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Erasing the Steps of Kingdom: Indigenous Autonomy in Chiapas, Mexico and the Zapatistas' Re-conception of Power

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Table of Contents

A Series of Introductions

"Utopia is on the horizon: when I walk two steps, it takes two steps back...I walk ten steps, it is ten steps further away. What is utopia for? It is for this, for walking" Eduardo Galeano.

Pedro, a young campesino *and Zapatista of 23, grins at my expression of amazement as he tells me that his community began from nothing seven years ago. Living in a divided village and threatened by local paramilitaries, he tells me how 25 Zapatista families left their homes to start a new life in the dense jungles of the* Selva Lacandóna. *In my mind I imagine barefoot women and children, men and boys hacking at the tangled vines with their machetes, erecting simple houses of sticks and palm leaves and plowing the newly claimed earth to plant the* milpas *that would sustain them. This young Zapatista, only seven years old when the indigenous movement declared war on the Mexican government in 1994 and established over 30 autonomous municipalities, tells me with pride that his community was founded on March 3ʳᵈ, 2003 on abandoned land that the government had intended to use for an ecotourism project. "It was very hard," he says, speaking about the first few years. "Many paramilitaries threatened us, but now things are calm; they know there is nothing they can do."*

Pedro's story is one of numerous tales of resistance and creation that demonstrates the incredible courage, vision, and tenacity of the indigenous peoples of Chiapas, qualities I witnessed repeatedly when I travelled to Mexico in the spring of 2009 and again in January, 2010. The decision of Pedro's community's to begin anew, independent of government involvement in its internal affairs, reflects a running sentiment among Zapatistas that a dignified life of struggle and hardship is better than one caught under the dictates of a governmental system that has continually failed them. Not only does Pedro's story make manifest the cry of "*Basta*!" (Enough), but it also tells of the bravery of creation - the conviction that common

people need not wait for a distant authority to change their lives for them. Rather, people posses

the wisdom and strength to alter their own reality and to govern themselves with dignity.

On the eve of January 1st, 1994 Mexico prepared to implement NAFTA and to begin its

climb into the league of the "First World". Yet, rather than waking to a day of festivities,

Mexican politicians found themselves confronted by the masked faces of some 3,000 armed

indigenous rebels (Pitarch 2004: 292) who dared to declare that Mexico was anything but the

"First World" (Barmeyer 2003; McCowen 2003). The rebels' cries exposed another side of the

country, one of widespread poverty, landlessness, malnutrition, illiteracy, inadequate health care,

and more than anything, false democracy: a country that, for 500 years, had sought to make itself

wealthy off the sweat of indigenous labor and suffering (McCowen 2003: 29). Emerging after

ten years of clandestine organizing in the eastern mountains of Chiapas, the Zapatistas took

seven municipal seats within the first week of the uprising, including the city of San Cristóbal de

las Casas (Poggiali 2005: 2), and nearly one year later declared 38 autonomous municipalities

(similar to counties) in which communities refused to respect the federal government or

constitutionally elected mayors or governors (Trejo 2002: 7). The Zapatistas declared war on the

Mexican government and demanded, "work, land, shelter, food, healthcare, education,

independence, freedom, democracy, justice and peace" (Poggiali 2005; Marcos 1995b: 54). At

the heart of their demands was a desire for true democracy, something that the Zapatistas

believed still elluded Mexico (Stahler-Sholk 2000). The problem with Mexico, they said, was

that democracy was an illusion, a game of farcical elections and empty votes, a game of

oppression and authoritarianism that ignored the voices of Mexicans and especially indigenous

Mexicans.

Invoking Article 39 of Mexico's 1917 Constitution, which invests national sovereignty and the right to alter governments in the people of Mexico (Collier 2005: 2), the Zapatistas demanded the right to autonomy for indigenous villages and, as one step in the democratization of government and the recognition of plural ethnic groups, proposed decentralization of the government at every level (Nash 1997: 264). Additionally, they called for the reinstatement of Article 27 that guaranteed the rights of communal land (*ejido*) and had been revoked in preparation for NAFTA, and demanded redistribution of large landholdings (Nash 1997: 264). Other demands focused on assistance for the indigenous population and an end to discrimination against Indians (Nash 1997: 264) (for a complete list of the Zapatistas' 1994 demands, see Appendix A). Throughout, the EZLN repeatedly shunned a system of state authority whose hierarchical structure, they believed, rendered it fundamentally flawed (Speed 2008).

The battle that ensued between the rebels and the Mexican Army lasted a brief 12 days, ending after protests of tens of thousands in Mexico City and around the world pressured the warring parties into signing a ceasefire (Olesen 2004b: 89). Claiming to be in response to civil society's demand for a peaceful revolution, the Zapatistas have strictly adhered to the terms of the initial ceasefire, signed by the federal government on January 12, and since the initial uprising have focused on non-violent means to further their struggle (Johnston 2000; Olesen 2004a). The Zapatistas declared that their use of arms was to make their voice heard when they saw no other way (EZLN 1994). Responding to supporters of the Zapatistas, protesting for peace, Subcomandante Marcos, the spokesperson of the EZLN (Zapatista National Liberation Army – *Ejercito Zapatista de Liberación Nacional*), explained:

> You told us to give peace a chance, and we come here [to negotiations with the federal government] in the spirit of truth and honesty. If there is another road to the same place, the place where this flag will fly in democracy, freedom, and justice, show us that road.

> We will not toy with our people's blood. If it is possible to raise this flag, our flag, YOUR flag, with dignity, and without the death that makes the soil it stands on fertile, if this can be done, then let it be done (EZLN 1994: Chapter 8).

Although skeptical of the likelihood of achieving fundamental change through existing power structures, the Zapatistas began dialogue with the federal government, eventually signing a bill concerning Indigenous Rights and Culture on February 16, 1996 (Burguete 2003). However, while this accord granted the indigenous peoples rights to regional autonomy, as of today the state has yet to implement the agreement (Speed 2008). Fed up with subsequent failures at constructive dialogue, the Zapatistas soon cut off all negotiations with the government and embarked on their own initiative to enact the rights the government failed to uphold (Speed 2008). Since this time, the Zapatistas have maintained a national, international and local struggle, creating autonomy in the countryside of Chiapas while pursuing national and international media campaigns, holding referendums, leading marches, hosting international meetings, and issuing reams of communiqués to national and international civil society.

Both the Zapatistas' local autonomy initiative and their bold rhetoric of hope and grassroots power have received remarkable attention from academics and activists, many of whom found themselves disillusioned with previous models of resistance (Olesen 2003a). In this thesis I will address what I argue is at the root of the Zapatistas' unique appeal: their bold proclamation to re-configure power itself. Seeking to subvert the very foundations of modern power structures (Esteva and Prakash, 1998b), the Zapatistas have rejected the notion of a vanguard party seizing control of the state, instead focusing on the creation of their own autonomous zones in which common peoples are entrusted to rule themselves (Esteva 1999). Shifting the revolutionary struggle away from the state, the Zapatistas' present a novel understanding of where power lies, how it should be contested, and who is able to participate in

the creation of a new world. Furthermore, recognizing that power itself can never be eliminated, the Zapatistas have experimented with ways to manage power, such that it may function as a source of strength for the collective rather than a force that generates corruption and inequality (Hardt and Negri, 2004). Critical of authoritarian democracy in Mexico, the Zapatistas base their model of autonomous governance on the notion that leaders should govern by obeying the people. As such, they have incorporated mechanisms into their governmental structures that encourage equality, honesty, and broad participation, such as consensus decision-making and rotational leadership. Moreover, the Zapatistas have taken strides to reformulate the traditionally paternalistic and hierarchical relations between the Global North and South. To many theorists, the Zapatistas' innovations place the movement at a turning point in the modern history of revolutionary struggle that has evolved from the hierarchical, militarized peoples' armies and guerrilla groups, into peaceful, network-structured movements (Hardt and Negri, 2004), which seek to work democracy into their very organization, such that structure and process of resistance become not just a means to an end but an integral expression of ideology (Hardt and Negri, 2004).

Discovering the Zapatistas

My own interest in the Zapatistas began almost two years ago as I prepared to study abroad during my junior year as a student at Colby College. I remember reading through information about numerous study-abroad programs in Latin America, all of which sounded unique and exciting. Unsure how I would decide, an SIT (School for International Training) program in Mexico held my attention because of its focus on grassroots development and the mysterious and paradoxically peaceful guerrilla group of indigenous peoples, known as the Zapatista movement, which was to be discussed intermittently throughout the semester. A

student of Latin American Development at Colby, I was becoming increasingly disheartened; development seemed to hurt more than help. I was itching to learn about another approach that could empower people rather than render them dependent on others, a challenge the Zapatistas had taken up.

When I arrived in Mexico in January of 2009, I immediately fell in love. I loved the warmth, I loved the colors, I loved the people, the spontaneity, the music. Furthermore, what I found in Mexico were people bursting with energy and passion to improve their country, to make it a place in which all citizens regardless of ethnicity, gender, social class or livelihood could live in comfort and dignity. Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) seemed tucked in every building of Oaxaca and San Cristóbal de las Casas, the two cities in which I spent the majority of my time, peasant organizations dotted the countryside, and every village no matter how tiny and remote, seemed deeply embroiled in local and national politics. Most likely this picture of Mexico was the result of the study-abroad program I was on which dealt specifically with issues of grassroots development and social change, but still, for me Mexico stood out as a country whose people refused to wait passively for their government to change society, but rather had taken the future in their own hands.

This opinion was only reinforced when, near the end of the semester, we traveled as a group to Chiapas to learn about the Zapatistas. Although I arrived interested in the Zapatistas' notion of alternative development, what struck me the most was the pride and the strength of the indigenous people I saw around me. Growing up in a small town in Western Canada, I was used to being in the midst of indigenous peoples. In fact, my home in the Cowichan Valley is on the traditional territory of British Columbia's largest First Nation (Cowichan Tribes 2005). Yet in my own experience as a child, the First Nations had always seemed so downtrodden, so helpless

and disempowered. They were still reeling from the horrendous practices of the Canadian government and the Catholic and Protestant Churches that sought to assimilate the First Nations peoples, forcing them into residential schools were they suffered physical, sexual and emotional abuse, were intentionally exposed to deadly diseases, and where the educational philosophy was to "kill the Indian in the child" (Annett 2003). While the indigenous peoples of Mexico suffered atrociously under the Spanish and over the past 500 years have been exploited and oppressed, I could see that they still possessed a fierce spirit that refused to be shoved down, a spirit that insisted on resisting. This spirit was manifested in the Zapatistas' bold rebellion but also in the numerous peasant organizations, active throughout the Chiapanecan countryside.

Interested in how rural communities were striving to regain their self-sufficiency and autonomy, for my final project as a student on the SIT Mexico program I worked for one month with OtrosMundos (Other Worlds), an NGO in based in San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas that led a school for eco-technologies. The school intended to train representatives of several nearby communities in practical skills such as building cisterns to capture rainwater, constructing dry-composting toilets and water purification systems, and relearning practices of organic, sustainable agriculture that had largely been lost due to Mexico's agricultural modernization policies of several decades ago. In this project I was concerned about how the school could help to foster self-sufficiency in communities, rendering them less dependent on the provisions of the government. What stood out to me during this month-long experience of fieldwork was the wisdom of the *campesinos* (peasant farmers) and their vision and dedication to alter their own realities without the help of a corrupt, unresponsive government.

This thesis, although not consciously so at the outset, is a continuation of this desire to understand the idea of "peoples' power" (Esteva and Prakash, 1998b) and to rethink how

common people can emerge at the helm of their own future, the directors of the way in which they live rather than the passive flotsam in a tide of national and international policies and processes, pursued without regard for the poor who do not count (Marcos 2000).

Methodology

This thesis is the result of eight months of research conducted in two very contrasting locations and following two vastly divergent methods. About seven months of my time was composed of library work at Colby College in Waterville, Maine, while the other portion of my research consisted of three weeks of fieldwork in Chiapas, Mexico.

Secondary Research: Studying Indigenous Mexicans from Maine

The majority of my research has been conducted at Colby College in Waterville, Maine where I read through numerous scholarly journals and books concerning the Zapatistas, revolution, power, development, grassroots mobilization and transnational activism. The broad nature of my thesis topic that seeks to examine questions of profound democracy has challenged me to draw from diverse fields of study and pushed me to delve into several disciplines that I had not explored previously. While synthesizing these various areas of scholarship has been very rewarding for me, it has also meant that not all arguments in this thesis could be addressed with equal attention and detail. Consequently, some areas of the thesis may not be developed as comprehensively as they perhaps deserve.

Literature on the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN)

While I have tried to draw from a variety of sources offering a range of perspectives, the vast majority of literature on the Zapatistas is written by supporters of the movement who, although they offer well-thought-out and insightful critiques, tend to highlight the positive attributes of the EZLN and view the movement as fundamentally beneficial for the indigenous

peoples of Chiapas. Most of the sources from which I have drawn are written by non-Mexicans, mainly because I had easier access to English material and much of the work of Mexican scholars has not been translated. Notable exceptions include political scientist and "deprofessionalized intellectual" Gustavo Esteva who has written extensively on grassroots power, democracy and resistance; Guillermo Trejo a political studies professor at the Center for Economic Investigation and Teaching (CIDE); and Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos, the eloquent and prolific spokesperson of the EZLN.

This reliance on the work of foreign academics is important to note for several reasons. Firstly, it contributes to the tendency of the literature on the EZLN to emphasize theoretical aspects of the movement and to highlight its transnational resonance. Secondly, much of the body of literature written by foreign scholars is based on an idealistic interpretation of outsiders who often have had very little contact with the indigenous peoples of Mexico themselves. As a young college student I was also initially drawn to the Zapatista movement through the poignant and grand writing of Subcomandante Marcos and the ideals of Zapatismo, and it should be noted that this paper at times also falls into the trap of idealizing the movement. For me, the incredible bravery of the indigenous peasants, who risked their lives in 1994 to make their voices heard and who today continue struggling to implement autonomy, is remarkable. Whether the movement has been more a success or an endeavor riddled with faults, to me, does not negate the worthiness of the intent. It is difficult not to proclaim triumphantly as does Rebecca Solnit that the Zapatistas, "…are not just demanding change, but embodying it; and in this, they were and are already victorious" (2004: 35).

Within Mexico there seems to be a much wider variety of opinions regarding the Zapatistas. While it is impossible to generalize across the population, based on my conversations

with Chiapanecos, many residents of Chiapas have become disillusioned with the EZLN, despite

the fact that they supported the movement in 1994 and continue to advocate for the rights of

indigenous peoples.[1] Within the NGO community of San Cristóbal de las Casas there seems to

exist a diverse and complex set of attitudes toward the EZLN and while, in general it seems most

sympathize with the Zapatistas, in my experience the movement is not viewed with the same

idealistic fervor often maintained by foreigners. This is not to suggest by any means that the

Zapatista movement does not engender inspiration within Mexico, but is simply to highlight that

the Mexican opinion is divided and nuanced. A reading of Mexican literature on the EZLN

would likely provide a more complex array of perspectives than the one I have been exposed to

that is rooted in the work of non-Mexicans.

As noted above, literature on the EZLN tends to follow a strong theoretical bent. While I

have drawn from several excellent ethnographic accounts of the Zapatistas, such as Duncan Earle

and Jeanne Simonelli's book, *Uprising of Hope: Sharing the Zapatista Journey to Alternative

Development* (2005) and Shannon Speed's *Rights in Rebellion: Indigenous Struggle & Human

Rights in Chiapas* (2008), such on-the-ground perspectives are much harder to come by than

theoretical renditions of the movement's global significance, or exhaustive analyses of the

economic, political and social conditions that preceded the 1994 rebellion.

Fieldwork: From Maine to Mexico

In January 2010, I travelled to Chiapas, Mexico where I spent two weeks as a human

rights observer in a Zapatista-occupied hotel nestled in the jungle near the Mayan ruins of

Palenque, and two weeks in and around the city of San Cristóbal de las Casas. My experience as

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[1] The most common complaints I heard centered on the concern that the Zapatistas had failed to improve the living conditions of the indigenous people and, through indirect means, had forced families to remain in resistance to government anti-poverty programs. Others argued that the EZLN simply wanted to control the indigenous people.

a human rights observer was made possible through the Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas Center for

Human Rights (*Centro de Derechos Humanos Fray Bartolomé de las Casas* - CDHFBC) which

will be discussed below. Besides two formal interviews with the Zapatista *Juntas del Buen*

Gobierno (Good Governance Councils), the rest of my conversations with Zapatistas were

informal and pseudonyms have been used to protect informants' privacy.

Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas Center for Human Rights

The Fray Bartolomé de las Casas Center for Human Rights, commonly referred to as

"Frayba", is a non-profit, non-governmental organization that was founded in 1989 through the

initiative of Samuel Ruiz García, Catholic bishop of the Diocese of San Cristóbal de las Casas.

Frayba works to protect human rights in indigenous communities in Chiapas and today is

recognized as one of the most important human rights organizations in Mexico (Speed 2008).

Inspired by the principles of liberation theology, Frayba seeks to, "…walk alongside and in

service of the poor, excluded, and organized villages that seek to overcome the socioeconomic

and political conditions under which they live" (CDHFBCa). The center sees its work as

accompanying and supporting excluded peoples in the project of, "…constructing a society

where people and communities exercise and enjoy all of their rights to their fullness"

(CDHFBCa). The organization works in several areas, principally: the documentation of human

rights violations in rural Chiapas; the promotion of indigenous autonomy though communities'

right to land and territory, and their right to maintain their own systems of justice and

government; and the promotion of the Civil Brigades of Observation (BriCo) which sends human

rights observers to various communities throughout tense regions of the state. BriCo is intended

to serve as, "…a mechanism for preventing aggression to communities that are harmed by

militarization and as an expression of national and international solidarity" (CDHFBCa).

Currently BriCo, in which I participated, sends small groups of observers to five indigenous communities throughout eastern Chiapas where groups typically stay for two weeks. Of these communities three are in Rebel Zapatista Autonomous Municipalities (MAREZ) and belong to the Zapatista movement. From my observation, human rights observers tend to be young people between the ages of 20 and 40, interested and inspired by the Zapatista movement who hope to learn more about the situation on the ground by volunteering as observers. I was placed in a group with three other observers: a university student from Germany, who studied political science, philosophy and sociology and was interested in how the Zapatistas conceptualized politics and social relations; and a couple from Argentina, also university students, who had been inspired by the ideas of Zapatismo. Together we spent two weeks in Agua Clara, which will be described in the following section. Halfway into the second week, four more observers arrived, all from Spain. They were in their late twenties or early thirties and had acted as human rights observers in several other communities before coming to Agua Clara.

Agua Clara (*Municipio de Comandanta Ramona, Morelia Caracol IV*)

Figure 1. Agua Clara. Photographed by author.

Agua Clara was unlike anything I had expected when I pictured my trip to Chiapas as a human rights observer. Most notably, while there is a village by the name of Agua Clara, I was not placed in the community but rather was stationed as an un-paying guest in an old hotel controlled by the Zapatistas. The hotel at Agua Clara is located on the edge of a brilliantly turquoise river, deep in the heart of the sticky *Selva Lacondona* (Lacondón Jungle), about one and a half hours from Ocosingo. Agua Clara's positioning between the touristed waterfalls of Agua Azul and Mizol Ha and the Mayan ruins of Palenque situates the Zapatista-managed hotel on the route for the more "adventurous tourists," and each day visitors with fanny packs would drive by in shiny cars, or young couples would trudge through the site, snapping photos of the wide river. Despite the rats that scurried in the roofs during the wee hours of the morning and the toilets that flushed only after a bucket of water had been poured down them, some tourists did stay the night. This occurrence always produced a flurry of activity as the men placed in charge of the hotel rushed about preparing a room and finding the right key for the door. Given that the hotel was run by rotations of men who stayed for just eight days before a new group replaced them, no one really knew how to run the place. As will be seen throughout the thesis, rotational systems that characterize many aspects of Zapatista community organization and governance often come at the expense of efficiency.

I heard several versions of how the EZLN came to claim the hotel and surrounding property, each story varying in its degree of detail and most very vague and general at best. The most comprehensive account was given me by another human rights observer, Mikhail from Spain, who had spent time at the hotel in the summer of 2009. According to Mikhail, in 1994, like many wealthy landowners afraid their land would be occupied by the EZLN or another peasant group emboldened by the Zapatista uprising, the owner of the estate abandoned the hotel

and the surrounding area. However, it was not the Zapatistas that seized the vacant property, but

rather nearby families affiliated with the PRI (*Partido Revolucionario Institucional* – Party of the

Institutionalized Revolution) who ended up holding the land for around 13 years. While the

PRIistas had as much of a right as anyone to control the abandoned property, they began selling-

off parcels of land being worked by *campesinos*. To make matters worse, the nearby

communities complained that men tramped about the area at night drunk, abusing women and

causing problems. After the community of Agua Clara took its concerns to the *Junta del Buen*

Gobierno of Morelia, the Zapatista autonomous government for the region, an agreement was

drafted for the land to be transferred to the Zapatistas. Apparently, the wives of the PRIistas all

signed the accord, as did their husbands, but two months later when it was time for them to

relinquish the property the men refused to leave. In response, in October 2008 some 80

Zapatistas non-violently occupied the hotel and surrounding areas.

Several communities surround the hotel, some affiliated with the Zapatistas and others

with the PRI. Relations between the Zapatista communities and the PRI communities remain

tense. The PRIistas have another *caseta de cobro* (charge house) at the top of the road leading

down to the hotel. Here they charge passersby 20 Mexican pesos (about US $1.80) to proceed

despite the fact that the PRIistas do nothing to assist in the upkeep of the hotel and the

surrounding grounds. I later discovered that Agua Clara is in a hot spot for tensions over control

of tourist sites and ecological reserves, an issue that has provoked numerous conflicts between

PRIistas and Zapatistas. Most recently, a confrontation occurred at the reserve of Bolom Ajaw

near the waterfalls of Agua Azul (less than half an hour form Agua Clara) where a group of

about 90 PRIistas, some armed, belonging to the *Organización Para Defensa de los Derechos*

Indígenas y Campesinos (Organization for Indigenous and Campesino Rights – OPDDIC)

invaded two hectares of the reserve in late January 2010. The issue of community division and political strife will be addressed in Chapter Three, in which I will argue that intra and inter community conflict are, in part, the result of a conscious strategy by the Mexican government to erode support for the EZLN.

Like many aspects of Zapatista organization, the hotel is managed collectively by all the communities belonging to the municipality. Men from each community are assigned to serve week-long shifts at the hotel on a rotating schedule, meaning that at all times there are about 15 to 20 men on duty at the hotel. The men spend their days and nights cycling through three posts: the *caseta de cobro* where visitors to the site are charged 10 Mexican pesos (about US$ .90) to enter; a small shop; and the front of the hotel.

During the two weeks I spent in Agua Clara I spoke with several of the men and am particularly grateful for the openness and candor of several young men who were eager to answer my questions about their communities and experiences as members of the Zapatista movement. I also visited several of the neighboring communities. Unfortunately, given that no women served *turnos* (terms of duty) at the hotel during my stay, the only female voices I was able to hear during my fieldwork in Chiapas were those of several women on the *Junta del Buen Gobierno* in Morelia.

Fighting an Unofficial War: A Window into Chiapas in January 2010

It would be near impossible to visit San Cristóbal de las Casas and not encounter the Zapatista movement. Subcomandante Marcos and Comandanta Ramona are sold in keychain form by groups of assertive indigenous "sales-children"; it is hard to miss Tierra Adentro, a collection of shops selling Zapatista produced honey and textiles along with T-shirts, postcards and calendars; the independent cinema, Kinoki, has been showing documentaries on the EZLN

for years; and conversations easily turn to topics of indigenous politics at the prompting of

inquisitive foreigners. Yet, if one stays a little longer in the area, he or she will soon discover that

the idealistic presentation of the Zapatista movement that is displayed for the tourists is a veneer

masking a remarkably complex and tense situation involving numerous actors, including the

EZLN, the military, the police, multiple indigenous political groups and paramilitaries, the

federal and state governments, local NGOs and the rest of the Chiapanecos who almost always

have a strong opinion either for or against the rebellion taking place in their midst.

My trip to Chiapas in 2009 had already scratched at the shiny coating covering the

Zapatista movement, preparing me for the complexity of the situation and the diversity of

opinions, many of them critical, that circulated among citizens of San Cristóbal. What I was not

so ready for, however, was the intensity of the undercurrent of political and military tension that

permeated the city and the surrounding communities. This undercurrent first began to show itself

on my second day in Chiapas in January 2010 when I attended an orientation session at the Fray

Bartolomé de las Casas Center for Human Rights (CDHFBC), along with about 20 other to-be-

observers. The leader of the orientation gave a brief history of the EZLN, placing it in the

context of violence and human rights abuses that continue to plague the state. In1994, the

Zapatista revolt provoked a harsh military response involving detentions, arbitrary

disappearances, torture, executions, and led to the displacement of thousands (CDHFBC 2003:

2).[2] This "low intensity warfare" (Swords 2007: 85) has continued over the years, largely fought

by paramilitary groups supported directly by the government and the federal army (CDHFBC

2003: 9). The orientation speaker offered us an up-date on the situation in 2010, "We've noticed

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[2] A 1994 count by the Coordinadora de Organismos No Gubernamentales por la Paz (Coordination of Non-Governmental Organizations for Peace - CONPAZ) found 17,139 displaced persons in the municipalities of Comitán, Las Margaritas, Ocosingo, and Altamirano alone (CDHFBC 2003: 3).

an increase in human rights violations in the last year," he told us. "The government is trying to

incite hysteria that the EZLN will stage something in 2010." This justifies the plethora of

military in the region and helps to explain the intensification of paramilitary activity in recent

months. "Frayba [CDHFBC] has also been targeted," he told us, "they accuse us of trying to

agitate the EZLN into action." He explained that Mexico was very sensitive to its international

image and it has been years since any foreign observers had received trouble. The government

would rather target Mexicans whose wounds or death could be covered up. Just by being in

Zapatista territory, the other human rights observers and I would be protecting the Zapatistas'

ability to maintain their autonomy project in relative peace. The man from Frayba went on to tell

us about the numerous paramilitary groups that patrolled the region, citing the largest ones as the

ironically named Democracy Peace and Justice (*Desarrollo Paz y Justicia*), the OBDIC and the

Red Mask (*Mascara Roja*), made up of local caciques and PRI supporters. In an information

packet we were informed of the various policing and military units active in the region. There are

no less than nine, including six branches of state police, three federal police forces and the

Mexican Armed Forces (CDHFBCb: 19 – 21).

In an interview with the *Junta del Buen Gobierno* of Morelia a few days later, a member

of the council noted that the principle groups now being harassed were not the Zapatistas

themselves, but rather other groups loosely affiliated with the EZLN. He also mentioned the

sense of brotherhood between these groups and the Zapatistas:

We, true Zapatistas, they no longer *really* bother us. The ones that are more persecuted
are the other organizations that are aligned with us, who are not as connected as we are….It
gives us much courage when people, groups of our people the indigenous, try to liberate
themselves (*desempeñar*) [through forming organizations]. It gives us lots of courage because
this is where we also came from; this is why we organized ourselves because we didn't want it
any more. So many people have come to the *Caracoles* to see how we support, to see what we
do, in what form. We have not become directly linked with them, but, for example, in support, in

idea, in how the form is, we have done it [assisted them]. And through this many brothers have been able to get out and to defend and they have been able to reorganize. But they have also faced many problems; some have gone to jail, others have been beaten, others threatened, others persecuted to this day, like us. We continue facing up to all of it. It is not true that the government is respecting us now; it does not (for the full response of the *Junta* regarding human rights violations and paramilitary activity, see Appendix B).

I discovered just how sensitive the situation was in Chiapas regarding the EZLN when I attempted to interview an acquaintance from a small indigenous community just outside of San Cristóbal de las Casas. I was particularly interested in speaking with Armando because his community had initially joined the Zapatista movement but, after various political conflicts and community divisions, had split into two new *pueblos* (villages) in 2006: one that supported the PRI, and Santa Maria (not its real name), Armando's community, that had decided to become completely independent of both the government and the Zapatistas. I was intrigued as to why they had felt it better to be on their own than with the Zapatistas and, after speaking with Armando in 2009 while working on another research project, I knew he was articulate and always eager to answer my questions. This visit was different though. A little intimidated by the presence of about 15 villagers who had crowded around to watch our conversation, I began asking questions about the community's involvement with the Zapatista movement. I knew something was wrong when Armando mumbled and stuttered his responses. After a moment he asked, clearly a little embarrassed, "Who else are you in contact with? I tried to explain to him that my project was just for my university and that I would not share anything he told me with anyone else I spoke to in the area. But my assurances did not seem to alleviate his obvious discomfort. "Is it not alright to talk about these things?" I asked, feeling hot and sweaty. He shook his head, smiling a little with an expression that I could not quite read: embarrassment? Annoyance? Offence? I apologized profusely and Armando explained the situation in Tzotzil to

the villagers. "If you have any other project…?" he offered, "but this no, I cannot talk about these things."

I am still not quite sure what motivated Armando's reluctance to speak with me. Was it the fact that half his village stood around him and perhaps this was a sensitive issue in the politics of the community? Was it because we stood in the middle of the plaza in San Cristóbal where anyone could overhear us including paramilitaries and police? Or, was it purely the subject matter and the fact that I had no letter from the *Junta del Buen Gobierno* (autonomous Zapatista governments) giving me authority to conduct this interview?

The tensions surrounding the Zapatistas and the political divides that riddle the countryside of Chiapas should be kept in mind as this thesis is being read. While I argue frequently that that Zapatistas have sought to generate harmony and solidarity within communities, the political reality of the state makes such peace a lofty goal and the high degree of intra and inter community strife that exists presents an odd contrast to the ideals and intentions of the EZLN. The "low intensity war" that has plagued Chiapas for the past 16 years bares testimony to the remarkable challenge of making ideas of revolutionary change into realities on the ground.

The Experience of Fieldwork and Research

When I left for my fieldwork in Chiapas I felt a bit as though I were jumping off into an abyss. I did not know anything about the community I was going to; I did not know its name, I did not know where it was, I did not know if it was big, small or in the midst of paramilitary groups. I did not know how I would feel there and, more importantly, I did not know how the people of the community would respond to me. I did not know if my Spanish skills had vanished; it had been six months since I had last been in Mexico. Yet, I was not so much nervous about

being on my own in a new place; after all, in past years I had backpacked alone through Bolivia,

Peru and Guatemala. Rather what was most intimidating to me was the experience of going as a

"researcher". I did have *some* experience from my field-based project completed in 2009 with

Otros Mundos' eco-technologies school. I could remember the awkward feeling of asking young

male indigenous farmers who I had only just begun to know if they would sit down and talk with

me about the issues my study concerned. The people with whom I spoke were clearly excited to

be interviewed but still, who was I to butt my way into their lives and presume to know enough

to write about them? This feeling of illegitimacy returned as I prepared for my second trip to

Chiapas in December of 2009. 'Who was I,' I thought, 'a 23-year-old student at an uppity

college in New England to travel to another country, enter into the dramatically different culture

and way of life of the indigenous people and then emerge with a "study"?'

With these thoughts rolling through my head on the long bus ride from Mexico City to

San Cristóbal de las Casas, I was anxious. The last hour of the trip is a climb through lush green

mountains from the sticky, humid climate of Tuxtla, the official capital of Chiapas, to the dry

crisp air of San Cristóbal, perched about 2,100 meters above sea level. We sped along the road,

engulfed by a thick grey mist when, all of a sudden the sun streamed through the haze revealing

the rolling hills of Chiapas stretching out for miles. I had forgotten how beautiful the state truly

was. 'It will be alright,' I thought to myself and I breathed a sigh of release.

Yet, the concerns I had before leaving for Chiapas are ones that cannot merely be

shrugged away and excused as the common nerves before an unknown adventure. To me, they

highlight some of the fundamental dilemmas of academia, and raise questions about knowledge,

authority and whose story gets to be heard. How are we to give a credible voice to something we

study from afar? How can we presume to encapsulate global patterns, economic trends, or

environmental degradation into tables and charts when we have not experienced the lived and

tangible reality of those processes? Why are we, "educated" and privileged scholars from the

"developed world" the ones endowed with a voice of authority? Where is the voice of those

whose lives depend on the processes we put into words and figures and why, when those voices

are present, must they be filtered through the eyes of an academic in order to gain any

credibility?

    Aware of the obvious confines of the "ivory tower", anthropology has tried to break free

to some degree, emphasizing fieldwork and participant observation to allow the "researcher" to

become better acquainted with the daily reality of those he or she studies. Moreover, what I find

especially valuable about the anthropological method is its honesty. The researcher is not

assumed to be an objective authority but rather is recognized as a subjective vessel that cannot

help but color and alter and the information from the field (Speed 2008). As I travelled to

Chiapas I felt like an imposter. Yet, while the worries I had are valid and real, the honesty with

which anthropology allows one to engage with a subject of study has enabled me to re-evaluate

my experience in Chiapas and the thesis that has emerged from it. This thesis, rather than an

authoritative and study of a culture totally foreign to me, is a window into a new world

experienced for the first time and seen through my own moral, political and cultural perspectives.

While this admission perhaps robs my work of the authority that is expected of academic studies,

I believe that my relative naivety in a sense also gives strength to this project. As a foreigner, my

rather unaccustomed eyes allowed me to observe what those living in a Chiapas might take for

granted or view as somehow less remarkable, and furthermore, my lack of extensive education in

the theoretical discourses surrounding the movement left me at least a little more freedom to

listen and see what was taking place around me without forcing it through the confines of pre-existing theories.

Acknowledgement of the politics of knowledge production in anthropological research emerges from harsh criticisms of anthropological theories and methodologies raised during the 1980s and early 1990s (Speed 2008: 3). Critics accused anthropologists of representing others through their own social positioning, shaping their ethnographic accounts around their own cultural and political orientations while trying to present their work as objective (Speed 2008: 3). Today, suggests Speed, many anthropologists have come to see "the politically situated nature of knowledge production" as unavoidable and regard "reflexively situating oneself in relation to the research subject" as an indispensable component of anthropology as a way to addressing the political nature of any field-based project (2008: 4). Furthermore, other anthropologists, including Speed, have come to embrace their own political perspectives in the research process, striving to integrate research with activism (2008: 4 – 5). As I will discuss in the following section, not only the discipline of anthropology, but also the Zapatistas themselves have tried to break the traditional relationship between the researcher and the researched, such that those being studied are no longer passive objects to be observed, but are active participants in the research process.

Studying the Zapatistas: Setting the Terms of Knowledge Production

From the outset of this project I knew it might be a challenge to write about the Zapatistas. I had been told that they did not want to be "studied" especially, I assumed, by young college students who could not offer any sort of benefit to the movement through their research. This suspicion only grew when, in December 2009, I attended a conference on the EZLN at City University of New York (CUNY) in which three men presented their doctoral theses. Hoping to

gain some insight into how I should go about my fieldwork in Mexico the following month, after

the presentations I asked one of the speakers about the possibility of living in a community for

several weeks. To my dismay the man chuckled and shook his head, "It's pretty difficult," he

told me, "I wasn't given permission. Especially now they are very cautious, you know, seeing as

it'll be 2010." I nodded, 2010, the bicentennial of Mexican independence and the centennial of

the Mexican Revolution. To further complicate the situation, I would be in Chiapas over January

during the anniversary of the Zapatista rebellion 16 years ago.

Finally, after contacting everyone I knew in Chiapas and spending hours searching the

internet, I found that it was possible to stay in a Zapatista community for a few weeks if one

volunteered as a human rights observer with the Fray Bartolomé de las Casas Center for Human

Rights (CDHFBC). An observer's role, however, was exactly that, to observe. In order to do any

sort of interviewing I would need to gain permission from the Zapatista autonomous government,

the *Junta del Buen Gobierno* (*Junta*, for short). My chances of being granted this license did not

look good. In my hostel in San Cristóbal I met two other students also trying to write theses on

the movement - one a masters and one an undergraduate - both on the Zapatista system of

autonomous education. Juan, a Mexican American, told me he had been visiting Zapatista

communities for almost ten years off and on and now he was back in the area to do "official"

research for the first time. After waiting days for an answer to his request, he was denied

permission to interview residents of the community he had been visiting for years. The other

student was a girl of 23 from Brazil. She spent most of her time waiting in our hostel for her

research plans to come through. I was clearly not the first or the last who would wait his or her

turn to participate in the knowledge industry surrounding the movement.

My own request to conduct interviews and take photos of community members received an interesting response from the *Junta* in the autonomous region of Morelia. "Why not ask *us* your questions?" they said to me. The next afternoon, six members of the Junta talked to me and several other curious human rights observers for over an hour. They gave what were clearly heartfelt and well thought-out responses despite the fact that groups of men from nearby communities waited outside to speak with the Junta and the day promised to be a long and busy one. They did not, however, give me permission to conduct official interviews with community members. While information is given out with care, the Zapatistas with whom I spoke, both in Agua Clara and in interviews with the *Juntas,* expressed profuse gratitude toward us visitors, and the Morelia Junta in particular was surprisingly open at times, offering to show us schools and set up interviews with education *promotores* (teachers).

When I presented my proposal to the *Junta del Buen Gobierno* I entered into a well-established knowledge industry surrounding the movement, a movement that has been the inspiration for numerous articles, books and documentary films and has spawned countless university essays, theses and dissertations (Earle and Simonelli, 2005: 5). Throughout my time in Chiapas I sensed a dual perspective on the part of the Zapatistas regarding their position as "research subjects". On the one hand, they did not want to be made curiosities and they did not want to have their wisdom, their struggle, their poverty put into a book or article that would benefit a foreign author, while leaving nothing behind for those left to continue the struggle. From this perspective, catering to the needs of the researcher was at the bottom of the Zapatistas' priority list. Yet this being said, the Zapatistas also seemed very aware that their survival as a resistance movement was in large part thanks to the solidarity they had inspired abroad and the subsequent flow of tourists, activists and scholars who spread their ideas around the world.

This latter position, which valued the maintenance of international interest and support, was evident when I visited the *Caracol* of Oventik, one of five autonomous governance centers and the one most frequented by tourists. High up in the mountains, the still and misty place is well set up for tourists coming so they could tell their friends that they were in rebel country. After meeting with the usual *Oficina de Vigilancia* ("Vigilance Office"), two friends and I were offered a meeting with the *Comisión de Información* (Information Commission). After a remarkably short wait of only about 15 minutes, we were invited into a little room in which two men awaited us, their smiling eyes peering out from behind black acrylic ski-masks. These were the first masked Zapatistas I had seen after nearly three weeks in rebel territory and I wondered whether they were not used as much to maintain a certain image of the Zapatistas as they were to protect the identity of the men. After the men peppered us with a routine series of questions, they asked if we had any questions, telling us they were happy to answer anything about the struggle, the uprising in 1994 or the functioning of the *Junta*. I began with my questions about NGOs and development projects. One man was assigned to give answers, his eyes sparkling out from the borders of his mask and his big nose almost spilling from of his disguise. The other slightly younger man soon picked up a newspaper and began to read; his *compañero's* (companion's) speech was obviously one he had heard many times before. The older man answered my questions, but he seemed to want to tell his own story and morphed his answers into other topics as though there were certain points he wanted to ensure we understood. "We are illiterate," he repeated many times. He was also careful to express his gratitude to us for being there. "We thank you for coming so far to see us," he said, "you come not just from San Cristóbal but all the way from your countries, places we will never be able to visit."

I felt a little like the movement was being sold to us, offered up to us as a dignified struggle of poor, exploited people, which I agree it is, but we were not left to discover that through our experiences, but rather were told so in the man's plaintive and selective speech. At the end of the talk, the men told us were we could visit and what we could and could not do. "You can take photos of the murals and building" they told us, "but not of any of the people. Only us, if you want, because we are covered." Feeling horribly "touristy" I took a picture of a "real live Zapatista!" I cringed as Harold and Jeff, two friends I had met at my hostel in San Cristóbal, posed in-between the men, the classic "oblivious tourist" picture as if the movement were some thing, some fixed done-deal, some show that could be seen and understood in a day, rather than a lived harsh reality of poor families struggling in the jungle and the mountains to cut wood, grow crops and stay committed to resistance despite the threats of paramilitaries and the challenges of living in poverty-stricken communities rife with political divisions.

This well set up information bureau for the inquisitive tourist seems in part practical; to process quickly the reams of visitors that pass through each year, but at the same time it could also be a convenient way to ensure that visitors leave with the "right" understanding of the Zapatistas.

Figure 2. Posing for a shot. A member of the Information Commission of Oventik.
Photographed by author.

With those who come to research them, those who are clearly more informed than the average tourist, the Zapatistas present a similar desire to be in control of the process of knowledge production. It is not that they want to construct the way in which the movement will be presented, but rather that they want to be aware and participating actively in the research process such that the project might benefit both the researcher and the researched (Earle and Simonelli, 2005). In discussing the procedure of writing their book on Zapatista community development, anthropologists Earle Duncan and Jeanne Simonelli (2005) remark on the involved process of gaining approval from the communities before their manuscript could be given the green light. The process of community and municipal review, they write, "…could take longer than the review process for a refereed journal" Earle and Simonelli, 2005: 10). Marveling at the nature of their ethnographic work they reflect:

> The communities we work with are no longer the benign recipients of anthropological scrutiny. We have been asked to give up part of the control of the research endeavor, to learn and document together, to return with what we write…Do we study others, or do we learn from them? Do they consent to be part of our research, or are we given permission to remain in their villages? (10).

In reference to this novel relationship, Earle and Simonelli (2005: 293) suggest that those studying the movement are obliged to adhere to a sort of "methodology *obedeciendo"* or methodology obeying, similar to the Zapatistas' fundamental concept of *mandar obedeciendo* (lead by obeying) that will be returned to frequently throughout this thesis in discussions regarding the Zapatistas' re-configuration of power and governance. Emerging from a history of exploitation in a country that today continues to rob everything from natural resources and medicinal knowledge to cultural traditions to be appropriated by the state, the Zapatistas have said "enough". Now taking control, they stipulate that the relationship between the researcher

and the researched must be one of mutual benefit. Not even knowledge will be taken without

giving back to the people from whom it originated.

The rather unusual relationship between the Zapatistas and those who come to study them

is indicative of the EZLN's attempts to rebalance the historically unequal power dynamic

between indigenous communities and foreigners from the "developed world," or more broadly,

between the Global North and the Global South. The Zapatistas seek to reassign control to a

population that for centuries has been viewed as inferior (Andrews 2010), or as a relic from a

more primitive era whose culture belongs in a museum rather than the modern world (Earle and

Simonelli, 2005). As will be discussed in Chapter Three, this renegotiation between the North

and South extends into questions of solidarity work and community development in which the

Zapatistas seek to put an end to degrading paternalism and ethnocentrism, instead striving to

enable communities to direct the work of NGOs, asking foreigners to let communities lead and

their organizations obey.

Thesis Outline

In this thesis I will address the Zapatistas' orientation toward power by looking both at

the movement's re-conception of where power lies and how it should be contested, and at their

initiatives to manage power within their autonomous regions. Theorists have been particularly

captivated by the Zapatistas' proposal that the locus of revolutionary struggle must be shifted

from the state to the realm of civil society, and that the concept of toppling power from above

must be replaced by efforts to generate alternatives from below (see Holloway 2005; Hardt and

Negri, 2004; Esteva and Prakash, 1998b). After exploring these ideas of grassroots struggle,

network organization and revolution in the first chapter, in the second and third chapters I will

examine how the Zapatistas have sought to enact such ideals of power within their autonomous

initiatives in Chiapas. I will look at both the Zapatistas' system of autonomous governance and their evolving model of community-authored development, showing how in both spheres the movement seeks to disperse power into the hands of the majority so as to avoid its accumulation and abuse. Furthermore, I will demonstrate how the Zapatistas conceive of democracy not a goal to be fought for by any means necessary, but rather as a *process* around which revolution must be built, such that organization and process become ends in and of themselves. I will conclude by arguing that what ties the Zapatistas' local struggle to their global vision is the overarching cry that power, agency and dignity be placed in the hands of common people, people who cry out "*Basta!*" (Enough) to oppression and illusionary democracy. While many scholars have theorized about the Zapatistas' global significance and others have elaborated on the internal mechanisms of autonomy in Chiapas, in this thesis I will take on the task of placing the movement's local practices, as seen from an ethnographic perspective, into its broader rhetoric of power.

Chapter One

In 1994, the Zapatistas' novel approach to rebellion caught the eye of thousands of activists and intellectuals, who saw the indigenous peoples' bold cry of *Basta* as a fresh sign of hope that proclaimed an "end to the end of history" (Klein 2002). In the first chapter of this thesis I will look at several aspects of the Zapatistas' conception of power and revolution that have made them such a source of hope. I will begin by addressing how the Zapatistas' have sought to revolutionize revolution itself by shifting the locus of struggle away from the state and into the realm of civil society (Johnson 2000). Calling themselves "the rebellious mirror that wants to be a pane of glass and break" (Marcos 2000: 104), the movement asserts that the struggle of the indigenous peoples reflects a much greater battle that must be fought in a

multitude of manifestations by oppressed peoples throughout the globe (Couch 2003). By

declaring a common enemy, a common *Basta,* and then encouraging others to articulate their

own local battles I will discuss how the Zapatistas have eschewed notions of vanguard and have

opened their struggle to a plural revolutionary subject that is at once both the indigenous people

of Chiapas and marginalized majorities the world over. Additionally, in this chapter I will

discuss how the Zapatistas mark a turning point in the evolution of resistance movements from

hierarchical, authoritarian models to forms of organization that champion democracy as a

guiding principle of their internal structure. Ultimately, I hope to show how, in its global

articulation, Zapatismo reflects a desire to dissolve the "steps of kingdom" and engage against a

common enemy in a form of open, horizontal network struggle.

While the Zapatista movement remains an inspiration for activists and a source of study

for academics, its national and international presence has quieted in recent years. Rather than

pursuing large media events or openly challenging the federal government, the Zapatistas have

turned themselves inward, focusing on the creation of autonomy in their communities. They aim

to enact the rights that state power structures are not willing to implement, refusing to recognize

the authority of a government that continues to wage a war against them while ignoring their

demands for a truly democratic Mexico. Thus, while the first chapter will look at the Zapatistas

on a global scale, the second and third chapters will travel inwards, exploring how the ideals of

Zapatismo that have so inspired intellectuals and activists are being articulated in the local

manifestation of the revolution – the local answer that continues to be written in Chiapas.

Chapter Two

In 1999, massive demonstrations at the World Trade Organization (WTO) summit in

Seattle launched a wave of protests around the globe against the inequalities and injustices of

neoliberal globalization, U.S. hegemony and global Empire (Hardt and Negri, 2004: 215).

Decrying the undemocratic characteristics of the global system, this wave of resistance acted as a

"…powerful symptom[] of the crisis of democracy" (Hardt and Negri, 2004: 237). "What the

various protests make clear," Hardt and Negri (2004: 237) argue, "is that democracy cannot be

made or imposed *from above*...Democracy, instead…can only arise *from below*." Within this cry

for "true" democracy, activists of diverse backgrounds continue to draw inspiration from the

Zapatista movement (Harvey 2005: 13). Disillusioned with the prevalence of weak and

superficial democratic systems of government, academics and activists from across the left

spectrum have celebrated the Zapatista autonomy model as a refreshing re-visioning of

democracy that, by refusing to recognize the authority of the state or affiliate itself with any

political party, has opened up, "new arenas for participation and experimentation in self-

government" (Harvey 2005: 13). In Chapter Two I will demonstrate how local forms of

governance have been formulated to enact the EZLN's revolutionary ideas of power and

authority and argue that, while not perfect, the Zapatista model of autonomous governance

serves as a worthy expression of human strength and dignity that boldly rejects the authority of

an abusive government. As Gustavo Esteva and Madhu Suri Prakash (1998b: 39) contend,

indigenous peoples in Mexico "have ceased to assume the current design of the state as a point of

reference for their political dreams." In contrast to the official governments they resist, the

Zapatistas aspire to disperse power amongst the people, such that in their communities, "the

people lead, and the government obeys."

In particular I will focus my discussion on the *Juntas del Buen Gobierno*, governance

structures created in 2003 to oversee the Zapatistas' interaction with solidarity workers and non-

Zapatistas in the area. I will examine the mechanisms of rotational leadership, consensus

decision-making and the concept of lead by obeying, illustrating how together these processes seek to avoid corruption and render government in the service of the community. Furthermore, I will address questions of community, democracy and efficiency, suggesting that efficiency may not be the best measure of efficacy.

Chapter 3

Critical of corrupt, ineffective, paternalistic and degrading development programs implemented by both the Mexican government and some solidarity NGOs, the Zapatistas have sought to renegotiate their relationship with the "providers" of development. They have rejected government aid altogether and have redefined the role of NGOs in their communities, such that the indigenous peoples are in control of the development process. In Chapter Three, I will examine how the Zapatistas have sought to place development in their own hands, working to make their relationship with their allies one characterized by reciprocal or horizontal solidarity rather than depreciating paternalism and charity (Andrews 2010: 93). While previous solidarity movements in Latin America have tended to view those they assist as helpless victims of globalization or war (Cunningham 1995) the Zapatistas assert their own strength, claiming they do not want "charity" and they do not need to be "saved."

I will begin by providing a brief historical look at indigenous exploitation in Mexico, showing how systemic racism and abuse became ingrained in Mexican society and was reflected in governmental policies. I will follow with a discussion of the authoritarian rule of the Party of the Institutionalized Revolution (*Partido Revolucionario Institucional* – PRI) that preceded the Zapatista uprising, arguing that Zapatista notions of governance and community development emerge from a rejection of the PRI's corrupt, corporativist rule that dominated Mexico for 70 years and its paternalistic development paradigm that viewed indigenous peoples as obstacles to

modernization. While the Zapatistas have rejected all government assistance, the NGOs that jumped to aid the indigenous Zapatistas following the rebellion of 1994 were also plagued by paternalistic, ethnocentric orientations toward the people with whom they worked. I will explore some of the critiques of NGO-led development work, moving into an examination of the Zapatistas' endeavors to reformulate the process through which development is enacted in their territory. I will conclude by discussing the way in which development is being used as a weapon in the government's counterinsurgency strategy, highlighting how the Zapatistas' ability to produce an alternative model of development has become a necessity for the movement's survival.

Conclusion

The conclusion will draw the three chapter of the thesis together, arguing that all the concepts addressed throughout the paper reflect an overarching revolutionary cry that power be dispersed among the people and not remain clutched in the hands of those at the top of the pyramid. What makes the Zapatistas different from past revolutionary movements is their claim that the way to achieve their goal is not through capturing the seat of power and imposing a new way, but rather through a multitude of voices around the world engaged in autonomous processes of *creation*.

Chapter 1

The Zapatistas' Revolution of Revolution: Shifting the Locus of Struggle and Relinquishing the Answer

"This is a world war of the powerful who want to turn the planet into a private club that reserves the right to refuse admission....All of us are given the option of being inside this zone, but only as servants. Or we can remain outside of the world, outside life. But we have no reason to obey and accept this choice between living as servants or dying. We can build a new path, one where living means life with dignity and freedom. To build this alternative is possible and necessary. It is necessary because on it depends the future of humanity." Subcomandante Marcos 2003b - part of a statement broadcast at a massive demonstration on September 11, 2003 in Cancun, Mexico, where the World Trade Organization (WTO) was having its annual meeting.

On the morning of January 1, 1994 Mexicans were shocked to see images of armed indigenous rebels flash across their TV screens and were taken aback by masked faces staring out from the front pages of their newspapers. Yet, despite initial surprise, the sight of armed guerrillas was not particularly unusual for Latin America, a continent that has been riddled with uprisings since the arrival of Europeans over 500 years ago (Castro 1999). As Eric Selbin writes, "There is one recurring plot line with regard to revolutions in Latin America and the Caribbean: revolutions happen; they are practically part of the region's 'romantic' flora and fauna" (1999: 145). While the factors that give rise to revolt are complex and varied, in a broad sense peasant rebellions in Latin America have been staged in response to persistent patterns of exploitation, inequality, imperialism and authoritarian governance that have plagued the continent to varying degrees for centuries (Johnston 2000). Even today Latin American countries maintain some of the highest extremes of inequality in the world and, while democracy has officially been established in every country in the region excluding Cuba, states remain characterized by "corrupt and inefficient judiciaries, weak and often aimless political parties, subservient legislatures, and militaries that remain out of reach of civilian control" (Selbin 1999: 142).

The Cold War period saw a wave of revolutionary movements sweep through Central and South America, a rather ironic response to U.S. encouraged campaigns to eradicate communism from its "backyard" (Smith 2008). Inspired by the Cuban Revolution that succeeded in

overthrowing the authoritarian Batista regime in 1959, left-leaning guerrilla groups hoping for

similar victory sprang up in virtually every country in Central America (Castro 1999). Most

notable of these were the Sandinista National Liberation Front in Nicaragua (1979 - 1990), the

Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) in El Salvador (1980 - 1992) and the

convergence of four Guatemalan groups into the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity

(URNG) (1982 - 1996). Today guerrilla movements are still active in Peru (the Shining Path) and

Colombia (the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia - FARC).

While each movement has adhered to its own ideological framework, revolutionaries in

Latin America during the Cold War period and beyond have followed several common

ideological and strategic trends largely inspired by Marxism, Maoism and the Cuban Revolution

(Rochlin 2003). Firstly, guerrilla movements looked to seizure of the state as their ultimate goal

(Holloway 2005; Hardt and Negri, 2004; Couch 2001). From this seat of power guerrilla leaders

intended to implement their own governance structure that would right all the wrongs of the

previous regime, ensuring a more egalitarian and just society. Violence was considered to be the

only means to achieve this goal and was viewed as a liberating force rather than an immoral act

(Rochlin 2003; Fanon 1961). As Chairman Mao Zedong posited, "Political power grows from

the barrel of a gun" (Rochlin 2003: 34). Furthermore, revolutionary movements were situated

firmly in Marxist notions of class struggle that rejected the dimension of ethnicity and viewed

peasants as passive subjects in need of strong leadership to guide their disorganized

revolutionary instinct (Hardt and Negri, 2004). Thus, guerrilla groups stressed the importance of

an elite vanguard and tended to adhere to rigid teleological ideologies (Hardt and Negri, 2004).

Despite the revolutionary fervor that surged through Central America in the second half

of the 20th century, however, while the Sandinistas maintained a government in Nicaragua

throughout the 1980s, ultimately none of Central America's revolutionary groups was able to

bring about the fundamental changes it wished to create (Hardt and Negri, 2004). In fact,

revolutionary regimes often became more oppressive, authoritarian and militant than the initial

governments they replaced (Hardt and Negri, 2004; Johnson 2000; Shapiro 2000). With the fall

of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the concurrent crumbling of state socialism, many left-leaning

intellectuals and activists around the world settled into hopeless resignation: revolution was

fruitless, capitalism had triumphed; as Francis Fukuyama (1992) declared, the end of history had

arrived. John Holloway, a prominent political thinker and philosopher argues that, "Perhaps the

saddest legacy that the 20th century [left] us [was] disillusionment, loss of hope" (2002b: 153).

He notes the apparent pervasiveness of this resignation, describing it as, "…a thin grey mist

[that] penetrate[d] everywhere" (2002b: 154).

However, this "thin grey mist" was not as all-encompassing as Holloway's words may

lead one to believe. In the far southern corner of Mexico, indigenous peasants chose this moment

to awaken. After centuries of exploitation and death, desperation did not allow the indigenous

peoples the luxury of despondency. As Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos, the spokesperson of

the EZLN, stated:

> Not everybody listens to the voice of hopelessness and resignation. Not everyone has
> jumped on to the bandwagon of despair. Most people continue on: they cannot hear the
> voice of the powerful and faint hearted as they are deafened by the cry and the blood that
> death and misery shout in their ears. But in moments of rest they hear another voice, not
> the one that comes from above, but rather the one that comes with the wind from below
> and born in the hearts of the indigenous people in the mountains. A voice that speaks of
> justice and liberty, a voice that speaks of socialism. A voice that speaks of hope…the
> only hope in this earthly world (1995: 45).

Hopelessness, declared Subcomandante Marcos, is a lie, a lie sold to us as history in order to

incapacitate us and resign us to conditions of subservience and marginalization (Couch 2001).

Calling themselves "professionals of hope" (Marcos 1995: 167) the Zapatistas' revolt of 1994 challenged the global left to rethink the failures of past revolutionary movements and inspired many to believe again in the power of people around the globe to challenge the forces that oppressed them (Leite 2005; Holloway 2002b; Couch 2001).

While initial scenes of armed Zapatista rebels suggested that the movement was simply another in a string of guerrilla uprisings, the Zapatistas soon convinced the world that they were remarkably different, repeatedly defying popular expectations of guerrilla struggle (Johnston 2000). Most relevant to this thesis is the novel conception of power proposed by the Zapatistas and their reinterpretation of how domination could be undermined. The Zapatistas' challenge to power is both local and global, both an initiative integrally rooted in Chiapas and the formation of indigenous autonomy, and a movement that has taken on international significance, inspiring activists and academics from a diverse range of political and philosophical traditions. In this chapter I will examine the ways in which the Zapatista movement has contributed to larger theoretical discourses of power and revolution. I will begin by looking at how the Zapatistas re-define the site and of struggle, dislodging it from the state and shifting it to the realm of civil society. Secondly, I will examine the ways in which the Zapatistas have opened their struggle to include an open and diverse collection of peoples around the world engaged in their own local struggles against a common rejection of oppression and injustice. This open network form of organization has required the Zapatistas to renounce notions of elite vanguard and to forgo adherence to a rigid ideology. Finally, I will conclude by looking at how the Zapatistas have rejected the prejudices of previous revolutionary traditions, championing indigenous peoples as powerful, protagonists in revolutionary struggle.

Shifting the Locus of Struggle

In the Zapatistas' re-vision of revolution, perhaps most notable to scholars has been the movement's rejection of state seizure as the objective of revolution (Holloway 2005). While the revolutionary experience throughout most of the 20th century was dominated by the notion that transformation of society could only be brought about through state power, the Zapatistas never proposed to overthrow the ruling PRI (*Partido Revolucionario Institucional* – Party of the Institutionalized Revolution) or become the new dominant force in Mexican politics (Johnson 2000). "We are not struggling against the PRI," Marcos said in 1994, "We are struggling against the system of the Party-State…" (Johnson 2000: 479). The Zapatistas not only rejected the notion of capturing the state, but also have repeatedly refused to form a political party themselves. In response to moderate political groups that encouraged the EZLN to establish a political party, Subcomandante Marcos declared that the Zapatistas did not want to convert themselves into "yet another part of the machinery of power…They ['the center'] do not understand that we do not want offices or posts in the government. They do not understand that we are struggling not for the steps to be swept clean from the top to bottom, but for there to be no stairs, for there to be no kingdom at all" (Communiqué of August 8, 1997 in Holloway and Peláez 1998: 4).

While some criticize the Zapatistas for not involving themselves in electoral politics, others credit the EZLN for shifting the locus of struggle away from the state, leaving behind an old model of revolution that they view as fundamentally flawed (Holloway 2005: Hardt and Negri, 2004; Esteva and Prakash, 1998b). As John Holloway argues, the concept of capturing positions of power fails to acknowledge that the ultimate aim of revolution is to dissolve relations of power, "What has failed," he argues, "is the notion that revolution means capturing power in order to abolish power" (2005: 20). Although critics of 20th century revolutionary

governments often blame the movements' leaders for the authoritarian and oppressive regimes

that tended to follow state takeover, Holloway argues that the failure of radical socialist or

communist governments lies much deeper than the flaws of individual leaders:

> The reason that the state cannot be used to bring about radical change in society is that the state itself is a form of social relations that is embedded in the totality of capitalist social relations. The very existence of the state as an instance separated from society means that, whatever the contents of its policies, it takes part actively in the process of separating people from control of their own lives" (2002a: 1).

Thus, he argues, "The failure of revolution was in reality the historical failure of a

particular concept of revolution, the concept that identified revolution with control of the state"

(Holloway 2005: 12).

Perhaps in response to the failures of past social revolutions in Mexico and Central

America, the Zapatistas have chosen to wage their war not in order to capture the state, but rather

on the level of society, seeking to rearrange power relations more profoundly (Johnson 2000).

Almost immediately after Marcos first declared the demands of the indigenous people on

national and international media in January 1994, the EZLN attracted the attention of a broad

base of activists, civil society groups and academics (Olesen 2004b). The extensive support base

that formed within Mexico and around the world was instrumental in bringing an end to the

violent struggle between the Mexican army and the EZLN and, since 1994, has continued to play

an instrumental role in the Zapatista revolution (Couch 2001). Through establishing such a vast

solidarity network, the Zapatistas hoped to undermine the authority of the state, exposing its

ultimate dependency on national and international civil societies (Johnson 2000). When

questioned by a reporter from the *New Yorker* about the Zapatistas' "delusional" aspirations to

capture Mexico City, Marcos responded, "Weren't we there already by January 2nd? We were

everywhere, on the lips of everyone – in the subway, on the radio. And our flag was in the

Zócalo" (Gray1997: 6).

The Zapatistas' message did indeed travel far: in 1996, the Zapatistas hosted over 3,000

activists from all over the world at the First International Encuentro for Humanity and Against

Neoliberalism (Olesen 2003a); their voice inspired groups and individuals who in 1999 staged

massive demonstrations in opposition to the WTO (World Trade Organization) and sparked a

wave of mobilization around the globe (Leite 2005: 43); their message spawned the creation of

numerous websites and listservs, initiating a new body of literature on the power of the internet

as a tool of revolutionary social movements (Bob 2005; Morello 2005; Cleaver 1998; Ronfeldt et

al. 1998); and the Zapatistas' example was a key source of inspiration for the World Social

Forum, which met for its first annual conference in 2001 in Brazil where it was attended by

4,000 delegates, 16,000 registered participants from 117 countries and 1,870 journalists (Leite

2005: 43).

"Asking we Walk": Dispossessing the Vanguard and Opening the Struggle

Not only did the 1994 rebellion shift the locus of struggle away from the state, but the

Zapatistas also eschewed the need for an elite vanguard to lead the revolution, an idea that had

been a crucial element in the history of modern revolutionary movements (Poggiali 2005; Couch

2001). Instead, the Zapatistas championed the agency and equality of a diverse array of actors,

claiming they themselves were but a few participants in a global struggle that resisted a common

enemy through a multiplicity of local actions (Esteva and Prakash, 1998b). The Zapatistas'

rejection of the vanguard is also demonstrated in the EZLN's perception of the indigenous

people as empowered revolutionary subjects that must be the ones to bring about their own

emancipation (Olesen 2004b). The Zapatistas have boldly discarded the logic of both socialists

and liberals who claimed that common people lacked the necessary wisdom and capacity to rule

themselves and thus had to be led by educated elite (Esteva and Prakash, 1998b). Instead, the

Zapatistas base their whole philosophy on the notion of the empowerment of common people

who are not only capable of ruling themselves, but must do so if they wish to live in dignity.

Contradicting the notion of elite leadership, the Zapatistas advocate that authorities should "lead

by obeying" (*mandar obedeciendo*). In place of an authoritative minority, through an emphasis

on consensus the Zapatistas enable the community to direct the trajectory of revolution. As

Esteva and Prakash argue, the power of the people to govern themselves has not only just

emerged, but rather is something that has always existed under the surface, "The post-modern

challenge is for 'the people' to grasp what they already possess; and, shaking off the oppressive

minorities, to begin exercising their power for their own common good" (1998b: 161).

Along with a rejection of an elite vanguard, the Zapatistas do not espouse a rigid ideology

or propose to hold a single and encompassing answer or recipe for change (Olesen 2004b). In the

past, Latin American revolutions and others around the world have been guided by the Marxist

belief in the teleological nature of rebellion, the notion that revolution of the proletariat is

inevitable and follows a marked path towards a certain fixed endpoint (Holloway 2005). The

Zapatistas in contrast, claim numerous times that the outcome of their struggle is unknown and

that, while they fight for a new world, they cannot predict precisely what this new world will

look like (Couch 2001). "Yes, the moment has come," began Marcos at the National Democratic

Convention in August 1994, "to say to everyone that we neither want, nor are we able, to occupy

the place that some hope we will occupy, the place from which all opinions will come, all the

answers, all the routes, all the truth. We are not going to do that" (Lynd and Grubacic, 2008: 8).

While Marx tried to proclaim the inevitability of a communist society, the Zapatistas have

recognized that such certainty can only be a misconception (Holloway 2002a: 6). To declare the

final outcome of revolution as some preordained future directed by the EZLN would be to claim

supremacy and, in fact, could only be achieved through domination (Holloway 2002a). As

Holloway writes, "…there can be nothing certain about the creation of a self-determining

society. For this reason," he continues, "revolution cannot be thought of as an answer, but only

as a question, an exploration in the creation of dignity" (2002a: 6). As John Holloway explains:

> Orthodox-Marxist theories sought to win certainty over to the side of revolution, arguing that historical development led inevitably to the creation of a communist society. This is fundamentally misconceived…Certainty can only be on the side of domination (2002a: 6).

By declaring their intention to build a new world while inviting all those oppressed or

marginalized around the globe to participate in its construction, the Zapatistas opened a space for

movements and activists to take up the struggle in their own way (Couch 2001). Theirs is a

struggle of one big no and many small yeses, a common cry of *Basta* against oppression and a

plural response (Couch 2001).

The Zapatistas promise no universal truth, if they have a truth it is for Chiapas alone;

others must find their own answers (Esteva and Prakash, 1998b). As is demonstrated in a

common saying of the Zapatistas, "asking we walk", Jen Couch argues that the revolution is one

that listens rather than answers (2001: 244). This aspect of Zapatismo contrasts starkly with the

rigid, teleological notions of Marxism and rather has more in common with anarchist thought

"[which] presume[s] no inevitable course of history…" (Graeber 2006: 11). Jen Couch describes

Zapatismo as an intuition so flexible and open that it occurs in all places. To be in solidarity with

the Zapatistas, Thomas Olesen agrees, does not simply entail supporting the Zapatistas directly,

but rather means to fight everywhere against what the EZLN is fighting against: inequality, false

democracy, racism, oppression, injustice, and a global economic order that prioritizes the rights

of global capital over human rights, identities and cultures (2004a: 260). As the introduction to

the book, *We are Everywhere: The Irresistible Rise of Global Anticapitalism* remarks, "The

Zapatistas…invited us all to read ourselves into the story, not as supporters but as *participants*"

(Notes From Nowhere 2003: 24, emphasis mine). By opening a space for others to create their

own answers the Zapatistas have relinquished to power to direct change, instead trusting in the

wisdom of common peoples to create the realities they choose.

To Change the World Without Taking Power

In 1994, the Zapatistas took on what John Holloway (2005) has called the revolutionary

challenge for the beginning of the 21st century: "to change the world without taking power".

This is a daunting task that comes with no instructions or answers and seems at first highly

unrealistic. However, recent shifts in global power dynamics make this proposition increasingly

less extreme. Scholars of economics to international relations to sociology and anthropology tend

to agree that the place of the state is shifting, both in matters of global politics and as well as in

the lives of citizens (see Stahler-Sholk 2007; Leite 2005; Kaldor 2003). Considerable debate

exists as to how exactly the state's role is changing and what its shifting position will imply for

the future, with some arguing that states will remain the principal actors in global politics and

others contending that states are becoming increasingly superseded by transnational institutions

and actors (Paley 2002: 481). Richard Stahler-Sholk discusses how the change in the state's role

following neoliberalism affects revolutionary struggle:

> Privatization, fiscal austerity and economic liberalization have resulted in the contraction
> and redeployment of the state, shifting the locus of political struggles away from the
> direct contestation for state power and opening new spaces to contestation (by new
> movements and old) over whether they will be controlled from above or below (2007:
> 49).

In light of neoliberal restructuring that has increasing transformed the state into a "broker for

global capital…[and]…renegotiate[ed] state-society relations," Stahler-Sholk argues the

Zapatistas "organize in newly contested spaces paradoxically created by neoliberal globalization

itself…(2007: 49). Neoliberal austerity measures, argues Johnson do not permit the state to

maintain previous structures of corporativism and clientalism which in the past were used to

"incorporate 'surplus' populations" (2000: 472). Thus, in a sense, peoples are liberated to resist.

June Nash continues this argument, contending that, "Globalization has disrupted old bases for

collective action [such as workers unions] while creating new modes of organization" (2001: 20).

As the book *We Are Everywhere* asserts, "In a global economy, there is no seat of power for the

new guerrillas to storm" (Notes from Nowhere 2003: 26). As power is held by a greater array of

international actors, resistance also must become a plural, multi-faceted response.

In their book, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*, Hardt and Negri

discuss the evolution of revolutionary struggle from traditional, centralized military structures to

guerrilla organizations and finally to what the authors view as the form of struggle for the 21st

century, a "distributed, or full matrix, network structure" (2004: 87). Through their clever use of

media and their appeal to international civil society, the Zapatistas act as a hinge between the old

guerrilla struggle and the new, more democratic form of network organization (Hardt and Negri,

2004: 85). The changing nature of revolution, contend Hardt and Negri, is a pragmatic response

to capture the "opportunity and historical occasion offered by the current arrangement of forces"

so as to allow maximum ability to "resist, contest, and/or overthrow the ruling forms of power"

(2004: 87). In our modern age, this historical occasion is both the changing place of the nation

sate and the simultaneous emergence of a powerful global actor that Hardt and Negri call "the

multitude": "…an internally different, multiple social subject whose constitution and action is based not on identity or unity (or, much less, indifference) but on what is has in common" (2004: 100). The multitude has no center, "only an irreducible plurality of nodes in communication with each other" (2004: 83). This multitude is comprised of all peoples around the world that oppose a common enemy of global empire, oppression, war and all the manifestations of power abuse. In the Zapatistas call for a global revolution of one big no and many small yeses they are speaking to the multitude, framing their struggle in the context of this emerging network of solidarity against a mutual threat and inviting peoples to participate through a plurality of response and creation.

The Zapatistas' appeal to international civil society is not a call for some sort of global coalition of resistance that dissolves difference (Olesen 2004b). The Zapatistas themselves remain firmly rooted in the indigenous situation in Mexico and are increasingly moving inward to focus on community development and autonomy (Olesen 2004b). Rather, the struggle they advocate is one taken up in a plurality of local responses which recognizes the value of national, local and cultural differences (Olesen 2004b; Esteva and Prakash, 1998b). As Marcos (2000) said at the closing of the First Encuentro For Humanity and Against Neoliberalism in 1996, "[Let] an echo of this rebel voice…turn[] itself into many voices, into a network of voices, that before power's deafness, opts to speak to itself, knowing itself to be one and many…recognizing itself as diverse in the tones and levels of voices forming it" (114).

Both integral to the rise of the multitude and descriptive of its composition has been the growing importance of civil society. This increased role of civil society does not mean the dissolution of the state, but rather, in the words of Mary Kaldor, makes sovereignty more conditional, "increasingly dependent on both domestic and international respect" (2003: 583):

What has happened in the 1990s, I would argue, is that a system of global governance has emerged which involves both states and international institutions. It is not a single world state, but a system in which states are increasingly hemmed in by a set of agreements, treaties and rules of a transnational character. Increasingly these rules are based not just on agreement between states but on public support, generated through global civil society (Kaldor 2003: 590).

Through working from the bottom up and mobilizing the grassroots, the Zapatistas seek to undermine the authority of the state, exposing the ultimate dependency of its power on those it rules. Holloway contends that, while the "powerless" may be oppressed and apparently lack agency, ultimately the "powerful" are also integrally dependent on those they exploit. Domination, or "power-over" something or someone, is incredibly vulnerable, vanishing the moment it can no longer to make its subservients act in a certain way (2005: 40).

While the Zapatistas have contested traditional state power through their appeal to civil society rather than by trying to take the state itself, as we will see in Chapter Two, the Zapatistas also offer a bold local contest to the Mexican state. The Zapatistas' initiative to enact the autonomy that the state refused to implement has, to a degree, rendered the state powerless. As a document written by the Dioceses of San Cristóbal de las Casas reflects, the alternative governance systems created by the Zapatistas have meant that, on the "local level municipal presidents imposed by the PRI are left governing only themselves, without being able to penetrate into the communities (Mora 1998). Esteva and Prakash stress the importance of creating alternatives as a means of resistance, contending that, "By claiming from the state what the state has (or does not have), [one] strengthen[s] it; further feeding the myth of its centrality, its importance to [one's] li[fe]" (1998b: 30). Only by moving the struggle away from the state can the true vulnerability of domination be exposed. As several young men related to me during

my time in Chiapas in January 2010, they did not need the official governments, "we have our

own now" they asserted.

Becoming "Scandalously Indian": The Formation of the EZLN

The Zapatista revolution has not only responded to shifting global power dynamics,

seeking to disperse the agency of creation and imagination into the hands of the multitude. In

Chiapas it has also sought to empower indigenous peoples, embracing indigenous peasants as the

protagonists of their own struggle, something unheard of in 20th century class-based movements

(Hardt and Negri, 2004). In order to understand how the Zapatistas came to embrace indigenous

traditions and to value peasants as revolutionary protagonists, it is worth discussing the origins of

the EZLN which began as a clandestine organization over ten years before its public

proclamation of revolution in 1994.

In the early 1980s a small group of Marxists left the concrete jungle of Mexico City,

forging their way into the overgrowth of the Lacondón Jungle (*Selva Lacondona)* in Chiapas.

These urban intellectuals had been active in student movements that took on new fervor in the

mid 1960s and provoked harsh repression from the state (Marcos 2008). Rafael Guillén, a

university professor who would later become the renowned Subcomandante Marcos,

spokesperson of the EZLN, discusses in an interview his disillusionment with university

education, describing the institution of the university as "a great corral for the domestication of

youth" (Marcos 2008). This corral prepared young people to enter successfully into a system that

relied on exploitation and oppression of those at the bottom of the pyramid. Quick to rebel

against this process of "domestication", students formed numerous organizations. Yet, says

Marcos, their horizon only extended as far as the classroom. While they recognized that that their

struggle was part of something greater, they did not know how or where to direct their rebellion.

Contact with the indigenous peoples, had a profound effect on Marcos and his

companions. Perhaps cognizant of the dangers of a vanguard of urban intellectuals and the

importance of local support, the group from the city took a very different attitude towards local

indigenous communities than previous Latin American revolutionary intellectuals, later claiming

that the *campesinos* led the movement's development (Henck 2007: 94). Marcos has spoken of

how he and other urban intellectuals arrived in the jungle espousing a classical Marxist

revolutionary discourse that was not understood, "Imperialism, social crisis, the correlation of

force with opportunity, these things were not understood … They were very honest. You asked

them, 'Do you understand?' and they told you, 'No'" (Henck 2007: 94). Marcos describes how

he and his companions soon realized the importance of listening, something which has since

become a recognizable aspect of Zapatismo, "We had to learn to listen, and, afterwards, to

speak…In order to survive we had to translate ourselves using a different code … this language

constructed itself from the bottom upwards… (Henck 2007: 94). Russell suggests that the

indigenous disapproved of hierarchical command structures all together, preferring a flat,

decentralized system that allowed for consultation at the community level (2005: 567). Thus,

though this process of listening, the initial band which Marcos called a classic revolutionary

guerrilla group, was transformed into "an armed group, overwhelmingly indigenous, listening

attentively and barely babbling its first words with a new teacher: the Indian peoples" (Marcos in

Henck 2007: 95). As Marcos has said, "We became scandalously Indian" (Klein 2002: 11).

Further emphasizing the influential role of the indigenous on the EZLN, Marcos has said:

> Ok, let me explain. We didn't propose all this. In reality, the thing we proposed was to
> change the world; the rest we have been improvising as we go along. Our original 'inside
> the box' view of the world, and of revolution, was demolished in the confrontation with
> the reality of indigenous Chiapas. Out of the ashes rose something new (which isn't the
> same as 'good'), what is known today as neo-zapatismo (Rosset, et al., 2005: 38).

Unlike other guerrilla movements, the Zapatistas have used the ideas of the indigenous to their advantage and have been applauded for their rather unusual and "remarkable" rootedness in local peasant communities (Barmeyer 2003: 122). Thus, while the group of urban intellectuals that ventured into the jungle in the 1980s may have initially intended to lead the indigenous peasantry in a classical war against the seat of government, the group's willingness to listen and to adapt to the reality of the indigenous situation has placed the indigenous peoples themselves at the helm of the revolution, making them the writers of the script rather than merely the actors in another's play. As Lorenzano notes, in contrast to past guerrilla movements, "The Zapatistas are not guerrillas with a particular social base, but in fact are the social base themselves" (1998: 126). The Zapatista's departure from earlier guerrilla movements in Latin America and their willingness to "listen" to the reality of indigenous peasant struggle in Chiapas are reflective of a consistently novel approach to power, an approach that, rather than placing an elite few as authorities, asks them to obey those they "rule"; an approach that claims no possession of the one truth or the final answer but admits its uncertainty (Couch 2001).

While the Zapatistas have received remarkable attention from academics and solidarity groups around the globe, in part because of their media-savvy and creative "marketing of rebellion" (Bob 2005), it is important to note that they by no means stepped into a disorganized vacuum of helpless indigenous peasants in the 1980s, or that today they are the only indigenous organization in Chiapas fighting for greater autonomy, rights and dignity (Speed 2008; Collier 2005; Trejo 2002). Rather, while most certainly innovative and unique, the Zapatistas should be seen as one manifestation in a struggle of indigenous Chiapanecos that has been raging if not for centuries than certainly for decades (Collier 2005). Numerous scholars have stressed the high

degree to which the area had been organizing and politically active for decades before the arrival

of the nucleus that would eventually become the EZLN (Collier 2005; Rosset, et al., 2005;

Barmeyer 2003; Rochlin 2003; Rus, et al., 2003; Stephen 2002; Johnston 2000; Shapiro 2000).

Stephen notes the importance of recognizing that the history of the indigenous peoples in

Chiapas, while clearly one marked by the loss of communal lands, and the continuation of debt-

peonage and servitude, was also characterized by a "simultaneous countercurrent of indigenous

refashioning of political, economic, and cultural spaces" (2002: 94). Thus, rather than finding a

population of dispersed and helpless peasants, the Zapatistas emerged within a rich context of

liberation theology, independent peasant movements and Maoist organizing (Johnston 2000).

The Zapatistas were not only formed in opposition to the neoliberal policies of what they

termed the corrupt government of President Salinas, but also arose in critique of the tactics used

by other peasant groups whose leaders, they claimed, had either used the peasants to consolidate

their own power or had been murdered or disappeared by the government after ineffectively

seeking change through legal means (Collier 2005). Collier argues that, above all, the Zapatistas

were critical of the basic tactic of two decades of peasant organizing that sought to bring about

change in the area through legal channels in the context of a state that clearly did not listen. The

Zapatistas recognized how the Mexican government had repeatedly "showed its capacity to

exercise the law as a tool for power, selectively and illegitimately, to thwart the revindication of

indigenous, peasant, and worker demands" (Collier 2005: 80).

The EZLN's critique of both leaders who "sold-out" to further their own gain and the

Zapatista's disillusionment with the process of seeking change the "legitimate" way through

unresponsive and corrupt governments is reflected in their future attitudes toward power. In

autonomous governance structures functioning in Zapatista territory today the EZLN has

attempted to eliminate the potential for accumulation of power by establishing a system of

rotating leadership that champions the idea of "to lead by obeying". Furthermore, refusing to

give undo authority to what they claim to be illegitimate governments and contorted laws

manipulated to serve the powerful, the Zapatistas have repeatedly refused to credit the state as

the ultimate authority over the rights of indigenous peoples (Speed 2008).

Trejo (2002) discuss the cyclical and fruitless cycle of traditional peasant protest that

persisted in the second half of the 20th century, arguing that protest led to repression which

simply led to more protest. This cycle of contention, he argues, exposed the failure of the state to

provide institutional channels for conflict resolution and can explain some of the frustration that

led Chiapanecos to join the EZLN and take up arms as their last resort. Furthermore, neoliberal

reforms in the 1980s that prompted the state to retreat from its traditional corporatist

responsibilities to the peasant sector meant that "…*campesinos'* political efforts to hold peaceful

protests and influence state decision-making were consistently stymied" (Johnson 2000: 474).

Zapatista Major Ana María describes the situation of frustration that immediately preceded the

uprising of 1994:

> …we could not find any other way out of this situation. We had spent years struggling
> peacefully, we held marches, we had meetings, we went to the municipal palaces and the
> Government Palace, and we went to Mexico [City] to the National Palace of Mexico to
> shout, to ask, to agitate in front of the government. They never paid attention to us. They
> always gave us papers full of promises. Then, what good is a piece of paper, filled with
> promises, to us? (EZLN 1994: chapter 8).

On January 1, 1994 the indigenous Zapatistas rose up in arms, the only way they felt was left to

them. "*Ya Basta!*" (Enough) they cried. Since this day, theirs have been an evolving story of

indigenous peoples trying to reclaim their right to rule themselves, to create a dignified life for

themselves. This story has gone through many chapters, adapting to the local, national and

international contexts in which it is told. At all stages, however, one plot that has remained

constant is the demand of the indigenous Zapatistas that they remain the protagonists in their

struggle, a theme that emerges in their refusal to recognize official municipal authorities and the

federal government, in their attitudes towards community development and their relationship

with the Global North, as will be discussed in Chapters Two and Three.

Indigenous Peasants as Revolutionary Subjects

The emergence of indigenous peasants as proud agents in their own revolution would

come as a shock to Karl Marx (2008) who invested his hope for revolution in the proletariat. To

Marx, the peasantry, although capable of *reaction*, could only have revolutionary potential by

"following the urban industrial proletariat - an unequal partnership in which the proletariat

played the active, leading agent and the peasantry the passive body" (Hardt and Negri, 2004:

123). The very poor and destitute were, to Marx, merely a "residue of preindustrial social forms,

a kind of historical refuse" (Hardt and Negri, 2004: 130). While Mao Zedong established a new

importance for the peasantry as revolutionary subjects, Hardt and Negri (2004) argue that

ultimately he adhered to Marx's notion that the peasantry was passive and needed the guidance

of the proletariat. "The Chinese revolution itself," Hardt and Negri propose, "was really a

revolution conducted *with* the peasantry, not *by* the peasantry" (2004: 124).

Ethnicity was also not viewed as a source for political or revolutionary action. Rather,

20th century movements in Latin America tended to absorb ethnicity into the broad rubric of

class struggle (Collier 2005; Rochlin 2003). As Collier writes:

> Many [Mexican] intellectuals denied the political potential of the country's indigenous
> peoples and claimed that they were not worth organizing because they represented an
> anachronistic, regressive sector of society that impeded the development of the
> proletarian class consciousness needed to overthrow capitalism (2005: 66).

Additionally, movements have tended to downplay the significance of indigenous epistemology,

exemplified by the Shining Path which John Rochlin claims blatantly contradicted indigenous

cultural tradition:

> Not content to let allow the Peruvian Indians to think freely, or to know the world
> through their own system of knowledge, Sendero contradicted the indigenous peasants'
> conceptions of time, space and spirituality. The rebels attempted to impose upon the
> indigenous peasant population a modern and communist ideology that left no space for
> others perspectives, a grave contradiction that served to erode a significant portion of the
> subversives' support base (2003: 37).

A study by Niels Barmeyer (2003) concludes that guerrilla movements in Latin America tended

to view indigenous peasants more as tools in the revolution of the proletariat than actors in their

own emancipation. Thus, as regards treatment and attitude to base communities, there has been a

general consensus among scholars that guerrilla movements in Latin America were largely

detrimental to their supporting communities (Barmeyer 2003).

As noted earlier, the EZLN and its social base gradually became one and the same

(Lorenzano 1998). Rather than dismiss their indigenous identity, The EZLN embraced the ethnic

nature of the revolution, recognizing the power that ethnic identity could give their cause (Trejo

2002). Many scholars agree that, at least in part, the incorporation of ethnicity into the

movement's rhetoric was for strategic reasons following the loss of the peasant's political clout

in Mexico and the rise of international concern for indigenous rights (Pitarch 2004; Trejo 2002).

Whatever the reason for this shift from a class-based peasant struggle to an indigenous one,

today the Zapatistas are firmly enmeshed in a discourse of indigeneity, something scholars

contend has aided indigenous peoples in creating a new political space for themselves in Mexico

(Jung 2003; Johnston 2000). As June Nash argues: "For those indigenous facing ethnocidal

threats in the current advance of capitalist enterprises, ethnicity becomes an instrumental factor

in achieving political solidarity. Instead of viewing ethnic mobilization as an obstacle to

progress, left-wing intellectuals and organizations are beginning to accept indigenous organizers

as allies against the state monopoly of power" (2001: 39).

Furthermore, contrary to groups such as the Sendero Luminoso, which regarded

indigenous life-ways as backward, the Zapatistas have embraced their traditional Maya culture,

basing their autonomous governance structures firmly in long-standing indigenous customs and

incorporating the wisdom of the indigenous people into the philosophy of Zapatismo (Shapiro

2000). While past revolutionary peasant movements have sought to liberate the rural poor, in a

sense they continued to look down on the indigenous peasantry as something lesser and in need

of salvation. The Zapatistas, in contrast, uphold their indigenous identity, declaring themselves

dignified protagonists who possess the strength and wisdom to rule themselves (Esteva and

Prakash, 1998b). As Marcos declared in an impassioned speech, the Zapatista rebellion shatters

the multiplicity of degrading images of the Indian:

> …they do not adapt to the 'diabolical' image of those who sacrifice humans to appease
> the gods, nor to that of the needy indigenous, with his hand extended….Nor that of the
> good savage who is perverted by modernity, nor that of the infant who entertains his
> elders with gibberish. Nor that of the submissive peon….Nor that of the skillful
> craftsperson whose products will adorn the walls of those who despise him. Nor that of
> the ignorant fool who should not have an opinion about what is further than the limited
> horizon of his geography… (2007: 200).

Through these rejections, the Zapatistas liberate the indigenous person to be a complex, self-

determining and modern subject.

Concluding Remarks

By situating the EZLN and the Zapatista rebellion in the context of a Latin American history of revolt and rebellion it becomes clear that the Zapatistas offer a new conception of how change should be achieved, where struggle should be directed and who can participate as a revolutionary subject. They stress that the goal of revolution should not be to replace one power structure with another equally repressive one, but rather should be to dissolve hierarchy all together, dispersing agency into the hands of the multitude. The Zapatistas challenge us to re-conceptualize our notions of authority and question the legitimacy of traditional positions of leadership. They contend that not only is an elite leadership unnecessary, but that it would reproduce domination. Moreover, rather than waiting for those in power to grant the rights of citizens, the Zapatistas propose that peoples should be the leaders of their own destiny and must not wait for the permission of illegitimate rulers (Speed 2008). This is particularly evident in the Zapatistas' enactment of indigenous autonomy in Chiapas upon the state's refusal to do so (Speed 2008). As Gustavo Esteva writes, the Zapatistas are "renouncing the frame of reference of the nation-state…" (1999: 41). Moreover, diverging from previous revolutionary traditions the Zapatistas have embraced the ethnic nature of their struggle and have advanced indigenous issues in Mexico and around the world (Jung 2003).

To international supporters inspired by the open and plural nature of Zapatismo, the Zapatista struggle is something that anyone anywhere can participate in, "an intuition", a common cry of *Basta* against forces of oppression. Yet, while it is easy to celebrate the concepts of Zapatismo and to see how the wisdom of the rebellion can help us to understand global discontent, organization and protest, it is important to remember that in Chiapas to be a Zapatista is not merely "an intuition" but is an intensely political act that has not only given the indigenous peoples a sense of empowerment, but has also led to community division and increased

militarization of the state (Trejo 2002). While we on the outside may praise Zapatismo for what

it offers us on a theoretical basis, in Chiapas the people are still fighting a very real battle to live

out the ideals that we easily transfer into theory.

      In Zapatista territory, the movement becomes a tangible enactment of the above ideals of

power and authority, an experiment in self-rule that must observe, ask and adapt as it walks into

the future. It is into this local enactment of Zapatismo that I will now turn, showing how power is

articulated in the local manifestation of Zapatista resistance.

Chapter 2

Resistance Through Creation: Autonomous Governance and Process as Ideology

"There is no need to conquer the world. It is enough that we make it again. We. Today."

EZLN (1996) in an invitation to the First International Encuentro for Humanity and Against Neoliberalism.

Figure 3. Entrance to the *Caracol* of Morelia. Photographed by author.

The gate into Zapatista territory is simple: a set of rusted steel bars separating the

Caracol of Morelia (one of five Zapatista autonomous governance centers) from the dusty dirt

road that leads to it and the villages and towns nestled in the surrounding hills; it is a gate whose

inconspicuous presence masks its ability to define the limit of state authority. Behind it sits a

rebel government. The only marker of resistance is a chipped sign at the entrance, proclaiming in

bold, red lettering: "You are in Rebel Zapatista Territory: here the people govern, and the

government obeys." It is a gorgeous sunny day as I approach the gate, one of a motley crew of

eight foreign human rights observers hoisting backpacks, sporting dreadlocks and a guitar. We

are going to meet with one of five autonomous governments, known as *Juntas del Buen*

Gobierno (Good Government Councils), to gain permission to travel to Agua Clara for our term

as human rights observers. Our approach is observed by the steady gaze of an indigenous woman

clad in a traditional dark blue skirt bordered with brightly colored ribbons and complemented by

an elaborately hand-embroidered blouse. She maintains her silence except for a few words of

greeting and later I discover this is because she only speaks Tzeltal, one of five local indigenous

languages in the region.[3] A young man approaches the gate, greets us and asks for our names and

passports. We hand over our identity and, 20 minutes later, we enter.

There is a process of entering any of the five Zapatista *Caracoles*, one many scholars

have described as unnecessarily slow, clogged up with meticulous paperwork and too much

bureaucracy in general (Earle and Simonelli, 2005: 161). The first step in this process is waiting;

in fact, the whole endeavor is interspersed with long periods of twiddling thumbs. Our "waiting

room" consists of an old tire and a sloping wooden board under a tree, not exactly luxury, but

then nothing in the *Caracol* is. Finally, we are invited into the *Caracolito*, a little wooden

building that houses the "*Comissión de Vigilancia*" (literally, the "vigilance commission"). Eight

men and two women are seated at a wooden table, their appearance in the soiled clothing of

campesinos (peasant farmers) revealing their lack of formal training or permanent position on the

commission. These are not men and women used to office work, but instead are farmers and

housewives serving temporarily in the governance apparatus of their region. They ask each of us

a series of questions as one of them carefully notes our answers on a sheet of blank paper. There

is no computer. "What is your name? Where are you from? What is your occupation? What

organization do you represent? What is your motivation for this visit?" It is clear they are

concerned about maintaining watch over who comes and goes.

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[3] The five main languages spoken in Zapatista territory are Tzeltal, Tzotzil, Chol, Tojolabal, and Mam (Nash 1997: 262).

Finally we meet the *Junta*. About ten people are crowded around a small table in a little

room, adorned with posters of Zapatistas and children's paintings. Our meeting goes very much

the same way as our previous encounter with the Vigilance Commission: a series of questions

diligently recorded by almost all the members of the *Junta*. Some struggle with their words but

even the slowest is given time to learn. I am struck by how approachable the "government"

seems, common people ruling themselves.

The Zapatistas' call of "*Ya Basta*!" in 1994 was a powerful cry that reverberated

throughout Mexico and the world, finding an echo in the frustration and struggle of countless

others fighting the forces of oppression. This declaration of rejection and resistance became a

profound statement of affirmation as hundreds of thousands around the world were inspired to

take up the Zapatistas' struggle to "make the world new" (Leite 2005; Esteva and Prakash,

1998b). The Zapatistas did not offer a formula for transnational supporters to follow, rather they

called themselves, "an army of dreamers" (Marcos in Lorenzano 1998: 157) and "professionals

of hope," (Marcos 1995a: 167) leaving people free to form their own local responses in a

plurality of struggle and creation. Since this cry in 1994, the Zapatistas have been forging ahead

with their own affirmation through a project of autonomy which is at once a declaration of

resistance against the Mexican state and a creation of dignified rule of the people by the people

that seeks to make redundant the authority of the state within Zapatista territory (Esteva 1999).

In 1994, when the Zapatistas put a voice and a face to the extreme poverty and

exploitation suffered by indigenous peasants in Chiapas, they did not merely demand

government handouts and poverty reduction programs, but rather called for a true democracy to

transform Mexico on a national level (Stahler-Sholk 2000). As Hardt and Negri have observed,

this demand for democracy is a theme that has permeated the modern history of resistance

initiatives:

> The primary forces that have guided the history of modern resistance struggle and liberation movements …are driven at base not only by the struggle against misery and poverty but also by a profound desire for democracy – a real democracy of the rule of all by all based on relationships of equality and freedom (2004: 67).

Unwilling to wait for an unresponsive government to grant the autonomy and democratic

participation in the state that the EZLN demanded, the Zapatistas declared their own autonomy,

ceasing negotiations with the government after several years of frustrating talks (Speed 2008).

While not abandoning their national and international struggles, the Zapatistas have increasingly

turned inward, working to make "real" democracy a reality in their own territory (Speed 2008).

This resistance through autonomy has become the Zapatistas' challenge to the state, their critique

of Mexican democracy (Speed 2008). In an interview with a member of the "Information

Commission" in the *Caracol* of Oventik (one of five autonomous governance centers), I was told

the Zapatistas would not consider returning to negotiations with the Mexican government: "We

have never thought of this," he declared emphatically, "this is why we work in resistance and are

not seeking to get money or support from the government [speaking in contrast to other peasant

organizations]. Even if we are dying we have to resist; it is our strategy. To be able to truly

change all this we must resist. It is our weapon; we don't carry them [weapons] in our arms, we

have resistance; it is stronger.

While Zapatismo has been celebrated by theorists around the world for its bold rhetoric,

it is within their autonomous zones that the Zapatistas are experimenting with the

implementation of their ideals. The first chapter of this thesis addressed the global and

theoretical implications of the Zapatistas and their revolutionary approach to revolution itself; in

this chapter I will "move inward," exploring local attempts to enact the concepts of power and democracy that permeate the rhetoric of the EZLN and have received such attention from activists and academics. In short, I will look at how the Zapatistas have sought to manage power, such that it does not erode bonds of community but is dispersed equitably. I will begin by providing a brief overview of the process of establishing over 30 autonomous municipalities (similar to counties) throughout the eastern half of Chiapas, looking at early attempts to negotiate with the federal government and the Zapatistas' ultimate decision to reject all involvement with the official government. I will then focus on the structures of self-governance themselves, particularly on the *Juntas del Buen Gobierno* (Good Government Councils), the highest level of civil governance, established in 2003. Through an examination of how these governing bodies function I intend to demonstrate the Zapatistas' intent to design organizational structures that enable them to democratize power relations within autonomous zones. I will argue that, in accordance with traditional indigenous practices, governance is essentially viewed as a communal responsibility in which leaders are expected to obey the dictates of their communities and in which dialogue and consensus building intend to broaden the space for community participation, allowing common people direct agency in their own rule. Furthermore, I will show how the Zapatistas have drawn from indigenous tradition, reinventing old models in new structures and reviving the idea that community can function as a powerful emancipator. I will conclude by reflecting on several of the successes and challenges faced by the *Juntas del Buen Gobierno* and the autonomy project in general.

At the end of 1994, the Zapatistas declared 38 autonomous municipalities throughout the eastern half of Chiapas; their development of viable autonomy over the past 16 years has been called the Zapatistas' "most significant political achievement…" as well as their "most tangible

gain" (Harvey 2005: 15). The Rebel Zapatista Autonomous Municipalities (MAREZ) were to function as de facto governments, claiming jurisdiction over defined territories within municipal boundaries (Trejo 2002: 7). Still today, Zapatista communities within the MAREZ refuse to recognize the authority of elected municipal officials, the state governor or the president of Mexico, instead declaring their loyalty solely to Zapatista appointed authorities. Additionally, members of communities in resistance refuse to pay taxes, electricity or water bills; they do not participate in electoral competition and have declined to receive any government programs or subsidies (Trejo 2002: 7). Interestingly, the EZLN has not tried to drive out families and communities within the MAREZ that do not support the Zapatistas. Thus, many communities are divided between Zapatistas and families that support one of Mexico's three main political parties, the PRI, PAN and PRD, or that belong to other independent peasant organizations (Swords 2007).

Within these autonomous zones the Zapatistas continue experimenting with their own models of governance. While well-founded critiques exist regarding the self-governance project (including that it is overly bureaucratic, slow, and inefficient), the Zapatistas' initiative to establish an autonomous "good government" exempt from the interference of official municipal and federal authority is widely regarded by scholars as a valuable and inspiring experiment that is at once innovative while remaining firmly grounded in traditional forms of indigenous authority (Earle and Simonelli, 2005; Harvey 2005). As John Holloway remarks, the Zapatista revolution has not been solely about "moving outwards," but also about "moving inwards," as it seeks to create a more democratic and egalitarian reality within its own communities and organization (Harvey 2005: 14). For activists who seek new modes of organization, the

Zapatistas offer a persuasive example of a model which sees process and internal structure not

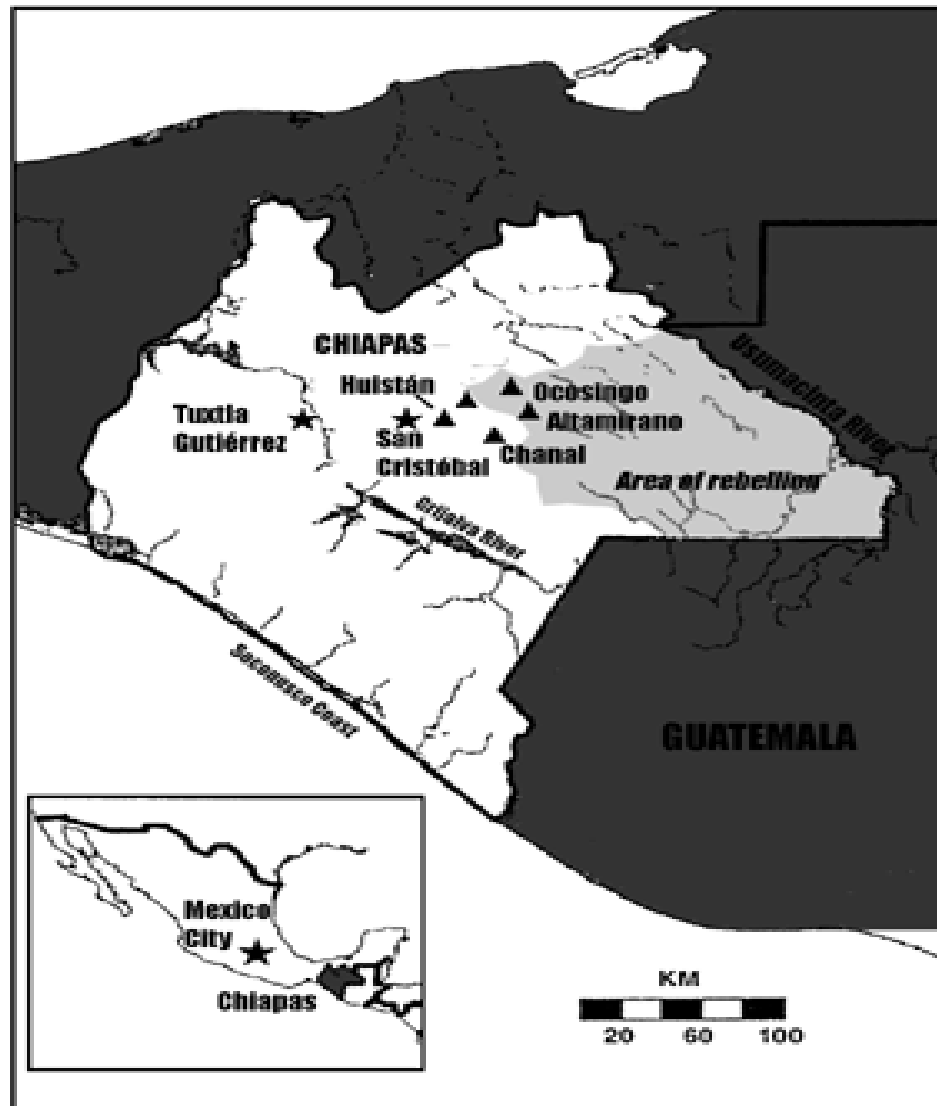simply as means to an end, but rather as ends in and of themselves (Hardt and Negri, 2004).

Figure 4. Areas of Zapatista influence in Chiapas. Source:
http://www.cs.utk.edu/~miturria/project/chiapas_map.gif

Creating Autonomy in a State of Denial

When people first hear of the EZLN, they often assume it is a separatist movement; yet

this is very far from the sort of autonomy the Zapatistas strive for. In fact, disengagement from

the state of Mexico is the opposite of the Zapatistas goal to finally be truly *included* within the

state. As Subcomandante Marcos stated in 1994:

> When we came down from the mountains carrying our packs, our dead, and our history,
> we came to the city to look for our country. The country that had forgotten us in the most
> remote corner of the land: the loneliest, the dirtiest, the worst (EZLN 1994: Chapter 8).

Marcos scoffs off descriptions of the Zapatista project for a "Maya Nation," "[this] exists solely

in the papers of some of the stupidest military persons in the Mexican Federal Army, who,

knowing that the war they are waging against us is illegitimate, are using this poor argument to

convince their troops that by attacking us, they are defending Mexico" (2007: 221).

Rather than secessionist ambitions, Marcos clarified the Zapatistas' vision of autonomy

in 2003:

> For us, autonomy is not fragmentation of the country or separatism, but the exercise of
> the right to govern and govern ourselves, as established in Article 39 of the Constitution
> of the United Mexican States[4]…we zapatista [*sic*] indigenous have always insisted that
> we are Mexicans…and that we are indigenous. This means that we demand a place in the
> Mexican nation but without ceasing to be what we are (2007: 221).

The autonomy the Zapatistas sought in 1994 refers to the right to "organize, govern and

adjudicate on the community and municipality level in a way that derives from traditions and

customs of an indigenous or campesino group" (Earle and Simonelli, 2005: 192). Autonomy, as

would be negotiated in the San Andrés Accords in 1996 (see Appendix C), was backed by ILO

(International Labor Organization) Convention 169, which recognized the collective rights of

indigenous peoples to manage the resources in their communities and which Mexico had ratified

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[4] Article 39 states: "The national sovereignty is vested essentially and originally in the people. The public power is originated in the people and is institutionalized for the people's benefit. The people shall be entitled to change or modify its government's form" (United Mexican States. Constitution 1917).

in 1990 (Stahler-Sholk 2000: 9; ILO 2010). However, the Zapatistas not only sought

decentralization of administrative functions of the state, but also what Stahler-Sholk calls a

"bottom-up definition of autonomy" which would allow people to "choose political and

jurisdictional space and relations with other units" (2000: 9).

The Zapatistas suggest that their decision to create autonomous governments is to ensure

honest, accountable and truly representative local authorities in contrast to historically poor

relations with distant and corrupt governments of the PRI. As Zapatista community members of

the autonomous region of Tierra y Libertad of Las Margaritas declared to political scientist

Guillermo Trejo, "In these territories our autonomous authorities rule and will continue to do so

because we need them, because they respect us, because we know them, because they obey us

and because we know how to obey them" (2002: 7).

Emerging from a history of distant, tense, and clientelistic relations with the PRI and a

resultant attitude that cast local officials as "undesirable interferences" in community affairs, in

the 1990s a favorable climate existed for Zapatista initiatives of de facto autonomy to develop

(Burguete 2003: 194). This struggle for autonomy has proceeded in several phases since the

rebellion of 1994, occupying an increasingly formalized place within Zapatista demands

beginning in 1995 (Burguete 2003: 194). As Araceli Burguete Cal y Mayor (2003) explains, the

first stage began in December of 1994, when the military attempted to encircle the Cañadas (a

subregion of the Lacandón Jungle) and the eastern part of the Lacandón, which it believed to be

the stronghold of the EZLN. In defiance of this encroachment, the Zapatistas announced their

organized presence with the declaration of 38 autonomous municipalities and two autonomous

regions, formalizing this endeavor with a declaration basing the right of self-government on

Article 39 of the 1917 Mexican Constitution.

A second phase in the autonomy process began after the February 1996 signing of the

San Andrés Accords (see Appendix C), when in October of that year the Zapatistas boycotted

municipal elections and refused to recognize the authority of officially elected leaders. Instead,

the EZLN chose to enact the autonomy that the state to this day has refused to implement. This

involved the construction of local government through autonomous councils and the

development – in collaboration with national and international solidarity groups – of the

Zapatistas' own systems of education, healthcare provision, agriculture and more (Speed 2008).

As Speed writes, the failure of the government to implement the San Andrés Accords prompted

the Zapatistas to move increasingly away from a movement of 'national liberation' and toward a

movement for 'indigenous rights'" (2008: 55). Thus, the autonomous municipalities "…emerged

as a principal space for the organization of resistance and a strategy for indigenous political

participation" (Speed 2008: 55).

In 1997, a third phase began when it became increasingly evident that the government

was reneging on the essential content of the San Andres Accords (Burguete 2003). As a

communiqué from the Indigenous Revolutionary Clandestine Committee stated in August 1996,

"As we Zapatistas foresaw from the beginning, papers guarantee nothing, and they do not

translate into solutions for the grave situation of the indigenous communities if they are not

accompanied by concrete actions… the government does not want to solve in a profound way the

national indigenous situation…in no way is it willing to radically modify the relation between

the nation and indigenous Mexicans" (CCRI-CG 1996). Refusing to respect limits on what the

Accords had outlined as their rights, the Zapatistas further institutionalized their de facto

autonomous municipal governments, in some cases even expelling the official local

governments. During this time, the federal government launched a military offensive against

several of the autonomous municipalities, including a paramilitary-led massacre in Acteal which

resulted in the murder of 45 men, women and children suspected of sympathizing with the

Zapatistas (Earle and Simonelli, 2005: 2). By 1997, estimates of the number of troops active in

Chiapas ranged from 40,000 to 60,000, roughly 40 percent of the whole Mexican Army (Earle

and Simonelli, 2005: 94). Additionally, the federal government created seven new municipalities

in an attempt to undermine EZLN claims to autonomy (Burguete 2003). Following this period,

the Zapatistas entered into almost five years of "strategic silence," during which time they

focused on internal organization and struggled within a strained economy that saw the fall of

coffee prices and a surge in government projects and subsidies designed to lure away EZLN

supporters caught in rough economic times (Burguete 2003).

The fourth stage, which is discussed in this chapter, was the creation in 2003 of the

Juntas del Buen Gobierno and the *Caracoles* which were designed to address some of the

challenges of autonomy building not dealt with effectively at the municipal level.

As Araceli Burguete Cal y Mayor (2003) points out, it is important to keep in mind that

the use of an autonomy discourse has often occurred spontaneously in response to popular

indigenous rebellion and resistance. In such cases, autonomy acts as banner under which to

proclaim overarching demands for liberty, democracy and justice. Within Zapatista zones,

autonomy is articulated in multiple ways according to the historical, cultural, religious and

linguistic contexts of each region. Thus, argues Burguete (2003), the Zapatista autonomy process

is characterized by diversity much more than homogeneity. Moreover, Burguete (2003)

highlights the complex nature of demands for autonomy in rural Chiapas, explaining how

discourses of indigenous rights and self-governance have not only been disseminated by the

Zapatistas, but have been utilized by diverse political bodies to achieve varying degrees of

regional power. Speed (2008) echoes this perspective, noting that during the 1990s and into

2001, indigenous peoples belonging to a diverse array of organizations sought to restructure the

Mexican legal framework through constitutional reform. Furthermore, The Zapatistas were not

the first or the only group to demand democracy in Chiapas. In fact, a study by Guillermo Trejo

found that between 1977 and 2002 the principal demands of indigenous peasant organizations in

Chiapas concerned the democratization of municipal power and the end of government

repression (2002: 15). However, while other indigenous groups have achieved certain degrees of

autonomy, none have made demands as radical as those of the EZLN and only the Zapatistas

have pursued their project as far as to reject any involvement in electoral politics or to refuse

government assistance in their communities (Trejo 2002).

Writing a New Chapter of Autonomy: The Creation of the *Juntas del Buen Gobierno*

Figure 5. *Junta del Buen Gobierno* in Oventik. Photographed by author.

On August 8th, 9th, and 10th 2003, the EZLN celebrated the birth of five *Caracoles*[5] and

Juntas del Buen Gobierno (Good Government Councils – *Juntas*, for short), their names a direct

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[5] These are the physical spaces where meetings and exchanges with civil society take place. Each *Caracol* is the seat of a *Junta del Buen Gobierno*. Thus, there are five *Carcoles* located throughout Eastern Chiapas: La Realidad, Morelia, La Garrucha, Roberto Barrios, and Oventik (Espinoza 2006). "*Caracol*," meaning conch or snail shell, is

challenge to the "*mal gobierno*" (bad government) of the Mexican state. The *Juntas* were

intended to function as autonomous administrative centers and decision making bodies with each

one representing anywhere from three to seven Rebel Zapatista Autonomous Municipalities

(MAREZ). With the creation of the *Juntas*, the Zapatistas would enact more comprehensively

and effectively the rights they had technically been granted in 1996 through the signing of the

San Andres Accords but which the Mexican state had still failed to implement. In the words of

Subcomandante Marcos, "Despite the stupidity and blindness of Mexican politicians, the so-

called 'San Andres Accords on Indigenous Rights and Culture' will be put into practice in rebel

territories" (2003a). As Shannon Speed argues in her book, *Rights in Rebellion: Indigenous*

Struggle and Human Rights in Chiapas, by declaring that their "…autonomy d[id not] need

permission from the government,"[6] the Zapatistas boldly refused to hold the state as the

authoritative guarantor of their rights (2008: 38).

While the Rebel Zapatista Autonomous Municipalities (MAREZ) maintain responsibility

over local justice, health, education, housing, land, work, commerce and culture, the *Juntas* were

created to address two principal concerns that were not effectively dealt with at the municipal

level: namely, the relationship with national and international civil society, and interactions

between Zapatista and non-Zapatista communities (Marcos 2007; Díaz-Polanco 2006). Having

identified unequal levels of development between autonomous municipalities and even between

communities and individual Zapatista families, the EZLN recognized the need for a higher

governmental structure that could better direct the support of national and international civil

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an ancient Mayan symbol meaning truth, awareness and the word in traditional Mayan culture (Earle and Simonelli, 2005). While the *Caracoles* serve several functions, according to the words of Subcomandante Marcos at their inauguration, the most important is,"…[to] remind[] us that we should stay awake and be alert to the righteousness of the worlds that people the world" (2007: 218.).
[6] A comment made by a young Tzeltal woman from the Morelia region.

society (Marcos 2007: 213). By enhancing oversight of solidarity work, the *Juntas* intend to

ensure that assistance is distributed equitably throughout autonomous municipalities and

communities and that development is carried out in a way that respects ideals of community

empowerment and dignity. This role of the *Juntas* is discussed in detail in the following chapter.

The second purpose of the *Juntas* is to act as mediators between Zapatistas and non-

Zapatistas living within autonomous regions or municipalities (Marcos 2007). This function is

particularly important in the present context of Chiapas in which communities are often divided

along political lines yet may continue to share the same school, church or hospital (Chatterton

2004: 5).

In addition to their function as "doorways" between non-Zapatistas - both foreigners and

locals - and the Zapatista communities (Marcos 2007), the creation of the *Juntas* marks a split

between the civil and military bodies of the EZLN (Díaz-Polanco 2006: 50), a crucial step that

separates the Zapatistas from previous guerrilla groups (Shapiro 2000: 2). Speaking candidly,

Marcos discussed the faults of the military branch of the EZLN in the Sixth Declaration of the

Lacandón Jungle, saying:

> The EZLN [military arm] in some ways 'contaminated' a tradition of democracy and
> self-governance" (2007: 230). "…we saw that the military being above, and the
> democratic authority below was not good, because democratic authority should not be
> decided militarily. It should be the reverse: the democratic –political authority governing
> above, and the military obeying below" (2007: 265).

By excluding the participation of members of the Revolutionary Indigenous Clandestine

Committee, - General Command of the EZLN (*Comité Clandestino Revolucionario Indígena –*

CCRI-CG) in civil governance, the Zapatistas set themselves apart from previous guerrilla

movements whose militarily-run governments often led to highly "centralized, bureaucratic, and

coercive" regimes (Johnson 2000: 468). As Shapiro argues, "…the uniqueness of the Zapatista movement lay in its ability to abandon an archaic, hierarchical, militaristic organizing model and adopt the indigenous concept of 'command obeying'" (2000: 2). In an interview concerning the origins of the Zapatistas, Subcomandante Marcos discusses the initial conflict that existed within the organization between two modes of decision making and leadership:

> On the one hand there was the initial proposal of the EZLN: a completely undemocratic and authoritarian proposal,…since the army is the most authoritarian thing in this world…On the other hand there was the indigenous tradition…that after the Conquest became their only way of surviving....the communities…saw themselves obliged to defend themselves collectively, to live collectively, to govern themselves collectively (1994: 3).

Throughout its evolution, the EZLN has continually opted to side with the indigenous tradition of the collective, finally rejecting military involvement in civilian rule in 2003. Through this rejection one can see how the EZLN has creatively sought to avoid the "de-democratization" (Hardt and Negri, 2004: 76) that characterized 20th century guerrilla movements and, rather than adhere to out-dated models of organization, has respected indigenous practices that offer more democratic alternatives. As Hardt and Negri discuss, the Zapatistas' decision to forgo authoritarian control for purely civilian rule articulates how democracy is beginning to "define both the goal of the movements and its constant activity" (2004: 87).

Origins of Zapatista Autonomous Governance

The Zapatista conception of governance, while innovative and progressive, is firmly rooted in the indigenous traditions of southern Mexico and Guatemala (Marcos 2007: 265) that have persisted despite five centuries of conquest, colonization and independence (Nash 2001). It

should be noted that these traditions are not static, or necessarily indigenous to Chiapas. Rather

the history of Chiapas, characterized by forced migration, resettlement and influxes of refugees,

notably from Guatemala in the 1980s, has meant a "widespread intermingling of diverse

indigenous traditions" (Couch 2001: 250). What these traditions have in common and what the

Zapatistas most draw from are customs that emphasize dialogue and consensus building and

view authority as subservient to the collective will of community (Couch 2001). Rather than

dismantle previous modes of organization, The *Juntas del Buen Gobierno* and other Zapatista

governance structures have been integrated into preexisting traditions, including *cargo*, a sort of

civil religious hierarchy in which, traditionally, men circulate through various unpaid posts of

community service to eventually graduate as respected elders and community advisors (Molnar

and Carrasco, 2001).

In addition to recognizing the value that community processes contribute to democratic

While this process has been modified to reduce its hierarchical and restrictive nature, for

instance by encouraging women to participate in the *cargo* system and making it more possible

for people of all ages to assume positions of authority, the fundamental principle of community

service has remained a guiding idea of the Zapatistas' governance model (Fenelon and Hall,

2008). As a member of the *Junta del Buen Gobierno* of Morelia reflected in an interview, the

essential value that leaders follow the people has remained a priority of the *Juntas*: "from the

communities come the accords and these accords from the community pass to the municipality

and arrive here. Here we meet so we can all talk and in this there is no difference."

In addition to recognizing the value that community processes contribute to democratic

organizing, in contrast to both left perspectives that view community as restrictive, and elite

minorities that conceive of the community as a "step back in history" (Estreva and Prakash,

1998b: 161), the Zapatistas have embraced the community as a model of organization with the

potential to liberate the indigenous peoples (Marcos 2007). This idea will be examined more closely further into this chapter.

The ability of the Zapatistas to reinvent ancient values in modern structures and to modify traditional practices just enough so as to allow them to continue serving the best interests of the people has been noted by scholars as one of the movement's principal strengths (Fenelon and Hall, 2008; Tilly and Kennedy, 2006). As Subcomandante Marcos has said of his arrival in the jungle in the early 1980s, "The indigenous communities teach us to listen, and this is what we learn" (1995b: 47). According to Harvey (1994) evidence exists that the Maoist/Marxists group from the city that arrived in Chiapas in 1983 was instrumental in encouraging certain traditional indigenous democratic practices to continue when they were threatened (Barmeyer 2003: 127). Thus, rather than impose new revolutionary doctrines based on the ideas of foreign theorists, the Zapatista governance model has emerged in organic evolution from the wisdom of the indigenous peoples themselves (Fenelon and Hall, 2008).

It is important to note that the Zapatistas, while they value certain indigenous practices, do not idealize ancient culture and lifestyle, but remain open to altering or abolishing customs that are in opposition to the broader ideological orientation of Zapatismo (Fenelon and Hall, 2008; Tilly and Kennedy, 2006). For instance, the Zapatistas have been working to eliminate the oppressive sexism that has become pervasive in Maya society, issuing a Revolutionary Women's Law in 1994 (Tilly and Kennedy, 2006: 4). While the existence of this law does not mean that gender equality has been achieved in Zapatista communities, the endorsement of such a motion by indigenous communities is in and of itself significant (Tilly and Kennedy, 2006: 4).

Governance as a Process of Community

The Zapatistas' notion of authority and governance emerges from a deep tradition of community practiced in Mayan communities and other indigenous societies throughout the world (Fenelon and Hall, 2008). As indigenous leaders and scholars discussed at a 2003 conference on indigenous peoples of Latin America, the indigenous concept of *"autoridad"* (authority) offers an alternative to the fundamentally "hierarchical power structure" of traditional governments (América Profunda 2003 in Fenelon and Hall, 2008: 1880). *Autoridad,* they agreed, views "communal authority [as] the whole community in its assembly…The central idea," they concluded, "is to maintain harmony within the community" (Fenelon and Hall, 2008: 1880). This valorization of the collective is evident in the structure of the *Juntas del Buen Gobierno,* which have been strategically designed so as to respect unique conceptions of leadership and decision-making that place broad participation and collective harmony as their central objectives.

Leadership

The Zapatista rebellion raises fundamental concerns about the nature of leadership, questioning who should hold positions of authority and proposing a reformulation of the relationship between leaders and those they represent. Wary of the cult of personality and the tendency to abuse power, the Zapatista have questioned the notion of individual leadership, masking their faces in part as a symbolic indication that leadership is fluid and interchangeable, never fixed to one individual personality but the responsibility of all members of the revolution (Esteva and Prakash, 1998: 181). In the words of Shannon Speed, "Zapatista leadership style has been specifically constructed, both in discourse and practice, in a way that discourages the public role of individual leaders and heavily emphasizes collective processes" (2008: 169). The Zapatistas seek to disperse decision-making ability throughout all participating villages and

Zapatista members, stressing that above all else authorities must lead by obeying the will of the

people (Esteva and Prakash, 1998b). As Duncan Earle and Jeanne Simonelli reflect:

> The very manner in which leadership operates in the Zapatista struggle, 'to lead by
> obeying,' suggests serious suspicion of the legitimacy of authority, especially in the way
> it must consult with its constituents over most of its decisions and in its general use of
> consensus to reach decisions. Autonomy means some escape from the authoritarian
> actions of a centralized institution…(2003b: 86).

This orientation towards authority and participation reflects a return to the community, a

reassignment of power into the hands of the people. In contrast to the vanguard of elite

intellectuals that Marx proposed was needed to guide the uneducated masses (Hardt and Negri,

2004), the Zapatistas have, in the words of Shannon Speed, "…elaborated on a notion of

authority that downplay[s] the role of the leaders themselves, and highlight[s] collective decision

making and the subjection of individual leaders' power to the collective will" (2008: 170). As

Tilly and Kennedy declare, "Zapatista governing structures are, "…quite explicitly, schools of

participatory democracy" (2006: 3).

The *Juntas del Buen Gobierno* have been fashioned so as to enable the above ideals to be

practiced in Zapatista territory (Speed 2008). Each of the five *Juntas* consists of about 30 to 60

members who rotate through terms of active service at the *Caracol*.[7] As such, there are between

10 to 15 Zapatistas serving at the *Caracol* at all times, with each member spending one to two

weeks at the *Caracol* ever six weeks or so[8]. Members of the *Juntas del Buen Gobierno* are

nominated through general assemblies at the municipal level, either by majority vote or

consensus and serve on the "*Junta* rotation" for three years before new representatives are

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[7] The number of community members serving on the *Junta* depends on the number of autonomous municipalities
that belong to each *Caracol*. Thus, *Juntas* overseeing smaller territorial areas or areas in which less Zapatistas live
will have less members rotating through service at one time.
[8] Term lengths vary by *Junta*. Members of the Morelia *Junta* with whom I spoke serve for eight days before they are
replaced by another group. In the *Junta* of Oventik, which I also visited, terms are 15 days.

chosen. If a representative on the *Junta* is not acting in the interests of the people, he or she is

made to step down from the position (Espinoza 2006: 224). Unlike in traditional indigenous

systems, women can also assume this *cargo* and when I visited the *Caracol* of Morelia there

were three women serving on the *Junta*.

Within the Zapatista model positions of authority are not remunerated. This not only

avoids the temptation to cling to authority in order to accumulate wealth, but also reflects the

view that leadership is part of a larger communal project in which governance is not the

responsibility of a few but rather is a communal project in which each member of society has an

important role to play (Espinoza 2006). This attitude was made particularly evident by one

member of the *Junta* of Morelia when he described in an interview how community support

enabled *Junta* authorities to leave their homes to serve in the *Caracol*:

> Some leave their homes at two in the morning to be able to walk to the place [*Caracol*].
> We see that others do the same because they rise early to make the food. The family stays
> there or a *compañero* or *compañera* stays without *cargo* to sustain the family and care for
> the animals. In this way we can see that we are all working. Even though some don't
> come here [to serve on the *Junta*], our families are giving their participation. We feel this
> support between all of us. For this we say we all collaborate in this work. Men and
> women, children and elderly even if they don't come here we can feel that they support
> us in other ways. They, in the community give us the ability [to serve on the *Junta*].

While leadership is often earned from dedicated service to the community, at other times

individuals are made to assume positions of authority as a sort of punishment for laxness or

indifference (Marcos 2007: 229). By acting as an authority, the individual is paying back to the

community for his lack of previous commitment. The language chosen by *Junta* members to

describe their work reflects the idea that leadership is a service. "Everyone who comes here

comes to give his or her services," stated one man. For farmers and mothers, spending three

years traveling back and forth between their busy lives at home and the *Caracol*, sometimes

hours away by foot, to work long, unpaid days hearing complaints and receiving visitors cannot

be an easy job. Rather than a glorified position, a place on the *Junta* seemed to represent more a

necessary burden that was shouldered out of a firm commitment to the ideals of the movement

and to the wellbeing of communities trying to survive the harsh reality of autonomy. As Gustavo

Esteva writes, "A position of authority is assumed as a cargo, a burden, a service, not as a source

of income and power" (1999: 163).

Rotational Leadership

       The practice of rotating leadership on the *Juntas* is a characteristic of Zapatista self-

governance that has received a great degree of attention from both critics and supporters of the

movement alike. To critics, this system is inefficient, causes lack of accountability, and does not

permit authorities to gain the expertise that years of training and experience provide.[9]

Supporters, on the other hand, uphold the practice as an example of how the Zapatistas seek to

maintain an egalitarian society in which no one individual rises significantly above another

(Speed 2008; Tilly and Kennedy, 2006; Chatterton 2004). Furthermore, they credit rotational

leadership as an innovative attempt to curb corruption (Speed 2008; Tilly and Kennedy, 2006;

Chatterton 2004). As Shannon Speed writes, through the frequent turnover of *Junta* members,

"the diffusion of leadership and authority is solidly built into the system" (2008: 170), thus

discouraging accumulation of power and subsequent corruption. While scholars have offered

their views regarding the value of rotational leadership, when I visited Chiapas in January 2010,

I was interested to hear how this process was understood by *Junta* members themselves. The

Junta del Buen Gobierno in Morelia raised several important objectives behind this practice,

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[9] I have not found a review of the practice of rotational leadership that is entirely negative. The critiques listed above are made by firm supporters of the Zapatistas who have seen room for improvement, or have noted the compromises that rotation entails. These short-comings are discussed in: Tilly and Kennedy, 2006; Earle and Simonelli 2005; Couch 2001 among others.

namely: to avoid corruption, as a precautionary measure to protect against confidential

information getting into the hands of the government, and to promote equal learning and

knowledge amongst community members. The idea of maintaining equality within communities

was integrated throughout their explanation of leadership rotation but was not addressed as an

objective in and of itself. Rather, it was presented as a condition that was necessary to ensure the

above objectives could be achieved.

Corruption

In the eyes of the *Junta* of Morelia, capitalism, and its promotion of a "profit-driven

value system" (Fenelon and Hall, 2008: 1874), is a principal factor behind corruption, "We feel

we are on an island because we are in the middle of a capitalist system…," a man on the *Junta*

told us human rights observers in an interview. Collier emphasizes the changes in traditional

community social compacts provoked by new reliance on money and increased participation in

the market and wage labor that grew dramatically during the oil boom of the 1970s (2005: 120).

He argues that the introduction of wage labor and the subsequent stratification within indigenous

communities caused community division as the wealthy no longer needed the webs of reciprocal

obligations and support that had been central to community life in Chiapas (2005: 120). It is

through this pursuit of individual gain over collective harmony that corruption enters into

Zapatista communities. As the representative on the *Junta* stressed, "This [corruption] is what we

don't want…" For this reason, he continued, "…we do not give an authority a long time to stay.

He or she must be changed."

Subcomandante Marcos, known for his humorous candor, has been anything but subtle in

his critique of Mexican politicians, "Politicians are now, and have been for some time, docile

employees…of whoever pays them more" (2007: 224). The Zapatista's frustration with the

Mexican government is not confined to marginalized indigenous communities, but rather

resonates with many Mexicans who feel disillusioned with politics as normal (Tilly and

Kennedy, 2006: 6). According to the World Economic Forum's 2008 – 2009 Global

Competitiveness Index, Mexico ranked 98th out of 134 countries for the extent that the public

trusted politicians, and did similarly poorly in categories of political favoritism, and government

transparency (Hausmann et al., 2009: 97). Emerging within a context of severe political

corruption and decades of PRI corporativism, it is understandable that the Zapatistas would be

particularly aware of this issue when enacting their own system of governance. By implementing

a system of rotational leadership the Zapatistas seek to evade the temptation that can come when

one individual is granted too much power over others. Furthermore, by frequently changing

authorities on the *Junta* relationships of corruption involving *Junta* members are not given time

to develop.

Changing Sides: Knowledge as a Threat

Not only does the practice of rotational leadership seek to prevent internal corruption,

but, by ensuring that no one person accumulates a disproportionate amount of knowledge

regarding the operations of the ELZN, it also intends to act as a safeguard in the chance that a

Junta member "sells out" to the government. "We have seen that through our knowledge

sometimes we leave and we sell-out to the government," a man on the *Junta* told us human rights

observers, "This is one of our concerns, and for this reason we are careful that no one rises

higher in his or her knowledge." The *Junta's* concern is not unfounded given the tense and

politically charged atmosphere in the Chiapanecan countryside. Even as human rights observers

we were cautioned during our training at Frayba not to take any photos of the Zapatistas or

record detailed information in our diaries that could, if seen by the wrong eyes, endanger the

EZLN or the community in which we were stationed. Knowledge is well guarded in Chiapas; it

may be a source of empowerment, as we shall see below, but it can quickly transform into a

dangerous weapon when placed in the wrong hands.

Knowledge as Empowering Community

"Knowledge is power," goes a well known saying. The Zapatistas recognize this truth in

multiple ways. While in one sense, knowledge is the ability to betray the EZLN, knowledge can

also be a way of empowering individuals and communities. One goal of sharing turns on the

Juntas that may not be so readily evident is to encourage community members to develop new

skills. Similar to conceptions of how community development should proceed, which will be

explored in the following chapter, the Zapatistas reject the notion of specialization and division

of labor, instead seeking to empower community members with a variety of abilities (Earle and

Simonelli, 2005: 21). "During these three years I will learn many different things," one shy

woman on the Morelia *Junta* related in an interview, "because many people come to the *Caracol*

with many different problems…." I could sense from her shyness that for her public speaking

was one of the skills she had been challenged to learn. The objective of rotational leadership, she

concluded, "is that we all learn, that we become equally knowledgeable." Perhaps this is the

logic behind why all members of the *Junta* diligently take notes during meetings with visitors

and is, in part, why during our interview, responses were shared among various members of the

Junta, such that almost each member was called upon to speak at some point.

In addition to empowering *Junta* members with new abilities, it is anticipated that when

representatives return to their communities they will disseminate what they have learned

throughout the community. As another *Junta* member remarked, "What one learns during the

three years one must bring back to the community so as to support it…we learn [] to return and

'lower ourselves' [*bajarnos*] ourselves again in the community where there is the necessity to know." In a sense, then, by obliging many people to rotate through terms of service on the *Juntas*, the Zapatistas are educating their communities and teaching them about the movement in which they participate. By informing the communities of what is taking place at higher levels of governance, the Zapatistas are endowing people with the knowledge and awareness they need to constructively participate in the decision-making process that affects the region. Furthermore, living within the tough atmosphere of low-intensity warfare and inter and intra community strife that exists today in Chiapas, perhaps knowledge is also seen as a source of protection: a better understanding of what other communities face could help to build solidarity, and perhaps also engenders greater loyalty to the EZLN within autonomous communities.

Lead by Obeying

The valorization of community is particularly evident in the Zapatistas' notion of "lead by obeying" or "command by obeying" (*mandar obedeciendo),* a concept that forms the foundation of the entire Zapatista project. This idea is clearly articulated in the functioning of the *Juntas del Buen Gobierno*. Rather than holding any power themselves to make decisions on behalf of the municipalities they represent, members of the *Juntas* are expected to serve as the voices of their respective communities or municipalities, acting on decisions made previously through consensus in general assemblies. "We can't *automandar* ("self-direct")," explained a man on the *Junta* of Morelia, "We have to listen to the voice of the *pueblo* (people), [and] from this alone we know what we must do. This is how *mandar obedeciendo* is," he concluded. He explained that the *Junta* gave input but ultimately was there to obey, "It's like being in the middle." As a man on the Morelia *Junta* reiterated, "We always rise from the pueblo."

"Rising from the pueblo" requires a lengthy process of consultation and assembly passing through each subsequent level of autonomous organization, a process which Duncan Earle and Jeanne Simonelli describe as "a sort of three-tiered representational consensus [that] enjoys universal participation at the community level…" (2005: 261). As José Rabasa notes, "the Zapatistas maxim of '*mandar obedeciendo'* and the constant alternation of the representatives in the *Juntas de Buen Gobierno* manifests the conviction that their struggles no longer aspire to take over the State, but also that the State must be avoided from within" (2005: 210).

Central to the concept of *mandar obedeciendo* is the process of keeping all Zapatistas informed of what is taking place at higher levels of organization. Communication, and therefore, informed communities promotes more constructive participation of community members in decision-making processes and, furthermore, by obliging the *Juntas* to inform the people they serve, the Zapatistas are able to ensure greater accountability. Each afternoon the *Junta* compiles the diligently recorded events of the day into a report (*informe*). Even my visit with the other human rights observers would be included in the *informe* of the Morelia *Junta*, they told us. "I will inform that we are speaking with you, who you are, where you come from. All this goes in our report," a man on the *Junta* told us, "Our base needs to know." Every three months, a huge assembly is held to which all those belonging to the region are invited. "[Here] we inform [the people] of all these activities," continued the *Junta* member, "We tell them everything. We cannot do anything secretly." He concludes, "We have to care for those in our pueblo." In this way, the Zapatistas are continually evaluating their methods and opening themselves to criticisms and suggestions from all participants, "[We ask] are we doing well or not? …there are details, but we correct them. In this way, we continue learning and… we walk forward,

[knowing] that yes, this is the best way." As Paul Chatterton remarks, "there are no blueprints for this journey…it might be a long, hard journey, but at least it is the one they chose" (2004: 6).

Consensus: Dispersing the Power to Decide

In a discussion with the *Junta* of Morelia concerning the implementation of development projects in Zapatista territory, one *Junta* member noted that there was rarely tension over how projects were being carried out. This low degree of conflict is not surprising when one considers that all community members participate in designing projects, and that villagers reach a consensus regarding how initiatives will proceed. "Every Zapatista knows exactly what is happening," the man on the *Junta* emphasized. It is clear that the inclusive process of deciding the parameters of a project is crucial to the initiative's ultimate success. Recognizing the importance of maintaining harmony and equality within the community, the Zapatistas, in accordance with traditional indigenous practice, emphasize dialogue and consensus building within governance structures and local community politics (Chatterton 2004). By encouraging the participation of every community member in the decision-making process, the Zapatistas entrust the people with the authority to rule themselves.

In her essay, *Consensus Building: Clarification for the Critics*, Judith Innes (2004) criticizes the tendency for consensus to be evaluated solely on whether or not agreements are reached and how long it takes to reach them, suggesting that efficiency may not be the best measure of "success." It is true that dialogue and consensus can be cumbersome, lengthy processes. During rounds of the San Andrés Accords in 1996, Mexican government officials were repeatedly frustrated by the Zapatistas' need to return to their base communities for consultation and consensus-building at each stage of the negotiations (Couch 2001). Yet, the

Zapatistas show us that for them what is important is not speed, but equality, community

empowerment and unity.

I do not intend to suggest that Zapatista communities lack tension and conflict. Like all

forms of societal organization, the community dedicated to consensus is not immune to political

differences, diverging interests, selfishness or anger. Rather, this discussion intends to

demonstrate the manner in which the EZLN attempts to enact its conceptions of equality,

grassroots agency and democracy through the dispersal of decision-making power. Consensus

building is just that, a project which is constantly under construction.

Consensus and Community

The model of consensus both depends on and promotes a cohesive and informed

community and is rooted in a valorization of social harmony over individual advancement

(Fenelon and Hall, 2008). A principal criticism made by "Westerners" is that consensus

discourages difference, freedom of thought and expression, instead promoting uniformity and

lack of innovation (Speed 2008; Innes 2004). Yet, critics fail to acknowledge that in numerous

traditional cultures around the world the promotion of communal unity is consciously given

highest priority (Fenelon and Hall, 2008). "The Zapatista discourse," argues Shannon Speed,

"asserts a very different kind of logic, one that does not lend itself well to market logics and to

notions of rational-actor citizens out to maximize individual benefits, express their freedom of

choice at the ballot box, and express their dissent in the courts of the state" (2008: 172). Instead,

she suggests the Zapatistas offer an alternative structure of power that values the collective.

Perhaps, rather than simply discarding community as an outdated model of organizing,

we can do to learn something from the Zapatista's celebration of the collective. Slovenian

activist and political scientist Andrej Kurnik, who spent several weeks in a Zapatista community

in 2001, related to me in an interview how his experience with the Zapatistas caused him to

rethink his perspective of community:

> …in Europe the community is something reactionary, regressive…in the European
> tradition, a community is always something that is closed, something that is
> hierarchical…[a form of organization through which people] cannot emancipate
> themselves individually or as groups and so forth….Then against the community you
> have the concept of individuality, such that rights and the question of emancipation,
> liberation is related to being individual…[Therefore], it was interesting for us to see how
> these communitarian forms of society [in Chiapas] basically produce effects we want.
> And the effects are that people get more power either as individuals or as villages or as
> poor people and so forth…in the communitarian form there are all kinds of emancipation
> and liberation processes going on….we started to rethink the question of community and
> we said, 'alright maybe it is good to build the community… and stop trying to base one's
> political project on abstract individual human beings who are kind of detached from
> social relations. This is one of the most important lessons we learned.

In the words of Subcomandante Marcos, community, rather than restricting the indigenous

peoples, has enabled them to survive and given them the strength to rebel: "Collective work,

democratic thought, and majority rule [rule of the people] are more than just a tradition among

indigenous people; they have been the only way to survive, to resist, to be proud, and to rebel"

(Johnson 2000: 484). In a time when people are searching for alternative forms of control, Esteva

credits the Zapatistas for championing the community as a valuable form of organization, "In the

community, the social order is not based on the rights of the individuals (central principle of

formal democracy), but in mutual, common obligations, which give an effective foundation to

the exercise of power" (1999: 166). He and Prakash go on to argue that, "Communities are

appearing as the only viable option taking us beyond a century of blindness: limiting political

imagination to the dichotomy of socialist or capitalist ideologies" (1998b: 161).

Consensus as a Form of Democratic Practice

"Our path was always that the will of the many be in the hearts of the men and women who command … Another word came from afar … [and] gave the name of 'democracy' to our way that was from before words travelled" (EZLN in Nash 1997: 264).

Like Andrej Kurnik, David Graeber (2004) recognizes the potential for "Westerners" to learn from the community model. Graeber refutes the modern believe in the supremacy of majoritarian democracy and rejects the notion that the Greeks were the first and only society to "invent" a form of joint decision making. Instead, he lauds indigenous forms of consensus building practiced for millenniums in societies around the world, suggesting that these models are perhaps more democratic than systems which enforce the will of the majority (2004: 88). Graeber scorns critics of indigenous consensus building arguing that, "The real reason for the unwillingness of most scholars to see a Sulawezi or Tallensi village council as 'democratic' – well, aside from simple racism, the reluctance to admit anyone Westerners slaughtered with such relative impunity were quite on the level as Pericles – is that they do not vote" (2004: 88). However, he goes on to explain why the practice of voting would be unrealistic and counterproductive in traditional communal societies. In order for the majority decision to be enacted successfully there must be some way of ensuring that the opposing minorities comply. In small communities voting and the process of adhering to the decision of the majority at the expense of the minority would, argues Graeber, "be the most likely means to guarantee humiliations, resentments, hatreds, in the end, the destruction of communities" (2004: 89). In societies without control over a coercive force to compel minorities to agree to the majority decision, consensus processes are the only logical means of maintaining social harmony (Graeber 2004). Furthermore even if communities did have the power to forcibly make people comply with certain decisions, Graeber argues that many societies would never even let this idea cross their minds as, in their understanding, one cannot *force* the will of the people (2004: 89).

The process of consensus in indigenous communities suggests that the course of action being decided on is no more important than the maintenance of social harmony and solidarity, promised through the *process* by which that action is decided on. The Zapatistas' commitment to consensus and dialogue has inspired activist networks throughout the world to look at their own organizational structure not as a means to an ends, but rather to view process and internal structure *as* their ideology (Graeber 2002).

The Zapatista's emphasis on a more participatory model of governance rejects the notion that the people's voices must be filtered through a representative, and attempts to eliminate the separation between the people and the government that characterizes representational democracy (Hardt and Negri, 2004). As Graham Smith and Corinne Wales highlight, "Within contemporary democratic theory, there is an emerging concern with the growing difference and distance between the subjectivity, motives and intentions of citizens and the political decisions made in their name" (2006: 157). This concern is leading scholars to question the foundations on which democracy is built and to examine the opposition that exists between democracy and representation. Calling representation a "*disjunctive synthesis*" Hardt and Negri note how representation "[both] links the multitude to government and at the same time separates it" (2004: 241). The Zapatista's pledge, "here the people rule and the government obeys," indicates their desire to return to a notion of a true democracy of *everyone,* in which "rulers" do not guide the people, but rather follow them. Through stressing that authority adhere to the decisions made through community-level consensus, the Zapatistas are experimenting with how best to remove the anti-democratic nature of representation. If this system is able to function as intended then the *leaders* can indeed be more appropriately called *followers*. Whether or not the Zapatistas are

successful in truly erasing all separation between people and their government remains a question.

Questions of Efficiency and Efficacy

While scholars tend to agree that the Zapatistas' practice of self-governance serves as an inspiring attempt to create a viable form of autonomy and to implement ideals of democracy (Tilly and Kennedy, 2006), several critiques have been raised regarding the autonomy model and the *Juntas del Buen Gobierno* in particular (Chatterton 2004). At the forefront of criticisms of the *Junta*s is the issue of efficiency (Stahler-Sholk 2007), raising questions about what "success" entails and who the *Juntas* intend to serve.

My experiences of waiting hours to see the *Junta* and then repeatedly answering the same list of detailed questions is not unique; in fact, my experience is nothing compared to what others often endure. For example, Abigail Andrews describes how a representative of a solidarity group hoping to put on a daylong children's fair, met with all five of the Zapatista *Juntas* at least three times, traveling back and forth between the dispersed and often remote locations in order to, "…explain, reformulate, and re-explain his proposal" (2010: 99). When I visited the *Caracol* of Morelia, a woman from Spain had been staying there nearly a week waiting for permission from the *Junta* to go to a certain community. "For all practical purposes," argue Duncan Earle and Jeanne Simonelli, anthropologists who have worked extensively in Zapatista communities, "it appear[s] that they [the Zapatistas] ha[ve] replicated the bureaucracy of the government they were trying to avoid" (2005: 161).

Yet, as Shannon Speed (2008) suggests, the objective of the EZLN is not to promote efficiency, a value we from the "Western" world tend to prioritize. Speaking about the process of rotational leadership, Speed argues, "There is no need to romanticize this process…the inverted

power relations of *mandar obedeciendo* [lead by obeying] lead to complicated decision-making processes….However," she concludes, "the goal of the EZLN's autonomy project is not to promote efficiency" (2008: 170). While the *Junta* system may be slow and frustrating for solidarity groups and visitors, my own observations and those of others suggest that, for the Zapatistas themselves, this system may be working just fine. "Their concept of time is completely different than our time," remarked activist Andrej Kurnik, who spent several weeks in a Zapatista community as a human rights observer. "Nothing goes fast there, and this is good. We could really see how effectively they organized their community and how life improved."

    One afternoon during my two weeks as a human rights observer at Agua Clara, I sat playing chess and talking with Beto, a young Zapatista of 21, about the organization of Zapatista governance. Thinking of the critiques I had heard, I asked him whether or not he thought the system worked well, "Yes," he told me. "It's not too slow?" I probed, giving him another chance to be critical, "No, it is very fast, faster than the state government!" While other conversations revealed some minor dissatisfaction with the *Juntas*, all in all the men at the hotel in Agua Clara seemed satisfied. Pedro, a young man of 23, summed up the general sentiment I had noticed when I asked him if he thought the Zapatistas would ever negotiate with the government again. In response, he shook his head, "No, we have our own now." Perhaps, we "Westerners" are just in too much of a hurry to realize the time that this form of democracy takes. Perhaps the lines of visitors at the gates of the *Juntas del Buen Gobierno*, and the repeated trips to dialogue are simply experiences of entering a different way of life and time. Those of us from "developed" countries have repeatedly ordered the "underdeveloped" to join our world; perhaps now, the Zapatistas are asking us to enter into theirs.

While visitors and NGOs collaborating with the Zapatistas may gripe about the hassle of dealing with the *Juntas del Buen Gobierno*, raising important concerns about the relationship of the EZLN with its solidarity network, many acknowledge that for the Zapatistas themselves the very act of declaring autonomy is an empowering gesture in and of itself that has had a profound effect on the self-perception of indigenous communities (Reygadas, et al., 2009; Barmeyer 2003; Jung 2003; Paré, et al., 2002). As Niels Barmeyer reflects, "With their project they have made hope, one of the most important human motivations, the focal point of their action. It replaces the feeling of powerlessness with regard to the state party and landowners that often comes up in stories of *campesinos* from the times before they organized themselves" (2003: 135). Barmeyer continues by arguing that the Zapatista value system that has been established through their revolutionary laws has helped to foster a sense of solidarity and identity, concluding that, "'Zapatista' has become the principal identity of many rural people and serves as a means for their empowerment" (2003: 136).

Andrej Kurnik and Barbara Beznec also observed this sense of empowerment when they visited Chiapas in 2001, "There was a strong impression that Zapatismo gave pride to people… you could immediately feel the difference between villages that were not Zapatista…and the Zapatistas communities." Kurnik went on to discuss what, for him, was the greater significance behind the often frustrating procedures of the autonomous government:

> Sometimes you feel like there are all these stupid rules inside the village, but the point is that for the first time in their history these people basically ha[ve] the power in their own hands…for example, in Chiapas, until the 70s, indigenous were not allowed to walk on the pavement in the city of San Cristobál de las Casas. So it was really incredible [to see] how proud they are [now]. And of course we had to take those forms of self-government seriously too.

I also observed this sense of pride and strength in the indigenous people when I first visited Mexico in the spring of 2009. In fact, it was this contrast between the indigenous Zapatistas of Chiapas and the First Nations people of my home community in British Colombia, Canada, who still suffer the psychological aftershocks of atrocious Canadian assimilation policies, that provided the initial impetus for this thesis. Although indigenous peoples in Chiapas have a long way to go before they are respected as dignified equals in Mexican society, the Zapatista movement has made their voice heard nationally and around the world, strengthening the indigenous people's sense of themselves as agent of change (Barmeyer 2003) and establishing a recognizable political space for indigenous peoples in national politics (Jung 2003; Johnson 2000).

Thoughts for the Future: Control and Flexibility

The Zapatista autonomy project has been widely credited for its flexibility (Stahler-Sholk 2007). As was seen in Chapter One in which the Zapatistas promote an open network form of global struggle that does not follows one prescription or creed, likewise in their implementation of autonomy the Zapatistas claim no "one fits all" solution. Rather, as Richard Stahler-Sholk (2007) remarks, they recognize a sort of pluralism of autonomy – "a world in which many worlds fit" – that leaves room for experimentation and does not pigeonhole autonomous practices into a stagnant model. This ability to adapt can be seen in the considerable strategic shifts that have characterized the Zapatista movement over the past 16 years. For instance, this is evident in the shift from a largely class-based armed revolutionary group to an organization that has come to embrace ethnicity and orient itself around indigenous rights (Speed 2008; Trejo 2002). The flexibility of the Zapatistas has also been demonstrated through differing strategies to gain indigenous rights and autonomy, ranging from sporadic negotiations with the government to

demand legal reforms, to the creation of their own autonomous municipalities and governance

structures. Similarly, these internal structures of governance have also continued to adapt so as to

best meet the pressing challenges of resistance posed by global, national, and local forces, and to

further democratize the internal working of the EZLN, for instance through the separation of

military involvement in civilian rule and through the inclusion of women in the *cargo* system.

Today, as the Zapatistas continue their autonomy project in Chiapas they are faced with

several challenges that threaten their ability to sustain their experiment in self-rule. Of these

challenges, which include increased paramilitary activity and government attempts to lure away

supporters (see Chapter Three), one that is particularly complex concerns questions of mobility,

migration and territory. Can the Zapatistas' autonomy deal with mobility without becoming

controlling and violating its ideal of liberty?

For me, this query arose one day after speaking with Beto during my time as a human

rights observer in Agua Clara. Beto, a bright, earnest young man of 21, was different than the

rest: he dressed in crisp, clean clothing and gelled his hair back like they do in the city; he was

clearly well educated, asking us human rights observers questions about our homes, social

movements, politics and our studies; he didn't want to marry until he was 28, and he was the

only one of about 40 men at the hotel who knew how to play chess. He wanted to be a math

teacher and was in university in a nearby city. But his dreams were not so simple. Through

talking with him it became clear that he was passionate about the ideals of the EZLN, that he was

committed to the struggle for dignity and autonomy from a corrupt political system. Yet, how

could he continue to be a Zapatista if he created a life for himself in the city as he dreamed of

doing? "The authorities have already talked to me about taking some time off from my studies

and coming back to the community," he told me. They were concerned that he attended a school

that, although it was largely private, still received some support from the government and

followed a conventional curriculum. "I do not want to bring that system to my community – I

only want to help my community," he said. He told me he did not want to be a framer; it was a

hard life and not for him.

Beto's dilemma illustrates the limits of the community-based approach to autonomy: it

serves only a particular lifestyle, an agrarian one lived in a small community of indigenous

farmers. Perhaps this is not so much a limitation as it is a reflection of the reality of globalization

in which cultures and lifestyles are butting up against each other with increasing frequency,

sometimes melding harmoniously and other times clashing roughly into one another. As the

Zapatistas walk into the future, I question how they will cope with issues of mobility and

migration. Will they encourage a traditional communal life at the expense of an individual

dream, such as in the case of Beto? Or will they exhibit the same flexibility that has allowed

them to navigate the changing political and social landscape over the past 16 years?

Another challenge that faces the Zapatistas' autonomy project regards the question of

political isolation. Several scholars of Zapatista autonomy have addressed what they see as the

need for the local movement to become integrated into the broader national and international

campaign of the EZLN (Stahler-Sholk 2007; Díaz-Polanco 2006; Tilly and Kennedy, 2006;

Harvey 2005). While Neil Harvey (2005) praises the Zapatista autonomy initiative, he highlights

the importance of the Zapatistas' national and international campaign and the need for these

initiatives to work together with the grassroots. This concern is echoed by Tilly and Kennedy

who place hope in the ability of the Other Campaign,[10] launched in 2006, to bridge the gap

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[10] Initiated in January 2006 to coincide with the presidential election campaign, the Other Campaign (*Otra Compaña*) intended to serve as an alternative to conventional electoral politics and campaigning. Over six months, Subcomandante Marcos and a host of fellow Zapatistas travelled throughout Mexico's 31 states and the Federal

between local community autonomy and a broader progressive movement (2006: 6). In 1994, the

impressive success of the Zapatistas' media campaign to national and international audiences

helped to prevent the Mexican government from simply labeling the Zapatista rebels as desperate

extremists and rendering them forgotten and isolated (Johnson 2000). Yet today, as the Zapatista

struggle goes through increasingly long periods of silence choosing to focus inward on autonomy

building, avoiding political isolation within their autonomous regions has emerged as a principle

challenge that the EZLN must address as it moves into the future (Stahler-Sholk 20007: 58).

Concluding Remarks

Through an examination of the Zapatistas' model of self governance and the function of

the *Juntas del Buen Gobierno* one can see how the Zapatistas have sought to democratize power

within their internal structure, consciously designing governing bodies that encourage equal and

universal participation at the community level, promote collective harmony, and adhere to the

principal of obedient leadership. This initiative, in addition to championing process as an

essential goal of revolution rather than a means to an end, also challenges the legitimacy of the

official Mexican democratic project and the neoliberal state (Speed 2008). As Speed argues, the

Zapatistas' form of autonomy poses a threat "not because of the much debated risk of

'separatism,' but rather by providing both symbolic and material alternatives to neoliberal rule"

(2008: 172 – 173). These alternatives, she proceeds, center around a, "…structure of power that

is based on distinct logics of rule, in collective and consensus decision making, *mandar*

obedeciendo, and the assertion of pluriculturality or diversity within the collective" (2008: 172 -

District listening to the concerns of a wide variety Mexicans. The campaign did not promote a presidential candidate but rather sought to demonstrate both the scam of election and to mobilize civil society to challenge the status quo of Mexican politics (Gibler 2006). The outcome of the Other Campaign was mixed as some criticized the Zapatistas for distancing themselves from the leftwing PRD candidate, saying that by rejecting Mexico's most progressive party, the Zapatistas had contributed to the loss of the PRD presidential candidate and a chance for change on a national level, albeit not radical change.

173). By acting as an alternative, this system may, as Gustavo Esteva argued in 1999, make state

power "superfluous" within Zapatista territory (165).

Subcomandante Marcos (2007) is one of the first to admit that the Zapatista system of

governance is not perfect, and cautions outsiders against idealizing it. Yet, he explains that while

there remains much to improve and to learn, Zapatistas continue to walk in the right direction,

following the principal of "govern obeying." This concept, he explains:

> …is a tendency, and it is not exempt from its ups and downs, contradictions and errors.
> But it is a dominant tendency. Its having managed to survive in conditions of persecution,
> harassment, and poverty that have rarely existed in the history of the world speaks to the
> fact that it has benefitted the communities. In addition, the autonomous councils have
> managed to carry forward, with the fundamental support of "civil societies," a colossal
> labor: the building of the material conditions for resistance (2007: 231).

Figure 6. *La Digna Rabia* ("Dignified Rage"). A mural in the *Caracol* of Oventik. Photographed
by author.

Chapter 3

Rising from the People: Community-Authored Development in Rebel Territory

> *"We do not ask for charity or gifts. We ask for the right to live in dignity, with equality and justice like our ancient parents and grandparents."*
> (Subcomandante Marcos before a 1994 declaration of the demands of the EZLN).

> *"Solo el Pueblo Salva al Pueblo."*(Only the people will save the people).
> Inscription in the kitchen of the Zapatista *Caracol* of Morelia.

It is night time and we are seated in a little wooden room with a dirt floor and dark walls, blacked from years of wood smoke billowing out from an open cooking fire. The air is cold and we hold our coffee cups close, trying to let the little bit of warmth they offer seep in. It is our first night as human rights observers in the Zapatista *Caracol* of Morelia, nestled in the mountains a short ride down a bumpy dirt road from the highland city of Altamirano. Across the table from us a man of about 30 is illuminated by the single bulb that hangs from the ceiling. I recognize him as a member of the *Junta del Buen Gobierno* with whom we spoke several hours earlier upon our arrival. He seems eager to talk to us and begins to speak about the Mexican government and a recent program in which it gave out free milk to the poor. He laughs, "Turns out the milk was left over from a huge batch manufactured for pigs! That's why you should never take what the government hands out because you can never be sure what it is!" Now getting enthused, he recounts a story about his brother who was unemployed, but when he went to the unemployment office instead of work they gave him bags of crackers as if that would somehow magically transform his life. "These useless little gifts," says the man "are just to placate the people, to stop them from breaking the barriers." He then launches into a passionate account of his own story and the challenges he faced growing up with a clubbed foot. "Finally when I went to the DIF [National System of Integrated Family Development, *Sistema Nacional*

de Desarrollo Integral de la Familia] to find a doctor who could operate," he says, "they told

me, 'we don't have any doctors here.' I realized," he continues, "that I needed to heal myself, to

reject the system and live in the way I wanted to. I refused to be defeated!" Two years ago his

dream of an operation on his foot was realized through the Zapatista health care system. "This

changed my life," he smiles. "Now here I am today. Dreams can be realized," he tells us, his

bright eyes showing that he speaks from experience, "but after much struggle and hard, hard

work."

In 1994, when thousands of indigenous Zapatistas shouted "*Basta*!" they not only

rejected the perpetuation of 500 years of exploitation and marginalization at the hands of the

Mexican state, but at the same time committed themselves to an arduous struggle in which they

would be the protagonists in a battle for "liberty, democracy and justice." "When we rose up we

didn't think we would only resist for a little while," a representative of the Information

Commission of Oventik told me in an interview. "We expected to resist for a long, long time.

Throughout the time I spent among the Zapatistas in January of 2010 I could sense a palpable

spirit of resistance invigorating the people with whom I spoke and was repeatedly humbled by

the courage of these peasants who had so boldly abandoned a system that was not working for

them to embark instead on a journey in which they were to be the ones to shape the course of

their future. "No one can make us do anything," a representative of the *Junta* of Morelia told me

in an interview, proudly declaring the freedom and agency of his people emerging in revolt from

a long history of oppression.

At the heart of the Zapatista's struggle for autonomy has been the challenge of

establishing an effective model of community-authored development able to sustain support

villages that have pledged to reject all government programs and assistance (Stahler-Sholk 2007). Following the 1994 revolt, the Mexican government has continued to pour money into social projects in Chiapas, tempting some Zapatista families away from the hard life of resistance. In this context, failure of the Zapatistas to offer sufficient resources to rebel communities places the very sustenance of their experiment at risk (Stahler-Sholk 2007: 52; Earle and Simonelli, 2005: 193). In meeting the challenge of promoting community development, the Zapatistas have made concerted efforts to escape from the paternalistic, ethnocentric attitudes endemic to previous development paradigms (Esteva and Prakash, 1998a). Additionally, the Zapatistas have implemented processes to avoid patterns of dependency on NGOs, championing the belief that the agents and directors of change ought to be the ones who are undergoing the "development" rather than outsiders. "Only the people (community) will save the people (community)," reads a painted sign in kitchen of the Morelia *Caracol*; the Zapatista's challenge is to empower communities with the tools to achieve this.

Just as the structure of autonomous governance explored in Chapter Two intends to facilitate the Zapatistas' ideals of democracy, the manner in which the Zapatistas conceive of community development is reflective of their notions of power and control. Over the past 16 years, the Zapatistas have considerably altered the way in which development is pursued in their communities, continually seeking to place directive control over the development process in the hands of the indigenous peoples and to ensure local empowerment. In this chapter, I begin with a discussion of the history of exploitation and marginalization of the indigenous peoples in Chiapas followed by a brief look at development as it was implemented by the PRI (*Partido Institucional Revolucionario* – Party of the Institutionalized Revolution) preceding the Zapatista revolt of 1994. By providing this historical perspective I intend to illustrate how past experiences

with modernization and development helped to fuel the 1994 revolt and continue to influence the

way in which the Zapatistas construct their own alternative models of development and

governance. The Zapatistas' cry of desperation in 1994 and their declaration of resistance to

government development assistance, inspired waves of support from national and international

civil society, including numerous NGOs eager to aid the impoverished indigenous peasants.

However, while well intentioned many of these NGOs fell into similar patterns of paternalism

and ethnocentrism for which non-governmental assistance programs have often been criticized

(Earle and Simonelli, 2005). Thus, after an exploration of relations between the PRI and

indigenous communities in Chiapas, I examine critiques of non-governmental development

projects in the region during the 1980s and 1990s. Emerging from negative experiences with

NGOs, I will show how the Zapatistas have attempted to reorganize the way in which national

and international NGOs participate in development work in their communities. I will argue that

changes in the way development is carried out in Zapatista communities are reflective of a desire

for local control, equitable development, and dignity in the development process. Finally, I will

conclude with a discussion of the emerging importance that development projects and social

programs are playing in the power struggle between the Mexican State and EZLN.

The Paradox of Chiapas: A Rich Land, A Poor People

"Chiapas is rich, in fact – rich in fertile farmlands, pastures, and forests; in coffee, cattle, cacao, and petroleum; and in productive enterprises owned by a few families. Yet most Chiapanecos remain very poor despite the wealth of the land, the reforms of the Mexican Revolution, and the modernization policies of successive state and federal governments. Natural plenty, of course does not necessarily create social plenty. Modernization and reform need not lead to progress for all. That is the paradox of Chiapas, a rich land of poor people
(Benjamin 1989: xiii).

The oldest of the old of our peoples spoke to us, words that came from very far away, about when our lives were not, about when our voice was silenced. And the truth journeyed in the words of the oldest of the old of our peoples. And we learned through the words of the oldest of the old

that the long night of pain of our people came from the hands and words of the powerful, that our misery was wealth for a few, that on the bones and the dust of our ancestors and our children, the powerful built themselves a house, and that in that house our feet could not enter, and that the light that lit it fed itself on the darkness of our houses, and its abundant table filled itself on the emptiness of our stomachs, and that their luxuries were born of out misery
(EZLN 1995: 137 - 138).

Laying the Foundations of Indigenous Exploitation

The Zapatistas' cry of desperation and their claim to dignity rise in protest to a long history of exploitation, marginalization and oppression of the indigenous peoples of Mexico. These systems became engrained in Mexican society soon after the arrival of the Spanish as colonists quickly perfected clever and cruel means of managing what was their most valuable resource in the New World: indigenous labor (Saldaña-Portillo 2003). Their methods of exploitation included systems of *congregaciones* (the forced concentration of dispersed indigenous populations), *reducciones* (the "voluntary" resettlement of entire communities upon conversion to Christianity) and the *encomienda* system which assigned conquistadors indigenous communities as laborers and servants for their *haciendas* (large private ranches and plantations) and mines (Saldaña-Portillo 2003: 200). Indigenous peoples were seen by the Europeans as inherently inferior, savage, dirty, uncivilized and valuable only for their physical labor (Collier 2005). These institutions and racist attitudes set the groundwork for the abuse of indigenous peasants that would continue in various forms for the next 500 years (Stephen 2002).

To the Liberals who came to power in the early 19th century in the newly independent state of Mexico, the indigenous people represented an obstacle to their grand dreams of modernization (Saldaña-Portillo 2003: 203). Of particular concern was the indigenous tradition of communally-held land, known as *ejidos*, which was viewed as an impediment to the development of a nation based on individual ownership and private property. (Saldaña-Portillo

2003: 203). Consequently, beginning in the early 1800s, agrarian policies allowed the lands surrounding indigenous communities, *terrenos baldios* (vacant lands), to be appropriated by private citizens, and by 1850 "virtually all the state's indigenous communities had been stripped of their 'excess' lands" (Rus 1983 in Stephen 2002: 92). During the remainder of the century, the number of *haciendas* increased steadily, growing from 448 in 1877 to 1,049 in 1896 further exaggerating the inequality in Mexico (Benjamin 1989: 27).

At the turn of the century, the Chiapanecan governor, eager to keep pace with the liberalization program taking place in central Mexico, passed legislation to divide up *ejidos* into small parcels of privately held property as a way to encourage peasants to enter the market economy. Benjamin argues that the primary result of this "vigorously enforced" policy was to make communities that had been independent for hundreds of years either disappear altogether or become bound to a *hacienda* (1989: 49). Subsequent laws allowed land surveyors to claim one third of what they had surveyed and eliminated restrictions on the size of plots held by one owner. Consequently, lumber companies in the Lacandón Jungle converted themselves into surveying companies and land concentration increased, such that the Jungle became the property of less than seven large companies and landowners (de Vos 1995 and Sullivan 1997 in Stephen 2002: 96). Labor on plantations in Chiapas was highly exploited, with many indigenous workers bound to large estates through a form of debt servitude (Stephen 2002). Workers remained trapped in debt through several mechanisms enacted by the ranch owners that included making peons purchase necessary goods at company stores, offering alcohol, or providing financing for festivals. As such, workers rarely made enough to pay back their initial loans and were forced to take out more loans in order to finance the first (Harvey in Stephen 2002: 98).

Land concentration and virtual slave labor on plantations were not unique to Chiapas. In 1910, on the eve of the Mexican Revolution, 95 percent of rural families in Mexico were without their own land and the degree of land concentration in Mexico was higher than in any other country in Latin America (Ita 2006: 148). Mexicans sought to alter this, and other abuses suffered under the authoritarian regime of the modernizing dictator, Profírio Díaz (1876 to 1911), by instigating a revolution in 1910 that merged into almost ten years of civil war. Under the leadership of Emiliano Zapata, the namesake of the modern day Zapatistas, sweeping land reforms were achieved which redistributed property held by large landowners to the indigenous peoples and granted rights to *ejido* land (communally owned land) (Ita 2006: 149; Collier 2005).

The effects of the revolution did not reach Chiapas until the 1930s and 40s when, under the regime of Lázaro Cárdinas, it became possible for indigenous people to petition for and receive *ejido* land and when debt-servitude was definitively ended (Stephen 2002). The government implemented policies to encourage the establishment of *ejidos* in the Lacandón Jungle and beginning in the 1930s and continuing into the 1960s and 70s, people who had been landless peons, bound to large cattle ranches and coffee plantations in the lowlands, moved into the Lacandón in several waves (Stephen 2002: 102). The Jungle also became the new home for tens of thousands of Guatemalan refugees fleeing the violence of the civil war across the border (Hanlon and Lovell, 2000). As such, the population of the Lacandón Jungle grew dramatically from just 1,000 in 1950 to 150,000 in 1990 (de Vos 1995 in Stephen 2002: 102). Yet, while the hundreds of thousands of Mexicans who received *ejido* land and communal farms were given economic rights over their lands, they held no political rights, such as self-government, the administration of natural resources, and certainly no cultural rights (Saldaña-Portillo 2003).

Throughout the middle of the 20th century, Mexico, and many other Latin American nations, implemented extremely closed economic policies known as Import Substitution Industrialization (ISI) in an attempt to stimulate their domestic industries. ISI required the state to borrow large amounts of money from organizations such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF). When this model collapsed in 1982, Mexico plunged deeply into debt. To make matters worse, the oil boom which had exploded in Mexico beginning in the 1970s had also crashed, leaving thousands unemployed (Collier 2005). In an attempt to recover, and under intense pressure from the IMF and the United States, President Carlos Salinas de Gortari implemented a series of neoliberal economic reforms (Jung 2003). These involved trade liberalization, including the reduction of import tariffs to increase domestic competitiveness, the withdrawal of subsidies and price guarantees for agricultural products, the opening of the agricultural sector to foreign investors, as well as the privatization of public enterprises (Jung 2003). Liberalization of the economy posed great challenges for Mexicans, especially the rural poor. As Saldaña-Portillo writes, "The structural adjustment programs.…were nothing short of devastating for the rural sector, and especially the small-holding indigenous peasant producers in Chiapas" (2003: 217). In Chiapas, men who had increasingly left subsistence farming for wage labor during the 1970s oil boom were now left without work and often lacked land of their own to return to (Collier 2005). The stress of liberalization was further exacerbated by the collapse of the International Coffee Agreement in 1989, when the world price of coffee (one of Chiapas' principal crops) dropped by half (Collier 2005: 106). Simultaneously, Salinas proceeded to privatize INMECAFE (Mexican National Coffee Institute), eliminating all its technical assistance programs (Saldaña-Portillo 2003: 218). This was accompanied by falling prices of other agricultural staples, along with reductions in government services to aid those left in poverty (Collier 2005: 106).

Neoliberal policies greatly reduced the government's investment in the economy and shrank the social capacity of the state, whose commitment to ensuring the socioeconomic wellbeing of its citizens became overshadowed by its responsibility to global capital (Jung 2003; Johnston 2000). In a similar vein to the old Liberals of the 19th century, small subsistence farmers were deemed increasingly irrelevant to the positioning of Mexico in the global economy, and the implicit goal became to drive these "inefficient" farmers into the labor market (Johnson 2000). Seeking to open the countryside to foreign investment, in 1992, President Salinas ended 75 years of land reform that had been a victory of the Mexican revolution, allowing for the privatization of *ejidos* (Hansen 2002)*,* which, at the time, represented 54 percent of the land in Chiapas (Yashar 1998: 54). Johnston argues that, in light of the state's retreat from its traditional corporatist responsibilities to the peasant sector, *campesinos* were left with little ability to achieve their demands through legal means and peaceful protest (2000: 474). To many peasants, the arms offered by the EZLN seemed the only way to finally say "Enough!" in a voice that would be loud enough for the state to hear (Johnson 2000).

Under the Arms of the PRI: "Development" without Democracy in 20th Century Chiapas

While poverty and exploitation were clearly crucial in fueling the Zapatista revolt, the Zapatistas have claimed that democracy lies at the real heart of the matter, "The grave conditions of poverty…have one common cause: the lack of liberty and democracy," (EZLN in Saldaña-Portillo 2003: 229). Saldaña-Portillo argues that, "By identifying the source of Mexico's problems as its lack of democracy, the EZLN refuses to have the reasons of their struggle be reduced to a set of economic indicators, or to place it outside of the Mexican context" (2003: 230). Rather, the Zapatistas' emphasis on democracy shows the problem to be a national crisis of the ruling party and the state of Mexican democracy, more broadly. Contrary to the claims of

some scholars and the Mexican government that the Zapatista revolt was prompted solely

because of economic failures and exceptional neglect in the state of Chiapas, Saldaña-Portillo

argues that, "When the Zapatistas insist…that the 'authentic respect of liberties and the

democratic will of the people are the indispensible pre-requisites of our country,' they are

speaking from their experience of development without democracy in the Lacandón" (2003:

231).

The crisis of democracy in Mexico was felt by indigenous communities in Chiapas over a

long history of corporativist relations with the Party of the Institutionalized Revolution (PRI)

which dominated Mexican politics from 1929 until 2000 (Diaz-Cayeros, et al., 2000). The

Zapatistas' decision to renounce all government involvement in their community affairs,

including the refusal to recognize municipal and local officials and the rejection of government

assistance programs and development projects, is rendered ever more understandable when one

examines the recent history of relations between the PRI and rural indigenous communities in

Chiapas. While the following offers only a small glimpse of PRI governance and development, it

demonstrates how the nature of the PRI's rule could prompt such intense frustration in the early

1990s.

During its 70 years in power the PRI employed what Diaz-Cayeros, et al. has called a

"system that [was] at once tragic and brilliant: Tragic in that it force[d] citizens to accept massive

corruption, low levels of government service, and highly inefficient policies; brilliant in that it

force[d] citizens not only to accept these features, but to play their role in maintaining the

system" (2000: 2). Citizens participated in this system through a corporativist model of

government, first adopted in Chiapas under the regime of Lázaro Cárdenas in the 1930s

(Saldaña-Portillo 2003). As Saldaña-Portillo explains, this model considered the "body politic"

(corpus) to be composed of separate limbs of various constituencies of "popular subjects" including, industrial workers (organized under the Confederation of Mexican Workers), peasants (organized under the National Confederation of Peasants), and members of popular organizations (Confederation of Popular Organizations) (2003: 220). Each group, she writes, was involved in a separate patron-client relationship with the PRI that tied the group vertically to the state (Saldaña-Portillo 2003: 220).

In many towns throughout Chiapas political power was managed by small bands of indigenous caciques who received direct support from the PRI, prompting autocratic rule that often followed the interests of the state over the interests of communities (Collier 2005). The PRI manipulated indigenous politics to ensure that compliant PRI leaders held municipal office, and frequently used the allocation of development projects and funding as punishment or reward for its election (Diaz-Cayeros, et al., 2000). In an investigation of how federal funds were distributed to states for public works Diaz-Cayeros, et al. found that states with a greater proportion of municipalities that defected to the opposition received systematically fewer funds. Additionally, the study found the same trend when looking at state funding to municipalities, such that opposition municipalities were similarly neglected (2000: 6). This condition of favoritism, in which those who supported the ruling party gained privileged access to resources that should have been available to everyone, created intense resentments towards the political system and exacerbated emerging class conflict in rural communities (Collier 2005).

The PRI's ability to maintain its corporativist relationship with Mexican peasants was challenged following the economic crisis of the 1980s which called on the government to cut back the programs that had once bought peasant loyalty (Collier 2005: 126). Consequently, in the years preceding the Zapatista uprising, as the PRI began to crumble, the ruling party increasingly

turned to coercive tactics and bribery to keep the peasants' vote, jailing or expelling from their

villages those who dared to resist the system (Collier 2005: 126). Collier notes that indigenous

leaders, attempting to further their own careers, often collaborated with the PRI to stifle

opposition while monopolizing government anti-poverty funding for themselves. As Trejo

suggests, for national and local elites peasant protest was about buying off unrest by

implementing small-scale poverty reduction programs and piecemeal land reform (2002: 16). If

these "solutions" did not calm protest then state police repression was the obvious next step

(Trejo 2002: 16).

Despite the hegemony of the PRI, the party was not able to sustain significant economic

growth in Mexico or considerably improve the situation of the country's poor (Diaz-Cayeros, et

al., 2000). Diaz-Cayeros, et al. proposes several reasons for this failure, concluding that, "Put

simply, economic development conflicted with the PRI's long-term goal of maintaining power in

Mexico" (2000: 9). Firstly, as the rural poor constitute the core PRI constituency, modernization

tended to undermine support for the party. Moreover, the authors note that historically the PRI

had a harder time maintaining support in more economically advanced areas, and as such, "it had

no incentive to foster the growth, power, and migratory draw of these regions" (2000: 8). In

contrast to stimulating meaningful development, the authors of the study found that areas of the

country with potentially high growth rates were "precisely those most likely to be punished

under the PRI system" (2000: 8). And finally, focused on winning elections and maintaining its

hold as the dominant political party in Mexico, the PRI devoted much of its resources to short-

term electoral goals rather than long-term economic development (Diaz-Cayeros, et al., 2000: 8).

President Salinas seemed to be heading in a new and positive direction when in 1989 he

launched a national antipoverty program called the National Solidarity Program (PRONASOL)

to ease the hardships posed by the neoliberal restructuring on the country's poor (Collier 2005).[11]

PRONASOL channeled funds into food subsidies, credits for poor farmers, social programs to

support access to education and healthcare, infrastructure for things such as water and electricity,

and development projects in indigenous communities (Collier 2005: 140). In encouraging

rhetoric it promised to eliminate, "all vestiges of paternalism, populism, clientelism, [and]

political conditionality" (Collier 2005: 141). However, PRONASOL failed to win popular

support in Chiapas (Collier 2005: 141). Collier explains several reasons for the program's failure

in the region that are reflective of other federal development programs and therefore deserve

mention. First of all it was simply too little too late given the hardships that neoliberal agrarian

reform had brought to the countryside. Furthermore, despite its rhetoric, PRONASOL did not

remain free of political conditionality. Rather, as it was channeled through municipal authorities

who had been selected based largely on their loyalty to the PRI, funding found its way to

supporters of the ruling party and not to opponents (Collier 2005: 143). In addition, funds were

highly misappropriated and the nature of the collaboration with indigenous communities was

fundamentally paternalistic (Collier 2005: 143). Moreover, Collier explains that many

indigenous peasants felt that PRONASOL enabled public officials to use the indigenous people

as "stepping stones to positions of advantage and power" (2005: 144).

Despite claims that PRONASOL would collaborate with local communities in

relationships of respect and joint responsibility, the indigenous were not given equal voices in

the process of designing development initiatives (Collier 2005: 144). As one man complained in

a 1993 INI (*Instituto Nacional Indigenista* – National Indigenous Institute) meeting, the INI-run

PRONASOL discredited the projects the indigenous proposed, "We don't want you to tell us our

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[11] Forty-eight percent of the population lived below the official poverty line in 1988 (Collier 2005: 140).

projects are no good, but rather to help us strengthen our projects" (Collier 2005: 145). He goes

on to explain that the proposals were not personal decisions, but had been constructed by entire

communities and regions in general assemblies. As Simonelli and Earle claim regarding

development in general, the government–led development agenda continues to comprise of

"pork-barrel handouts that serve [ ] to foster division and envy, one PRI program after another

that serve[s] to create dependency and make a sham of democratic practices by buying votes in

exchange for aid" (2005: 88).

PROCAMPO was Salinas de Gortari's other initiative to ease the transition into NAFTA.

This program, launched in 1993, was aimed at aiding small farmers though providing direct

subsidies (Klepeis and Vance, 2003). While seemingly a positive step for peasants, as corn prices

and those of other agricultural products plummeted, PROCAMPO's subsidies were not sufficient

to aid small farmers (ERA). Furthermore, the program discouraged traditional *milpa* and

subsistence farming in favor of market crops that could never hope to compete and conflicted

with traditional practices of fallow (Klepeis and Vance 2003: 236). And finally, in response to

the corruption that surrounded the management of PROCAMPO funds, the program became

known by *campesinos* as "PRICAMPO" (ERA).

The general frustration with antipoverty programs is expressed in the following

exclamation of an indigenous man participating in the same meeting with the INI mentioned

earlier, "For seventy years, they say, they've been trying to help Indians. But they haven't been

able to make any progress, they haven't found the right shot, the right pill to cure the Indians'

poverty" (Collier 2005: 145).

Even given this very brief look at the corporativist model of the PRI and its ineffective

and paternalistic attempts to promote development in the countryside one can begin to

understand the extent of the Zapatistas' frustration that could prompt them to armed revolt

(Collier 2005). Furthermore, the failures of the PRI are addressed by the Zapatistas' in their own

governance philosophy in concepts like "lead by obeying," equality, and dignity (Collier 2005).

Not only can one see how the structure of autonomous governance discussed in the previous

chapter has been envisaged in resistance to the anti-democratic governance of the PRI but, as we

shall see in this chapter, the community development model proposed by the Zapatistas is in

direct contradiction to the indigenous *campesinos'* experience with PRI-directed programs.

George Collier goes as far as to argue that, "…the conflict in Chiapas arose directly from a

quarter century of Mexican development and modernization…" (2005: 146).

A Critique of NGO-Led Development Work in Chiapas

        In 1994, when Zapatista communities announced their rejection of all government

assistance and projects, the EZLN was met with an influx of aid from both national and

international NGOs. Although well-intentioned, this influx of non-governmental assistance

brought a new set of challenges for Zapatista communities. Development projects and aid were

not distributed evenly throughout municipalities, or even communities; projects were often

ineffective, or did not address the needs of the community; at times funds were mismanaged; and

NGOs often approached the indigenous peoples with an attitude of depreciating pity and

paternalism (Marcos 2007: 213). In 2003 the Zapatistas made sweeping changes regarding how

development would be carried out in their territory, attempting to place more directive control in

the hands of the Zapatista communities whilst still benefitting from the financial and

technological support of foreign and local NGOs. Again, the measures put in place by the

Zapatista are the products of considerable experience with non-government directed

development initiatives in the region. In this section I will explore some general critiques of

NGO work in Chiapas, demonstrating why the Zapatistas felt the need to reformulate development processes in 2003.

Based on over two decades of work with community development among the Maya of Southern Mexico and Guatemala, anthropologists Jeanne Simonelli and Duncan Earle (2003a) draw several principle conclusions on the work of development NGOs in the region that are relevant to the discussion at hand. Firstly, they suggest that development projects were often oriented around what they term a "missionary position" in which NGOs acted largely on the moral mandates of donor organizations. Secondly, projects tended to be characterized by what they call "McDevelopment", superficial consultation with communities that, while claiming to empower locals through participation, actually stifled the creativity and agency of community members. And finally, they raise the issue of control over community development, arguing that poverty may in fact be a symptom of a loss of control.

Addressing the problematic nature of the relationship between NGOs and funding organizations, Simonelli and Earle (2003a) discuss what they have termed "the missionary position," a paternalistic orientation towards the poor in which NGOs are made to follow static objectives that are often more a reflection of the donor agency's goals than the NGO. Thus, projects are often disconnected from the reality of the local context of in which they will be implemented. The fact that donor agencies tend to finance projects that fulfill a stated ideological mission, argue Simonelli and Earle, implies that agencies have the problem defined and the solutions sketched out prior to any serious dialogue with recipient communities they have chosen to "fix". Concerned about the underlying attitude this approach reflects, Simonelli and Earle suggest that, "This represents the gravest obstacle to NGO community development success,

because how can we truly listen if the answers precede [ ] the questions, if the plans (and the

assumptions that underpin them) precede [ ] the dialogue?" (2003a: 192).

Another point of concern is what Simonelli and Earle (2003a) have called

"McDevelopment" in which development agencies superficially consult recipient communities,

often by offering a selection of versions of a certain project (i.e., for small-scale productive

activities cooperatives have the choice of hens, rabbits, or horticulture). Community members

are then given a short time to reflect and decide which option they want. "…[M]ission-

determined McDevelopment," argue Simonelli and Earle, "limit[s] the form a project might take,

and ultimately short-circuit[s] any realistic and practical ideas the community might have

concerning the alleviation of their own poverty" (2003a: 183). The authors suggest that, while

many donor organizations have recognized the importance of consulting the recipient population,

they have been largely unsuccessful in translating this local insight into their program definition

on the ground, often adhering to preconceived models of how development should take place

(2003a: 178).[12] They argue that such program inflexibility in terms of both ideology and

implementation can undermine the success of a project from the outset (2003a: 178).

Finally, the issue of control in the development process is of central concern to Earle and

Simonelli (2005) and certainly, as we shall see, to the Zapatistas. After experimenting with

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12 This view is supported by Giles Mohan's (2001) research into participatory development. Mohan suggests that often agencies will use the rhetoric of participatory development in order to secure funding, yet their work in communities changes little to reflect their words. Furthermore, Mohan suggests that lack of cultural knowledge of the recipient communities has led participatory initiatives to involve only the local elites in the process of designing a project, thus further marginalizing the people most in need. For an additional critique of participatory models which seek to empower supposedly non-powerful peoples, see Rahnema, Majid 2010. Rahnema argues that often models of participatory development fail to recognize the forms of power that the "underdeveloped" already possess. Furthermore, they remain paternalistic and ethnocentric in that they assume that those on the outside coming to "empower" poor people have the "secret formula of power" to which the receiving group needs to be "initiated" (2010: 135). Rahnema does not discard participatory approaches, but rather suggests that if they are to succeed they must be reevaluated and approached from a perspective of humility and sensitivity.

different definitions of development and prosperity and puzzling over how the success of

community development projects can be determined, the authors postulate that poverty may be

viewed as the loss of control. Prosperity, then, or *positive* community development, can be

defined as the process of gaining control. Earle and Simonelli (2005) suggest that through their

work in communities in the Río Chayote region of Chiapas they have found that control over

one's personal and community life is *the* community development issue of the people. Well-

meaning efforts to improve the situation of these peasant communities, the anthropologists argue,

have often found little success because they failed to address issues of control and power (Earle

and Simonelli, 2005: 181).

Rising from the *Pueblo*: NGOs in Rebel Territory and the Zapatista Vision of Community-Authored Development

        In August of 2003, the EZLN announced the creation of the *Juntas del Buen Gobierno*,

(Good Government Councils), and proposed broad changes to the way in which development

would be carried out in their territory (Marcos 2003a). Noting that the work of international civil

society, while appreciated, had led to "an unbalanced development of the autonomous

municipalities, of the communities located within them, and even of the Zapatista families who

live there" (Marcos 2007: 228), the Zapatistas hoped to implement a more equitable and

effective plan (Chatterton 2004). At the heart of this restructuring was the redefinition of the

Zapatistas' relationship with NGOs and solidarity workers, such that Zapatista communities

would obtain considerably more directive control over the development process taking place in

their villages (Earl and Simonelli, 2005).

At the inauguration of the *Caracoles*, Subcomandante Marcos provided a five-part

critique of development aid, speaking honestly about the well intentioned, but often ineffective,

uneven, and paternalistic assistance that had arrived to "help" them:

> To aid the indigenous communities shouldn't be seen as help to the mentally retarded
> who don't even know what it is they want (and therefore must be told what they need to
> receive) nor children who need to be told what they ought to eat, at what time and how,
> what they should learn, say and think…this is the rationale of some NGOs and a good
> part of the international funders of community projects…with the passing of the
> Aguascalientes [and the birth of the *Caracol*es and *Juntas del Buen Gobierno*] there also
> dies the "Cinderella syndrome" [an attitude of depreciating charity; providing castoffs to
> the poor relations] of some civil society types and the paternalism of some national and
> international NGOs…from this moment onward the communities will not receive
> leftovers nor permit the imposition of projects (Earle and Simonelli, 2005: 253).

Attempting to put an end to such depreciating relations between the "underdeveloped"

and the "developed," the Zapatistas have experimented with the most effective way to place

autonomous communities at the helm of development initiatives, such that this work may reflect

the central idea of *mandar obedeciendo* (to lead obeying). As Earle and Simonelli (2005) argue,

for the Zapatistas, an essential component of the community development equation is the battle

for autonomy, the local ability to gain control over one's life and the lives of those in a shared

community. This strong impetus to distribute power into the hands of the *pueblo* (the people)

was clearly articulated in my conversation with the *Junta del Buen Gobierno* in Morelia, "It is

not those who come who decide to do these projects, rather it depends on the necessity of the

pueblo," a woman on the *Junta* informed me when I asked what sorts of projects NGOs

undertook in Zapatista communities. It seemed important to her that I understand this point, "It is

not them [the NGOs] that do the projects" she repeated several times, "it comes always from the

will of the *pueblos* [communities]." Echoing one of the principal criticisms of traditional

community development work, the soft spoken woman added that if the needs of the

communities were not assessed and the voices of the people not respected then often NGOs

would "…bring something but it is not the necessity of the *pueblo*."

   While all organizations that wish to work in Zapatista territory must pass through the

Junta del Buen Gobierno to have their projects approved, the *Junta* members wished to make it

clear to me in our interview that it was not the *Junta* itself that dictated the form the proposed

project would take. Rather, in accordance with the sign that greets visitors at the entrance to each

Zapatista *Caracol*, "Here the people govern and the government obeys," the *Junta* stressed that it

was the communities that ultimately shaped the projects. A member of the *Junta* of Morelia

explained the long process of consultation with the Zapatista support base that must take place

before any project is given the go-ahead:

> It is not us that will say if that is ok [the proposed project]; it depends on the necessities
> of each *pueblo*. We, as the *Junta*, receive the words of those who arrive and say they
> would like to support us [aid organizations] and then we, as the *Junta*, call all the
> commissions of the zone to speak with them…the commission of the zone has to get all
> the municipal commissions together and they tell them that there is someone that wants to
> support. After the municipal commission they have a meeting with the *promotores*
> [representatives of, and active participants in, specific areas of community development,
> such as education or health] from each pueblo….And from this comes the plan of what
> each *pueblo* needs. For example, now we come from different *pueblos* and each *pueblo*
> gives its necessity and the commission puts it together. The municipal commission
> compiles that (*lo junta*) and brings it to the commission of the zone and the commission
> of the zone brings it to the *Junta* and the *Junta* brings it to those who want to support [the
> outside organization]. It depends on the will (*voluntad*) of those who wish to support us if
> they want to do this, [if yes,] then they can start to work. It is not that those who come
> decide to do these projects, rather it depends on the necessity of the *pueblo*. This is how
> we are working. I already said, it is not them that come to do something, but it depends
> on the necessity that we see.

   Not only have the *Juntas del Buen Gobierno* attempted to place control over the design

and implementation of a project into the hands of development's recipients, but additionally they

have sought to make the aid flowing into the region more transparent. The fame achieved by the

movement of Mexican indigenous peasants has led Zapatista members to worry about the

possibility that NGOs and others could use their contacts with communities to raise funds that

then never end up reaching the communities (Earle and Simonelli, 2005). In essence, they worry

that outsiders will exploit the rebels and their international renown to run an organization and

pay outsiders. A clear outline of how an organization intends to spend its money in a given

project is one of the principle requirements a perspective partner in Zapatista development must

produce before it will be given permission to implement a project. The emphasis placed on this

stipulation arises from years of experience, as voiced by the *Junta* in Morelia, "Sometimes they

tell you it will cost, let's say as an example, 6,000 pesos but what happens if they raise 10,000?

They keep 4,000 and only send us 6,000 pesos. This is what we don't want. Of course we

understand that there they pay for light, they pay for water…"

After centuries of exploitation, these concerns over funding point to the Zapatistas' firm

resolve not to be taken advantage of in anyway. Similar to the Zapatistas' perspective towards

scholars, which seeks to ensure mutual gain rather than lop-sided benefits for the researcher,

once again the Zapatistas refuse to let anything be taken from them, whether it be their

knowledge or their international renown.

Escaping Poverty in Community: Striving for more Equitable Development

Just as governance in Zapatistas areas is viewed as a project of community, as discussed

in Chapter Two, development is likewise considered a process in which all should participate

and from which all should benefit equally (Earle and Simonelli, 2005). The Zapatistas have,

therefore, implemented several mechanisms to ensure that development projects strengthen

communities rather than provoke discord and tension through inequitable distribution.

One of these mechanisms involves obliging all NGOs operating in Zapatista zones to pay

a "brother tax" of ten percent the cost of the project they complete. "This ten percent is not only

to serve us, but rather it is to be divided (*repartido*) between the *pueblos*," a member of the *Junta* in Morelia told me. This tax is redistributed by the *Junta* as seen fit, such that communities not directly involved in a given project (for instance the construction of a school) are not neglected and so that necessities not addressed by the NGO's project can be attended to. Without this policy, certain municipalities tend to receive disproportionate portions of aid, a condition that could likely spark jealousies and rivalry between Zapatista communities and municipalities. For example, a study by Paul Chatterton found that in 2004 the five *Caracol*es received an income of 12.5 million Mexican pesos (about USD 1 million), but the majority of it went to the most well-known and accessible of the *Caracol*es (Oventik and La Realidad) (2004: 4).

As an additional precaution to ensure that aid is evenly distributed throughout autonomous Zapatista communities, donors can no longer select the particular community they wish to support, but must pass all specific decisions on to the *Junta del Buen Gobierno* of the area. Donors can choose a general area of interest, such as education or health, but it is up to the *Juntas* to decide which program in which community will get the funding (Earle and Simonelli 2005: 253). "We want to make certain that the truly remote communities are not neglected," a representative of the autonomous municipality of Tierra y Libertad told anthropologists Simonelli and Earle (2003a: 191). With the creation of the *Juntas* and the establishment of this stipulation, donors have had to relinquish control to the Zapatistas to define how exactly the funding and/or expertise NGOs provide will be utilized. Again, the Zapatistas are asking for the project to meet their needs as determined by the communities, not by someone foreign to their situation and culture as was the case in the "missionary position" described by Simonelli and Earle (2003a). This increased control over development work in Zapatista territory has led to

tighter restrictions on the NGOs "permitted" to work in Zapatista zones (Swords 2007: 81). For

instance, only five principle NGOs are currently working with the *Junta* of Morelia.[13]

In an interview with Slovenian activists, Barbara Beznec and Andrej Kurnik, who spent

several weeks in a Zapatista community as human rights observers, Beznec expressed her

admiration for the effort the Zapatistas took to encourage equality within their communities:

> One thing that hit me the most was how they tried to overcome severe poverty through
> special mechanisms of collective distribution inside of the village. For example you [as a
> visitor] are not allowed to give anything to a person, to individuals. Be it a plastic bag or
> a pencil, things that just seem completely worthless… if you have a gift that you want to
> give, you give it to the council of the village and then they distribute it to…the person the
> most in need of it. They want to prevent any kind of corruption that could come through
> visitors, [even through] an act [done] in good faith.

Likewise, in the training I received before heading into Zapatista territory as a human rights

observer, Frayba emphasized that we were not to provoke discord by favoring one family over

another, for example by accepting dinner invitations or assisting one family in its *milpa*

(traditional plot of corn, beans and squash). Observers were just observers, they repeatedly told

us; we were not to alter the community in which we entered in any way. Here we can see how

community is placed at the center of development and resource management. NGOs and visitors

who threaten this community, even when they do so unintentionally, must be guided.

The Zapatistas seem determined not to fall into the corrupt mechanisms of aid distribution

followed by the PRI. In their eyes, for development to succeed, the community, the municipality

and all Zapatistas must rise out of poverty together.

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13 According to a member of the *Junta del Buen Gobierno* of Morelia, these organizations are, PTM ("from the
government of the Basque [Country]"- I believe this is Paz y Tercer Mundo); Puente; Kinal Anzetik, (a women's
rights organization); and DESMI (Social and Economic Development for the Indigenous of Mexico) (interview,
01/07/10). I have included the Fray Bartolomé de las Casas Center for Human Rights in my count.

Empowering Communities with the Skills to Enact Their Own Development

The reforms put in place with the formation of the *Caracol*es and *Juntas del Buen Gobierno* are suggestive of a clear desire to be in control of what takes place in rebel territory and to implement, as much as possible, a form of development in which Zapatistas are not dependent on anyone else to create the future of their communities (Earle and Simonelli, 2005). This is markedly divergent from traditional development work done by others that tends to orient itself around a standard model of "we teach, you learn" (Simonelli and Earle, 2003a). In pursuit of community empowerment and liberation from a condition of dependency, the Zapatistas have established a system in which community members may attend *talleres de capatación* or capacity-building workshops in diverse practical skills ranging from organic agricultural techniques, electricity, mechanics, mathematics, shoe making, accounting, health, education, production, commercialization, etc. (Earle and Simonelli, 2005: 21, 251). Through this system, the Zapatistas are trying, at least in theory, to give communities the tools with which to help themselves and release themselves from the confines of dependency on outside actors and global markets. In one example, the community members of Cerro Verde in southwestern Chiapas attended workshops to learn how to operate power tools and build desks for their newly constructed school rather than buy furniture from the nearby market (Earle and Simonelli, 2005: 180).

Contrary to the hegemonic belief in specialization and division of labor, the Zapatistas have sought to make members multi-skilled (Earle and Simonelli, 2005: 21). Even turns on the *Juntas del Buen Gobierno* are rotated in part so that many members of the movement have the chance to learn and understand the functioning of the governance system (discussed in Chapter Two). Although this system may not always be efficient, it fosters equality and community. As

in the system of Zapatista governance in which democratic process takes precedence over speed, in the Zapatista development model it seems that empowering community members and fostering equality are integral objectives.

Activist and academic Andrej Kurnik discussed in an interview how impressed he was by the Zapatistas' system of practical training as a way of liberating indigenous peasants from dependency: "they had their power plant with electricity, they had a whole generation of new so called "*electricistas*", that really knew about electricity in detail. And they were really good, really good *electricistas*." Government projects, he contended are all about creating dependence, whereas a primary objective of the Zapatistas is "not to reproduce dependence….They really have this emancipator way in which they understand the question of development. Not to have gifts….Because it's crucial for them to find their independent way of development. Not to follow the line that is always prescribed: the capitalist modernization line."

While in theory, the system of *talleres* or workshops to train Zapatista community members in various skills is laudable, one young man on duty at the hotel in Agua Clara noted that, at least in his experience, the system was far from perfect. "We go to the workshops for only a few days every three or four months," he told me, "and because there is so much time in-between workshops we forget." He suggested that the system of *capacitación* (literally to "give capacity") needed to be rethought so as to be more effective. Of course, the opinion of one Zapatista from one community cannot be seen as representative of the movement, but his perspective does highlight that putting ideals into practice is a complicated process that must be flexible if it is to succeed.

Dignity as an Organizational Principal: Renegotiating the Relationship with Solidarity Groups

The Zapatistas champion dignity "not just as the aim of their struggle but as the organizational principal of the struggle" (Holloway 2002b: 158).

At the core of the Zapatistas' alternative development model has been the rupture of an unequal and paternalistic relationship with their allies, and more broadly, a challenge to the historically hierarchical relationship between North and South, "developed" and "underdeveloped," "powerful" and "non-powerful" (Andrews 2010). Seeking to transform altruistic, one-way solidarity into more horizontal, mutual, and reciprocal forms of partnership the Zapatistas continue to uphold dignity not just as a goal, but as a principle of organization. Denied dignity for so many centuries - through colonial exploitation, systemic racism, virtual slavery, government policies that took indigenous land and eroded their ability to self-sustain themselves, development agendas that viewed indigenous people as expendable obstacles in the road to modernization - the Zapatistas seem determined not to lose the dignity they have re-found in themselves through rebellion.

The fight for dignity is intertwined in all aspects of the Zapatista struggle, guiding their battle for a re-visioning of democracy on a national scale. As Juan, a Zapatista delegate to the 1994 peace negotiations, made clear:

> We fight to gain respect for our dignity….What offends us most is the inability to express our sentiments, our demands. Let it be clear that we fight for our dignity as Indians and so that we will not be stigmatized….For years we have not been respected….We say this in order that we stop being sold like animals in a zoo, so that we get treated as persons and humans (Collier 2005: 143).

Concern for dignity is also fundamentally embedded in the Zapatistas' conception of community development and the relationship they seek with their allies. Over more than a decade building autonomous systems of governance in the back corner of Mexico, the Zapatistas

have made alliances with organizations from over 70 different countries (Andrews 2010: 91).

Their partners range from non-governmental organizations, think tanks, film makers, tourists,

scholars, students and feminists many of which materially support the movement and others that

share experiences or take strategic or ideological inspiration from their interactions with the

Zapatistas (Andrews 2010: 91). As discussed previously, initially allies tended to demonstrate

their solidarity by imposing their agendas, practices, and organizational forms, rarely deferring to

the Zapatistas for directive input (Andrews 2010: 91). By 2003, the Zapatistas had apparently

recognized that this power dynamic was creating dependency and degrading their dignity

(Marcos 2007: 210). Gifts of pity and altruism were not what the Zapatistas wanted. As

Subcomandante Marcos has said, "For us, pity is an affront, and charity is a slap in the face"

(2007: 210). Rather than an unequal and demeaning relationship with outsiders from the

"developed world," at the inauguration of the *Juntas del Buen Gobierno* in August 2003,

Subcomandante Marcos dreamt of a new partnership with civil society:

> Those who help one or various communities are helping not just to better the collective's
> material situation but a project much simpler but more encompassing: the construction of
> a new world, where many worlds fit in [*sic*], where the handouts and pity for others are
> part of a science fiction novel, or a forgettable and expendable past (Earle and Simonelli,
> 2005: 26).

Rather than be the recipients of pity gifts and projects imposed on them by outsiders, the

Zapatistas have sought to create a more dignified and two-way partnership between North and

South, yet a partnership in which the indigenous peoples of Chiapas are at the helm. Since 2003,

Abigail Andrews writes, "the Zapatistas [have] built up unusual influence over the privileged,

Northern supporters on whom they rely" (2010: 90). This has been possible, argues Andrews,

through both internal reorganizing of the Zapatistas and through the expulsion of "imperious"

donors that were not willing to respect the Zapatistas as directors of their projects (2010: 90).

The ability of the Zapatistas to exercise such control over their supports is remarkable and

perhaps only possible because of the international renown they have achieved.

Today, almost seven years since Marcos expressed the hope of a new relationship with

outside supporters based on mutual respect. Andrews argues that by changing the "rules of the

game" the Zapatistas have been able to place themselves as the directive body and participate

with supporters in a relationship of reciprocal inspiration" (2010: 90). In my own experience, it

also seemed the Zapatistas had been able to foster relations of respect with visitors and solidarity

groups. In the words of a representative on the *Junta del Buen Gobierno* in Morelia regarding the

relationship between NGOs and the Zapatistas:

> More than anything there is respect between us. For example we as the *Junta* and those
> who come here we respect them and what they say and they respect what we have to say
> as well. This is how we do everything. Those who arrive and those who are working with
> us, if they arrive…to give this, but for us it is not that we accept what they say but rather
> it depends on the necessity [of the community] as I said. If they respect our word we
> respect them also.

I sensed this desire for a new relationship with outsiders and those from the "developed

world" when I first met with the *Junta* of Morelia. As I waited in the office to gain permission to

work as a human rights observer in Agua Clara, I felt an odd sense of mutual respect, but a

respect that was granted by them. I was the one that had to prove my integrity of purpose, I was

the one being admitted into their world and they were the ones who held the power to decide.

This relationship for which the Zapatistas strive may be one in which power is shared between

supporters of the EZLN and participating communities, yet the reins of this collaborative work

are held firmly in the hands of the autonomous communities and the *Juntas* designed to speak in

their voice.

I also perceived a different attitude towards me and the other human rights observers when we strayed for two days in the *Caracol* of Morelia. While we were taken care of, by no means were the Zapatistas working in the *Caracol* running at our beck and call. Rather, we were expected to figure things out for ourselves. During our first meal we followed by example, serving ourselves and eating with dried tortillas as utensils; no one went out of his or her way to make sure we had all we needed. Following the meal we were again left to figure out where to wash our dishes. Perhaps the *Caracoles* receive so many foreigners that they simply assume we knew what to do; yet the feeling I had at the *Caracol* was markedly different than the experience of being a visitor in other homes in Mexico where the mothers, in particular, serve visitors as if they were royalty.

This being said, I also could not help but notice the great humility the *Junta del Buen Gobierno* of Morelia expressed towards me and the other human rights observers throughout our stay. I was particularly struck by this when interviewing the *Junta.* Asked to write out my questions prior to the discussion, on my first day in the *Caracol*, I found myself nervously handing a young woman on the *Junta* a list of my interview questions written hastily in the best Spanish I could muster. Concerned that my meaning might not always be clear, I expressed my fear to the young woman. She looked at me peacefully, "Little by little we will come to understand them." Later as the group of human rights observers and I listened to the *Junta's* responses to those questions, I again felt anxious knowing that the Argentine observers were hearing my mistakes. Yet, as another young woman read out my questions, each was stated in a slow, deliberate voice, and no smile turned her lips into a smirk. I felt a sense of allegiance with this young woman, a woman whose native language was also not Spanish but Tzeltal. She understood what it meant to respect, I thought.

Grappling with Dependency

On one hand, it seems that Zapatistas have established a new relationship with civil society supporters in which the indigenous Chiapanecos are in control. Reflecting on the process of designing and negotiating a development project in the community of Cerro Verde, anthropologists and activists Simonelli and Earle marvel at the way their project was made to reflect the desires of the Zapatistas, "We were privy to a community development process in which the community struggled even with its most proximate political allies for the right to negotiate their lives on their own. It was all about control" (2003a: 190).

Other scholars of the Zapatistas, however, have questioned the degree to which the movement ultimately does have control over those that support it or, more precisely, to what degree the Zapatistas have been able to avoid the trap of dependency. In the words of Giovanna Gasparello, a supporter of the movement who has conducted extensive fieldwork in Chiapas:

> [The Zapatistas] were attempting to combine autonomy with the establishment of a series of essential material services that would give the population a decent standard of living. These achievements are extremely important, but they have almost entirely been made possible by the external solidarity provided by national and international civil society, and are not the fruit of the community's internal development….I am referring to the construction of a truly autonomous self-governed economy which would produce an economic surplus that could be reinvested in the production of services. The question is fundamentally important and the Zapatista authorities have not taken it into consideration. (Reygadas, et al., 2009: 231).

In a study of social and economic transformation in Las Cañadas, Xóxhitl Leyva Solano suggests that there exists a relationship of dependency between the EZLN and international supporters of the movement despite efforts to evade it, "The EZLN's international supporters now also run the risk of getting trapped in forms of political and economic support that, instead of promoting sustainable autonomy, turn out to be paternalistic and to foster dependence and a long-term need for assistance" (2003: 180). Yet, it is important to note that the observations of Solano were

made nearly seven years ago, just before the creation of the *Juntas del Buen Gobierno*, which intended to address some of the issues of dependency that scholars raise. However, I do think that Solano's argument still holds weight and, furthermore, that it applies not just in questions of community development, but extends to concerns over the very autonomy of the Zapatistas. Solano cites the example of the government's dismantling of the autonomous municipality of Taniperlas near Ocosingo in 1998, arguing that without international pressure, local anti-Zapatista authorities would certainly have imprisoned pro-Zapatista activists. While this incident happened over a decade ago, the continuing flow of international human rights observers into tense zones of Chiapas suggests that autonomous communities still require the backing and protective eye of foreigners. I was conscious of my position in this process of dependency as I headed into the jungle as a human rights observer. I was not asked to do anything: my Canadian citizenship was all the power I needed. As a foreigner in Zapatista territory, my role, and that of all observers, was precisely to deter the harassment of Zapatistas that, without our power as representatives from more "developed" countries, would occur more frequently. In this sense, the calm and safety of Zapatista communities was, at least in part, dependent on the presence of foreign observers. While the Zapatistas may have made bold strides to overturn unequal power dynamics between the North and South, it seems that the reality of living within Mexico, a state that has historically oppressed citizens who do not comply with the ruling party's agenda, has rendered this attempt incomplete.

Development as a Source of Division

While the Zapatistas have been working with their solidarity base to construct a development model that will effectively address the poverty of the indigenous peoples, the federal government has been actively pursuing its own development policy in Chiapas. Both

scholars and the Zapatistas with whom I spoke see the influx of government projects in the

region as a threat to the sustainability of the Zapatista movement (Stahler-Sholk 2007; Swords

2007). To conclude this chapter I will explore this challenge and highlight how the positioning

of the Zapatistas in a competition with the state for the allegiance of peasant families makes the

movement's ability to promote an effective development policy essential to its sustainability.

The countryside of Chiapas is starkly divided between Zapatistas, supporters of Mexico's

three main political parties (the PRI, the PRD, and the PAN) and a plethora of independent

peasant organizations (Stahler-Sholk 2007; Swords 2007; Trejo 2002). In this context of plurality

and division, the promise of development is being fought over; it is a hidden weapon in the

government's war on the Zapatistas more obviously marked by swarms of military stationed

throughout the state and the movements of numerous paramilitary groups. Driving along the

winding roads that snake through the green hills of Chiapas large signs announce the

government's projects and the number of people who will benefit from their implementation.

"*Pisos Firmes*" (cement floors) says one pink and white sign that seems to appear around every

second corner. The signs boldly proclaim the slogan of the state governor, Juan Sabines,

"*Hechos, no palabras*" (deeds, not words) and "*Vive Mejor*" (live better).

Figure 7. One of numerous signs promoting the federal government's cement floors
project. Photographed by author.

"In around 2000, the strategy of the government shifted," says Sergio Guardiola (not his real name), a human rights advocate who works for the Fray Bartolomé de las Casas Center for Human Rights. "Rather than just focusing on paramilitary intimidation, the government began infusing the state with tons of money in an attempt to buy people out of the movement. It's a huge threat," he concludes. "Health, education, support for agriculture, or just directly offering money…It seems calm but it is destroying what has been created." Earle and Simonelli note the strategic shift that took place several years ago from Zedillo (President from 1994 to 2000) and the PRI approach of intimidation and violence, to the more "insidious approach of foxy Fox [President from 2000 to 2006]….As we had been told so many times before in the communities," they continue, "the strategy was to nickel-and-dime people into staying away from Zapatismo with little gifts, handouts, and projects" (2005: 258). Since the 1994 rebellion, not only have federal anti-poverty efforts increased, at least nominally (Swords 2007: 86), but Stahler-Sholk argues that government aid programs have been "clearly tailored and administered in Chiapas for the political purpose of dividing communities and attracting supporters away from the Zapatista cause" (Tilly and Kennedy, 2006: 5).

The recognition of this weapon in the hands of the state is not lost on the Zapatistas who continually proved to be extremely aware and shrewd in the conversations I had with them. In an interview with the *Junta del Buen Gobierno* of Morelia I asked an open ended question about the challenges that Zapatista communities face, expecting to hear about economic difficulties or the hardships of promoting development without any assistance from the government. Instead I was told about the state's attempts to buy people from the movement:

> What we are seeing very clearly is that our indigenous *compañeros* ["companions" or "comrades"] have always been driven by money (*manejados a través de dinero*). Many

> people go [leave the movement] for a little money. They [the government] have tried to put an end to us in this way…with different projects that they send, projects for agriculture…or for the management of the household. They offer houses or *pisos firmes* (cement floors) as they call it in these parts of Chiapas. There has been a lot of this…recently.

He moved on to speak about education, saying that the government had also tried to attack the autonomous Zapatista system in part through giving scholarships for children who attended state schools. This observation is followed by an impassioned speech about the dignity of the Zapatistas' resistance and the government's attempts to destroy them:

> We feel that it [the government] wants to trick the people…we want our children to be rebels like us. That they have these values, that they know, that they grow up knowing about exploitation and plundering (*despojo*), that they know what discrimination is….[But the government] doesn't want us to organize…We have not let them trick us because we know that it is a trick, to distract (*entretenernos*) or to disorganize us…the government brings in all these kinds of things [social and agricultural support programs] so that we like all this…It has always caused harm to our indigenous *compañeros*, and even sometimes our own families.… it is very hard work [what we are doing]. We have to know very well what our responsibilities are. We have to be very conscious to do it. The way we are now no one takes us by force; no one forces us to do anything. No one! Each one of us, each Zapatista knows what he or she does.

It is evident that to this man rejecting and resisting government projects is crucial if the indigenous people are to maintain more control over their lives. This is a sentiment I heard numerous times in 2009 when I conducted research in Chiapas regarding self-sufficiency and government assistance. As one woman told me, although programs such as PROCAMPO, that provides direct subsidies to farmers, help in the short term they also serve to make communities "complacent." As Maria explained, "They [the communities] cannot complain about the government because they are receiving its 'help.'" The difficulties of living without government aid are often preferable to this loss of control. As one member of a cooperative stated in an interview with Alicia Swords, "I never negotiate with the government. I demand that they respect my rights. Then they can't control me because I'm not getting anything from them" (2007: 89).

Moreover, as stated above by the representative on the Morelia *Junta*, government programs are

a threat because of their divisive nature. As Sword's informant argued, working in collectives

was stronger than accepting the government's assistance because the collective allowed the

women to stay organized (2007: 89). Government programs, on the other hand, benefitted the

individual, providing each person with "crumbs" that distracted them from organizing and

demanding change at a more profound level (Swords 2007: 89).

It is clear that the strategy of the government is of concern to the Zapatistas. In my

conversations with them they vehemently asserted that under no circumstances would they

resume negotiations with the government often, it seemed, as if they wanted to reaffirm their

resolve as much to themselves as to me, "That has not crossed our minds" a member of the

Oventik Information Commission told me when I asked him if they would consider negotiating

with the government under the right circumstances, "No [we won't negotiate], no," he repeated. I

asked how the government was struggling with the EZLN and received a response similar to the

one I had heard in Morelia:

> They are doing it through economics. Before 1994 they never kept any of their promises.
> Then in 1994 all of the sudden they realized that the indigenous existed. Now the
> government is giving highways, electricity, schools and agricultural programs. It gives
> out "*dispensas*": sugar, oil, rice, money through *oportunidades* and PROCAMPO,
> lamina, cement floors. Even if the roof is falling down they will ignore that and give you
> a floor. They want to stop us in our tracks; they want to buy us. But we've decided to
> resist; even if these things are right in front of us we will not receive them – this is not
> why we rose up in arms. What we have discovered is that we have much wisdom (*razón*).
> What we want to achieve is democracy, liberty and justice which now there is not. We
> want this for everyone, not just Zapatistas, not just Zapatistas. It is in our name: Zapatista
> National Liberation Army, we want liberation for the entire nation….

It is hard given my brief time in Chiapas to assess how damaging this "soft" weapon of

development has been on the movement. According to one young man serving a term at Agua

Clara, in his community it is just normal that some receive government programs and others do not, "We are used to it," he tells me. But he alludes to this condition's destructive influence, saying "It makes it difficult for those who do support the government to collaborate with us. They are kept quiet because of the supports of the government."

I found it interesting that in response to a question about how many communities were under the jurisdiction of the *Caracol* of Morelia, the *Junta* claimed they did not know, "It is always changing," they told me, "and so we do not keep count." Given the meticulous recording of all the activities that go on in Zapatista territory it seemed unlikely to me that the *Junta* did not know the number of communities it oversaw. Perhaps their response was in part a result of the division that exists within communities making it impossible at times to call one community Zapatista or not. Or, perhaps there really is so much back and forth between allegiance to the Zapatistas and political parties that it is futile to try to keep count. Even local scholars of the Zapatistas are not sure how many communities belong to the movement, "We know of thousands who were Zapatistas and left because they couldn't take the hardships. We also know of thousands who have joined. If you ask, 12 after 1994, are there more or fewer Zapatistas, the answer is we don't know, nobody knows" (Ernesto Ledesma of the Center for Political Analysis and Social and Economic Research (CAPISE) in Tilly and Kennedy, 2006: 5).

Battling in this low-intensity war, it is of vital importance that the Zapatistas achieve a viable autonomous alternative to the government's promised development. Through such an alternative, the Zapatistas may be able to liberate themselves from the threat posed by the state. While the autonomous governance system of the Zapatistas discussed in Chapter Two is still adapting and learning from its mistakes, it appears to have gained a degree of legitimacy that

renders state officials largely redundant within its territory. As perceived in a document written

by the Diocese of San Cristóbal:

> The naming of authorities through indigenous norms and customs signifies that the
> political party system is no longer the only channel to elect authorities and government
> representatives. At a local level municipal presidents imposed by the PRI are left
> governing only themselves, without being able to penetrate into the communities.
> Basically this means the slow destruction of the false democracy sustained by the
> political party system and its replacement by communities and organizations that
> construct their own history first as autonomous municipalities and eventually as
> autonomous zones (Mora 1998).

The Zapatista's model of community development must achieve similar efficacy if the

movement is to succeed in undermining the government's economic attack on the EZLN.

Gustavo Esteva and Suri Prakash (1998b) write about the power of creation as a crucial

manifestation of resistance. They contend that resistance that is purely focused on the object it

wishes to defeat serves only to "clothe the emperor", to legitimize its dominance and authority

(Esteva and Prakash 1998b: 29). On the other hand, the decision to refuse to abide by the rules of

one's oppressor and instead create one's own reality has the potential to completely "disrobe the

emperor", leaving him naked and powerless in the face of this new alternative that no longer

recognizes nor needs his oversight. Esteva and Prakash present Mahatma Gandhi's Salt March

as an example of such an action, "…the simple decision of the oppressed to make their own salt

in their own streets, could be considered decisive in ending the global British Empire…In

autonomously producing salt for themselves or weaving their traditional clothes – instead of

buying British textiles – India's masses rediscovered their own strength and power" (1998b: 29).

In contrast, Esteva and Prakash raise an example of a large French workers' movement

protesting the country's neoliberal reforms in the 1990s, "by claiming from the state what the

state has (or does not have), they are strengthening it; further feeding the myth of its centrality,

its importance to their lives." Gandhi's radicalism, they contend:

> …lay in the philosophy and praxis of simply *ignoring* British "power" – its laws, its
> technology, its industry. Turning away from political structures that weaken "the people,"
> he moved the struggle for power to spaces where they can exercise their capacities for
> self-rule; governance that renders redundant rulers 'on top'. Affirming the liberation of
> 'the people' from their rulers, he was underscoring the opposite: the dependency of the
> 'rulers' upon the 'ruled' (1998b: 30).

While I agree with Esteva and Prakash (1998b) about the power of autonomous creation

to undermine the legitimacy of an oppressive power, in order for the "emperor" to be effectively

disrobed or made irrelevant, the new competing initiative must be more desirable for the

majority than what is offered by the "emperor". Thus, if one applies this concept to the struggle

of the Zapatista movement, their power to undermine the authority of the state and make its

governance unnecessary is contingent on the movement's ability to promote a viable and

effective development agenda as an alternative. Clearly, there is much more than material

conditions to keep Zapatistas loyal to the movement and many members seem willing to suffer

throughout their lives in order to uphold the ideals of the EZLN and to carry on the struggle for

what they believe will be a more just world. However, the reality of extreme poverty combined

with the threat of paramilitaries and militaries in the region make the handouts of the government

that much more alluring to families not sure where to place their allegiances.

By no means do I propose to pass judgment as to whether or not what the EZLN provides

its support bases is sufficient to maintain their commitment to the cause. However, during the

time I spent in Chiapas, I had several conversations with *compas*[14] clearly committed to struggle

for the long run, that suggest that, at least for some, the programs and services offered them by

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[14] Short for *compañero* (companion - comrade), a term used amongst Zapatistas and between Zapatistas and their allies.

the official government have indeed been made redundant by the initiatives of the EZLN. Pedro,

a young man completing his term of duty at the hotel in Agua Clara told me that they did not

need the official government anymore in his community. They would never negotiate with the

government again, he said, because they had their own, "Now we have *promotores*

["promoters"] of health, we have schools; if we need light, if we need schools we go to our

government." He went on to tell me, "One day a man from the government came to our *pueblo*

and told us he would bring us a school and a clinic and everything we needed. But we told him,

'No.' We didn't want it. We have our own governments; we don't need what they offer." Beto,

another young *compa* at the hotel who was always eager to talk with us foreign observers,

responded to my inquiry about what it was like living side by side with families that received

government programs. "Is it difficult?" I asked him. "No," he responded calmly, "we are used to

it." He told me that in response to the government's attacks on the EZLN via social programs,

the *Juntas del Buen Goberino* were trying to fight back by offering competing programs of their

own. "When the government does a project in a community the *Caracol* does one too. If the

government does an education program, so does the *Caracol*. The government gives things the

people don't really want in which case the *Caracol* gives what they do want"

Conclusion

      The Zapatistas endeavor to reformulate their development model echoes a broader

initiative to resituate the indigenous people within society and political life, such that they who

have always been sidelined can assume a position of leadership in their own community affairs.

Like conceptions of autonomous governance, which seek to broaden the participation of the

entire community in the process of rule, the restructuring of development work in Zapatista

territory is yet another reflection of returning power to the people. Furthermore, the Zapatistas'

initiative stems from a desire to make development in indigenous communities democratic after

decades under corrupt oversight of the PRI. Again, as in the model of community governance,

democracy becomes a process that must penetrate all aspects of the revolution and its internal

organization. Development, then, forms an important aspect of the Zapatistas' enactment of

democracy.

While I lack sufficient experience with the practices of Zapatista community

development to make a judgment on its ultimate effectiveness, what I have sought to present in

this chapter are the ways in which ideals of equality, horizontal power sharing, community

empowerment and lead by obeying are being put into practice. Furthermore, the Zapatistas'

model, whether it has been plagued by more problems than successes, can be viewed as a source

of interest worthy of further study, for it is an initiative that seeks to reverse a highly unequal

power dynamic between the poor of underdeveloped regions and the wealthy who wish to help, a

daunting task that that people involved in development work have been increasingly striving to

achieve (Rahnema 2010). As Duncan Earle and Jeanne Simonelli declare, the historically

mediocre results of conventional community development models demonstrate the need for

alternative approaches, and, as the Zapatistas offer such an approach, "at minimum, all people of

conscience should take a good gaze at this experiment and let it proceed, the demonstration

model of alternative development" (2005: 21).

Conclusion

"Brothers and sisters, there is dissent over the projects of globalization all over the world. Those above who globalize conformism, cynicism, stupidity, war, destruction and death. And those below who globalize rebellion, hope, creativity, intelligence, imagination, life, memory and the construction of a world that we can all fit in, a world with democracy, liberty and justice."
                                                    Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos 2003b

The masked faces of the Zapatistas that surprised the world in 1994 emerged out of a rich history of revolutionary uprisings, peasant revolts and religious organizing, both within Mexico and throughout Latin America. Yet, when they descended from the "mountains of the Mexican South East," the Zapatistas also brought with them something new. At the heart of their struggle was a novel conception of power, one that re-imagines where power is located, how it should be contested and, ultimately how it should be managed. Overturning expectations of guerrilla groups, the Zapatistas soon rejected violence, state capture and shunned the notion of a vanguard, instead seeking to subvert the very foundations of modern power structures such that concentrated power is itself would be toppled (Esteva and Prakash, 1998b: 153). "We do not want the steps to be swept clean from the top to bottom," they have said, "but for there to be no stairs, for there to be no kingdom at all" (EZLN in Holloway and Peláez, 1998: 4). The steps of power cannot be erased by storming the state; this would only serve to replicate embedded patterns of hierarchy and authoritarianism. As Hardt and Negri observe, "… All notions that pose the power of resistance as homologous or even similar to the power that oppresses us are of no more use" (2004: 90). Rather, the Zapatistas proclaim that to bring about true change, revolution must arise from the grassroots, from the peoples at the bottom of the pyramid, the ones forgotten and deemed helpless.

Declaring that the so called "powerful" are not the sole possessors of power but are in fact vulnerable, the Zapatistas contend that true power – the ability to enact change - to do –

(Holloway 2005) is found in the concurrent processes of rejection and creation that are within the capability of the world's majorities. They expose the ultimate dependency of the state on those it oppresses, proposing that through a unified rejection and a plurality of creation the multitude has the strength to undermine the authority of the "powerful", to "disrobe the emperor," rendering his rule superfluous (Esteva and Prakash, 1998b). Through shifting the struggle away from the state to the realm of global publics, the Zapatistas have tapped into a new power that has only recently been taken up by scholars, that of the multitude, a multiple social subject that has neither a center nor a commanding ideology yet is linked through a common rejection (Hardt and Negri, 2004: 99). By waging their battle in the realm of the multitude, the Zapatistas are responding to the effects of globalization and the increasing dependency of sovereignty not only on its citizens but on a growing array of international actors, from transnational institutions to novel forms of media and communication technology.

As has been discussed throughout this thesis, the Zapatista movement is committed to a fight to return agency and dignity to peoples who have historically been marginalized and oppressed. While the Zapatistas must fight this battle in Chiapas, their struggle is one that reflects a much greater battle for the emancipation of all "the same forgotten men and women / The same excluded, / The same intolerated, / The same persecuted…" that are the majorities throughout Mexico and the world (Marcos 2000:103). As Gustavo Esteva has argued, "[The Zapatistas' is] a struggle that does not aim to conquer 'democratic power' but to widen, strengthen and deepen the space where people can exert their own power" (1999: 154). By rejecting a vanguard the Zapatistas redistribute agency to the people, placing confidence in the ability of the people to rule themselves (Esteva 1999).

In the Zapatistas' autonomy project, their own local contestation of national and global systems of oppression, this desire to return power to the people is an organizing principal, manifesting itself in the structure of autonomous governance and in the pursuit of a development model directed by the poor. In declaring their autonomy prior to any official state recognition, the Zapatistas have rejected the state as the authority over their lives, challenging the legitimacy of the Mexican power apparatus and championing the idea that people must be the ones to enact their own dreams for the future. "Demands" cannot be "granted" by the state as it is fundamentally flawed; rather, demands must be fulfilled by the people themselves.

While the Zapatistas propose to erase the steps of kingdom, as Hardt and Negri emphasize, power itself can never be eliminated, "Power may at times be more widely distributed or at others divided between two or several rulers, but…[what] remains constantly present and never leaves the scene is power itself" (2004: 163). Consequently, the Zapatistas have developed sophisticated mechanisms to manage power so as to avoid its de-equalizing and oppressive side-effects. Infused in their structures of autonomous governance is the desire to disperse power. This desire is evident in practices of rotational leadership, consensus decision-making, attempts to equalize knowledge and diversify skill acquisition, and the construction of collaborative relationships with NGOs and scholars in Zapatista territory. Perhaps, in response to the systemic corruption of the PRI that dominated Chiapanecan politics for over 70 years, the Zapatistas have made concerted effort to avoid power accumulation. Concentrated power, they recognize, corrupts. Instead, the Zapatistas have attempted to disintegrate traditional relationships of hierarchy within their own organizational structure, reflecting what Hardt and Negri call the "democratic tendency" of modern resistance movements, in which revolutionary organizations have moved from centralized forms of dictatorship, to organizations that strive not

simply "… to be a means to achieve a democratic society but to create internally, within the organizational structure, democratic relationships" (2004: xvi). In these ways we can see how Zapatismo has conceived of democratic *process* as a goal in and of itself. As their popular maxim states, "There is no need to conquer the world. It is enough that we make it again. We. Today." "Today" means not striving for a distant end, but creating that end in the process of the journey; the journey itself is in a way the goal. The Zapatistas walk not so that they can arrive at some promised land, but because walking itself is the revolution (Holloway 2002).

Yet, while the Zapatistas have sought to disperse power within their organization, a defining feature of the movement has also been the desire to place indigenous peoples in control of what takes place within their communities. As the Zapatistas walk into the future they will be challenged to continually rethink not only their methods of internal governance but also their and interactions with local and foreign non-Zapatistas, such that the desire for control does not become a rigid and polarizing force, but rather remains a means to empower the indigenous people.

Not only have the Zapatistas proposed a new orientation toward power and revolution, adapting themselves to meet the emergence of the multitude as a global actor, but they have also both tapped into and helped to create an emerging revolutionary subject, a new force in the resistance against patterns of injustice and oppression: indigenous peoples. Around the world, and particularly throughout Latin America, indigenous peoples are standing up after centuries of oppression, demanding that their voices finally be heard, that their life-ways be respected, and their liberty recognized (Fenelon and Hall, 2008; Nash 2001; Brysk 2000). In Ecuador, Bolivia and Chile among others, indigenous populations of Latin America are demanding citizenship be reconfigured to recognize the plurinationality of Latin American states (Brysk 2000). Although

they fight in differing and at times divergent ways, similar to the Zapatistas, many indigenous groups are demanding a "world in which many worlds fit" (Marcos 2000: 456).

As June Nash (2001) has argued, globalization, while disrupting conventional sites for organized resistance of the working class, has opened new spaces for dissent. These spaces have allowed for the emergence of indigenous peoples as powerful agents of resistance. Nash contends that, "…indigenous people will become the chief protagonists of change in the coming millennium….Not only have their 500 years of resistance and outright rebellion prepared them to reject the excesses of the dominant world order, but they have the unique bases for alternative social formations to the New World Order that emerged in the aftermath of the Cold War" (2001 26). Nash's bold claim remains to be seen, yet what seems clear is that new actors are emerging onto the world stage, shaking the foundations of modern power apparatuses and reclaiming the dignity, agency and liberty that for centuries they were told they did not posses. At least in the case of the Zapatistas, they are not waiting for their demands to be granted by a state, but rather are enacting them through their own local manifestations of resistance and creation, proclaiming loudly that the people will be their own rulers and their own emancipators.

Acknowledgements

Appendix A

Demands Submitted by the Zapatistas during the February 1994 Dialogue

(Accessed online: http://flag.blackened.net/revolt/mexico/ezln/ccri_di_demand_mar94.html)

March 1, 1994

To the Mexican people:
To the people and governments of the world:
To the national and international press:

Brothers and Sisters:

The Clandestine Revolutionary Indigenous Committee-General Command of the EZLN addresses itself to you with respect and honor to make known to you the list of demands presented at the dialogue table during the days of peace and reconciliation in Chiapas.

"We do not ask for charity or gifts. We ask for the right to live in dignity, with equality and justice like our ancient parents and grandparents."

To the People of Mexico:

The Indigenous people of the state of Chiapas, who have risen up in arms as the Zapatista National Liberation Army against misery and the evil government, present the causes of their struggle and their principal demands:

The reasons and causes of our armed movement are that the government has failed to find solutions to the following problems:

First: The hunger, misery and marginalization from which we have always suffered.

Second: The complete lack of land on which to work in order to survive.

Third: Repression, displacement, imprisonment, torture and murder as the government's response to the just demands of our people.

Fourth: The unbearable injustices and violations of our human rights as impoverished Indigenous people and campesinos.

Fifth: The brutal exploitation we suffer in selling our products, in our workday, and in the buying of merchandise of basic necessity.

Sixth: The lack of indispensable services for the majority of the Indigenous population.

Seventh: The government's lies, deceit, promises and intrusion that have lasted over 60 years. The lack of liberty and democracy to decide our destinies.

Eighth: Constitutional laws have not been followed by those who govern this country; instead they make us, the Indigenous people and campesinos, pay for even the smallest mistake. They lay upon us the weight of a law that we did not make, and those who did are the first ones to violate it.

The EZLN came to dialogue with the word of truth. The EZLN came to speak its word on the conditions that gave rise to its just war and to ask all of the Mexican people for a resolution to these political, economic and social conditions that led us to take up arms in defense of our rights and our existence.

Therefore, we demand...

First: We demand that free and democratic elections be convened with equal rights and obligations for all political organizations that struggle for power, with true freedom to choose one proposal or another, and respect for the will of the majority. Democracy is a fundamental right of all Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Without democracy there can be no freedom, justice or dignity. And without dignity there is nothing.

Second: To ensure that there are truly free and democratic elections, it is necessary for the head of the federal executive and occupants of state executive offices who reached their positions of power through electoral fraud, to resign. Their legitimacy does not come from the respect for the will of the majority, but rather from its usurpation. Consequently, the formation of a transitional government is necessary so that there may be equality and respect for all political currents. The federal and state legislative powers, elected freely and democratically, should assume their true function of passing fair laws for all and ensuring their enforcement.

Another way to guarantee the realization of free and truly democratic elections is to legitimize, in the nation's great laws and at a local level, the legitimacy of the existence and work of citizens and citizens' groups who, without party militancy, will oversee the entire electoral process, sanction its legality and results, and guarantee, as the maximum authority, the legitimacy of the entire electoral process.

Third: The recognition of the Zapatista National Liberation Army as a belligerent force, and of its troops as authentic combatants and the application of all international treaties regulating armed conflicts.

Fourth: A new pact between Mexican Federation members to do away with centralism and allow regions, Indigenous communities, and townships to govern themselves with political, economic and cultural autonomy.

Fifth: General elections for the whole state of Chiapas and the legal recognition of all the political forces in the state.

Sixth: As a producer of electricity and petroleum, the state of Chiapas pays tribute to the nation and receives nothing in return. Our communities have no electric energy and the economic bleeding, a product of oil exports and internal sale, brings no benefits to the Chiapaneco people. Therefore, it is of the utmost importance that all Chiapaneco communities receive electric energy and that a percentage of the income earned from the commercialization of Chiapaneco petroleum be applied to industrial, agricultural, commercial and social infrastructure projects for the benefit of all Chiapanecos.

Seventh: The revision of the North American Free Trade Agreement signed with Canada and the United States, since its present form it does not take into account the Indigenous population, and it sentences them to death because it does not include any labor qualifications whatsoever.

Eighth: Article 27 of the Magna Carta [a reference to the Mexican Constitution] should respect the original spirit of Emiliano Zapata: Land is for the Indigenous people and campesinos who work it, not for latifundistas. We want the large tracts of land that are in the hands of ranchers, national and foreign wealthy land-owners, and other people who occupy a lot of land and are not campesinos, to be passed over to the hands of the people who have absolutely no land, as it is set out in our Revolutionary Agrarian Law. The redistribution of lands should include agricultural machinery, fertilizers, insecticides, credits, technical assistance, improved seeds, cattle, and fair prices for our products such as coffee, corn and beans. The land that is redistributed should be of good quality, and it must be accessible by roads, public transport, and have adequate irrigation systems. Campesinos who already have land also have the right to receive the support mentioned above to facilitate their work and improve production. New ejidos and communities should be formed. The Salinista reform to Article 27 of the Constitution should be annulled and the right to the land should be put back into our Magna Carta.

Ninth: We want hospitals to be built in all of the municipal seats, and that they have specialized doctors and sufficient medicine to attend to all patients, and rural clinics in the ejidos and communities, with training and fair salaries for health representatives. Already-existing hospitals in the area should be rehabilitated as soon as possible and have complete surgical services. Clinics should be built in large communities, which have sufficient doctors and medicine to more closely attend to the needs of the people.

Tenth: That Indigenous people be guaranteed the right to true information about what happens on local, regional, state, national and international levels, through an Indigenous radio station that is directed and managed by Indians.

Eleventh: We demand that housing be built in all rural communities in Mexico and be provided with all necessary services, such as: light, potable water, roads, sewage systems, telephones, public transportation, etc. And also that they have the advantages of the city, such as televisions, stoves, refrigerators, washing machines, etc. The communities should have recreational centers

for the healthy diversion of residents: sports and culture that dignify the human condition of Indians.

Twelfth: We want an end to illiteracy in Indigenous communities. For this we need better elementary and secondary schools in our communities, which have free teaching materials and teachers with university degrees who are at the service of the people and not just there to defend the interests of the wealthy. In municipal seats there should be free elementary, secondary, and preparatory schools. The government should provide uniforms, shoes, food and all study materials for free. Centrally located communities that are far away from the municipal seat of the respective townships should have boarding secondary schools. Education should be completely free, from preschool through university, and it should be available to all Mexicans regardless of race, creed, age, sex or political affiliation.

Thirteenth: That the languages of all of the ethnicities be official and that their teaching in primary, secondary and preparatory schools and at the university level be mandatory.

Fourteenth: That our rights and dignity as Indigenous peoples be respected and that our culture and tradition be recognized.

Fifteenth: We do not want to be subject to the discrimination and scorn which we, the Indians, have always suffered.

Sixteenth: As the Indigenous people that we are, we demand that we be allowed to govern ourselves autonomously, because we no longer want to be subject to the will of national and foreign powers.

Seventeenth: That justice be administered by the Indigenous communities themselves according to their customs and traditions, without intervention from illegitimate and corrupt governments.

Eighteenth: We want to always have dignified jobs with fair salaries for all workers, both in the countryside and in the cities of the Mexican Republic, so that our brothers and sisters are not forced to resort to bad things such as drug trafficking, delinquency and prostitution in order to survive. The Federal Labor Law should be applied to rural and urban workers with bonuses, loans, vacations, and the true right to strike.

Nineteenth: We demand fair prices for our products of the fields. For this we need to have free access to a market to buy and sell without being subject to the coyotes who exploit us.

Twentieth: That the plundering of the riches of our Mexico and above all Chiapas, one of the Republic's richest states, but one in which hunger and misery grow every day, cease.

Twenty-first: We want all debts, whether they be credits or loans and taxes with high interest rates, to be cancelled, as these cannot be paid back due to the poverty of the Mexican people.

Twenty-second: We want an end to hunger and malnutrition, because they alone have caused the death of thousands of our brothers and sisters both in the countryside and in the city. In every rural community there should be cooperative stores supported economically by the federal, state and municipal governments, and the prices in these stores should be fair. Moreover, there should also be transport vehicles, owned by the cooperatives, for the transport of merchandise. Moreover, the government should send free food for all children under 14 years old.

Twenty-third: We ask for the immediate and unconditional release of all political prisoners and unjustly imprisoned poor people in all the jails of Mexico and Chiapas.

Twenty-fourth: We ask that the Federal Army and Judicial and Public-Safety Police no longer enter rural zones, as they will only intimidate, evict, rob, repress and bomb campesinos who are organizing to defend their rights. Because of this, our people are tired of the presence of soldiers and Public-Safety and Judicial forces, because they are so abusive and repressive. That the Mexican government return the Pilatus planes, used to bombard our people, to the Swiss government. The refund money should be channeled to programs to improve the life of rural and urban workers. We also ask that the government of the United States of North America take back its helicopters, as they are being used to repress Mexicans.

Twenty-fifth: The Indigenous campesinos took up arms because they have nothing but their humble shacks. When the Federal Army bombarded the civilian populations, it destroyed these humble homes and all of their few belongings. For this reason we ask and demand that the federal government compensate families that have suffered material losses due to air raids and actions by federal troops. We also demand indemnity for widows and orphans of the war, both civilians and Zapatistas.

Twenty-sixth: We Indigenous campesinos want to live in peace and tranquility and want to be allowed to live according to our rights to freedom and a dignified life.

Twenty-seventh: That the penal code of the state of Chiapas be eliminated, as it does not allow us to organize, except with arms, because legal and peaceful struggles are repressed and punished.

Twenty-eighth: We ask and demand an end to the expulsion of Indians from their communities by the caciques who are supported by the state. We demand a guarantee that all expelled people may return freely and voluntarily to their lands of origin and that they be compensated for their lost goods.

Twenty-ninth: Indigenous Campesino Women's Petition

We, Indigenous campesino women, demand the immediate solution to our urgent needs, which the government has never resolved:

A: Childbirth clinics with gynecologists so that campesino women receive necessary medical attention.

B: That child care facilities be built in the communities.

C: We ask the government to send sufficient food for the children in all rural communities including: milk, corn flour, rice, corn, soy, oil, beans, cheese, eggs, sugar, soup, oats, etc.

D: That kitchens and dining halls be built for the children in the communities, which have all the necessary services.

E: We demand the construction of community corn dough mills and tortillerías based on the number of families in each community.

F: That they give us poultry, rabbit, sheep and pig farm projects, and also that we be provided with technical assistance and veterinarians.

G: We ask for bakery projects, which include the provision of ovens and ingredients.

H: We want artisan workshops to be built, equipped with machinery and raw materials.

I: Markets in which to sell our crafts at fair prices.

J: That schools be built where women can get technical training.

K: That there be preschools and maternal schools in rural communities, where children can play and grow in a morally and physically healthy way.

L: That as women we have sufficient transportation for the products we produce in our various projects.

Thirtieth: We demand that Patrocinio Gonza'lez Blanco Garrido, Absalo'n Castellanos Domi'nguez and Elmar Setzer M. be tried politically.

Thirty-first: We demand that the lives of all EZLN members be respected and a guarantee that there will be no penal process or any repressive action brought against any EZLN members, combatants, sympathizers or collaborators.

Thirty-second: That all organizations and commissions for the defense of human rights be independent or non-governmental, because government human rights organizations only hide the arbitrary actions of the government.

Thirty-third: That a National Commission for Peace with Justice and Dignity be formed, composed primarily of people who are not in the government or any political party. And that this National Commission for Peace with Justice and Dignity oversee the fulfillment and implementation of the accords that the EZLN and the government arrive at.

Thirty-fourth: That the humanitarian aid for the victims of the conflict be channeled through authentic representatives from Indigenous communities.

While these just demands of our people are still unresolved we are prepared and committed to continue with our struggle until we obtain our goals.

For us, the smallest of these lands, those without face or history, those who arrived with truth and fire, those of us who come from the night and the mountain, those true men and women, the dead of yesterday, today, and always...for us nothing. For everyone, everything.

Justice!
Democracy!
Freedom!

Respectfully,
From the Mexican Southeast.
CCRI-CG of the EZLN

Appendix B

Paramilitaries and Counterinsurgency in and around Morelia

This response was given by the *Junta del Buen Gobierno* after being asked by a human rights observer about the situation of human rights in the region. This conversation took place on January 7, 2010.

Well, in the communities we have seen many different people. For example, they put on clothing that is paramilitary and walk armed with machetes and backpacks. These are the paramilitaries. We see that they are trying to provoke us so that we start to fight amongst ourselves. But this idea comes from the government. This is what happens in the communities. The other is displacement (*desalojo*) from the communities. This is what we see: paramilitaries. The government is searching for a way to get itself into the communities (*meterse en las comunidades*). And in the question of forced migration it is the hardest. The government does it to try to finish us off or to distract us so that we are afraid. But no, we will go as far as we can. If they get rid of one community, others crop up. The situation is a little serious, especially in this time of the New Year. Many people were confused, thinking something was going to happen. Everyone is ready, waiting for what will happen. During these dates we've seen movements of strange people walking at night. We know exactly what is going on because we know these paramilitaries, they are *indígenas* used by the government. They are indigenous like us and they are close to where we live, this is where they are. So in this time they are prepared in case anything were to happen, to make sure that if anything were to happen it would not be because they were far from us, thus they are in the midst of us the whole time.

We know that within our communities there have been movements of strange people and also some that are not from Chiapas. People who come from outside, as we say *gringos*…from other places (*el otro lado pues*). They are going around at night. This makes us understand that yes they are moving. But also because we are alert we know what they are doing. We see that the paramilitaries continue to do their thing. We have also noticed violations to our rights. For example the *compañeros* of the Other Campaign have been harassed. We have seen that, for example, in a part where they have land with a house at a tourist site, there by Agua Clara, if any of you are going there, you will see. Where the public security comes they take off the *compañeros* and sometimes the public security starts collecting money in the *casa de cobra* [entrance house where a fee is paid] and the true owners of this land have to stay on one side. We see this is a serious problem. It is the indigenous' land, but others arrive that want to take it by force. We see that...they no longer respect us; what they want to do, they will do. But also that occurs not only with this organization, but also with others, such as the Other Campaign. We, true Zapatistas, they no longer *really* bother us. The ones that are more persecuted are the other organizations that are aligned with us, who are not as connected as we are. But us, until now no, although it remains part of our struggle. It gives us much courage when people, groups of our people the indigenous, try to liberate themselves (*desempeñar*) [through forming organizations]. It gives us lots of courage because this is where we also came from; this is why we organized ourselves because we didn't want it any more. So many people have come to the *Caracoles* to see how we support, to see what we do, in what form. We have not become directly linked with them, but, for example, in support, in idea, in how the form is, we have done it [assisted them].

And through this many brothers have been able to get out and to defend and they have been able to reorganize. But they have also faced many problems; some have gone to jail, others have been beaten, others threatened, others persecuted to this day, like us. We continue facing up to all of it. It is not true that the government is respecting us now; it does not.

Appendix C

Negotiating for Autonomy: The San Andrés Accords

While the Zapatistas were skeptical about the possibility of achieving fundamental change through the existing political system, in the first few years after the uprising they did engage in negotiations with the government to restructure Mexico's legal framework and alter the constitution (Speed 2008). As Shannon Speed (2008: 48) argues, reform of the national constitution was considered critical by many indigenous groups already involved in legal battles. Groups were concerned because assimilation measures and the discursive erasure of the indigenous peoples were supported by the Mexican legal framework. Shockingly, not until two years after Mexico ratified ILO Convention 169 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples was the Mexican constitution reformed to recognize the existence of indigenous peoples in its populace (Speed 2008: 48). Even so, these reforms focused on cultural rights and failed to include reference to political rights, self-determination, or autonomy (Gómez Rivera 1997 in Speed 2008).

In early 1995, the EZLN began formal negotiations with the Mexican government, dialoguing with an intermediary body made up of federal legislators from the three main political parties called the *Comisión de Concordia y Pacificación* (Commission for Concordance and Pacification - COCOPA). An additional intermediary body, the *Comisión Nacional de Intermediación* (National Mediation Commission - CONAI) was also established headed by San Cristóbal Bishop Samuel Ruiz García. Most of 1995 was spent solidifying what exactly would be dialogued. The process was very slow, in large part because of the EZLN's insistence that the proceedings be translated into multiple indigenous languages and on its commitment to consult with its base communities at each stage of the process (Speed 2008). Finally, it was agreed that negotiations would address four themes: Indigenous Rights and Culture, Democratization and Justice, Well-Being and Development, and Women's Rights. The first of these themes, Indigenous Rights and Culture, was discussed between October 1995 and January 1996 and signed on February 16, 1996.

The accords recognize the rights of indigenous peoples to "develop their specific forms of social, cultural, political and economic organization," "to obtain recognition of their internal normative systems for regulation and sanction insofar as they are not contrary to constitutional guarantees and human rights, especially those of women," "to freely designate their representatives within the community as well as in their municipal government bodies as well as the leaders of their *pueblos indígenas* in accordance with the institutions and traditions of each *pueblo*" and "to promote and develop their languages, cultures, as well as their political, social, economic, religious, and cultural customs and traditions" (San Andrés Accords on Indigenous Rights and Culture 1999 in Speed 2008: 51).

While the signing of the San Andrés Accords was generally considered a positive first step in the peace process, only a few months later militarization of the region continued to increase and negotiations on the three remaining issues were ended by the EZLN after the government continually showed lack of sincerity and will to see the laws passed (Speed 2008). Today, the San Andrés Accords on Indigenous Rights and Culture have still to be implemented.

Shannon Speed argues that the failure of the Mexican government to implement the San Andrés Accords had two important effects. Firstly, it confirmed the assertions of the Zapatistas

that fundamental change could not be achieved through the established political system, and prompted the EZLN to turn inward to conceptualize a notion of rights that existed regardless of government recognition. Secondly, Speed argues that, "On the rhetorical terrain, it gave the Zapatistas a strong weapon: they had negotiated in good faith, and the Mexican government had failed to honor its own agreement" (54).

In 1996, as the conflict in Chiapas worsened, the COCOPA proposed revisions of the San Andrés Accord that met with the approval of the Zapatistas but were rejected by the Zedillo administration. The historic defeat of the PRI in 2000 brought hope that the COCOPA law would pass. However, in April 2001, a watered-down version of the law was proposed that restricted indigenous autonomy to communities within single municipalities and denied constitutional recognition of collective subjects with the right to determine their own forms of governance and development (Harvey 2005: 15). The Zapatistas rejected these modifications and, in frustration, suspended all negotiations with the federal government, a relationship, or lack thereof, that continues today and seems unlikely to change in the near future.

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García, María de los Ángeles. Interview concerning her community, rural self-sufficiency, and government supports. Comitan, Mexico. 4 May, 2009. 2 p.m.

Junta del Buen Gobierno – Good Government Council (Caracol: Morelia). Interview concerning collaboration with development NGOs and the functioning of the Juntas del Buen Gobierno. Morelia, Mexico. 7 January, 2010. 1:00 p.m.

Junta del Buen Gobierno – Good Government Council (Caracol: Oventik). Interview concerning collaboration with development NGOs and current challenges faced by the Zapatistas. Oventik, Mexico. 26 January, 2010. 11:30 a.m.

Informal Interviews

I had numerous informal conversations with several of the men serving terms at the Zapatista-run hotel in Agua Clara. I spoke primarily with two men to whom I refer throughout this paper using the pseudonyms, "Beto" and "Pedro." These conversations occurred between 8 January and 22 January, 2010.