

THE REASSERTION OF  
INDIGENOUS IDENTITY:  
Mayan Responses to State Intervention in Chiapas\*

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In the early hours of 1994, a few hundred men and women of the Ejército Zapatista Liberación Nacional (EZLN) blocked the Pan American Highway between Tuxtla Gutiérrez, the state capital of Chiapas, and San Cristóbal de las Casas and the road to Ocosingo, declaring war on Mexico's ruling Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI). This move signaled to the world that indigenous populations intended to make themselves heard at home and abroad as Mexico restructures its economy according to the neoliberal model promoted by President Carlos Salinas de Gortari. The rebels captured and briefly held the municipal buildings in San Cristóbal, Altamirano, Las Margaritas, and Ocosingo. Speaking for the rebels, Subcomandante Marcos declared that their war was "a final but justified measure": "We have nothing, absolutely nothing. Not a decent roof, nor work, nor land, nor health care, nor education."<sup>1</sup>

The rebellion brought to the forefront long-standing complaints that peasants and workers in this southernmost Mexican state have been making for decades. Every peaceful demonstration was suppressed with massive military action and arrests. But because of the recent passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in late 1993, a rebel-

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1. Tim Golden, "Rebel Attack Hits Four Towns in Mexico," *New York Times*, 1 Jan. 1994, p. A4.

lion that otherwise would have been noted only briefly has remained the focus of analysis by specialists on world economics and politics.

Many of the issues the rebels have raised recall those fought for by Emiliano Zapata, the national hero of the Mexican Revolution in the early decades of the twentieth century. Like the farmers who joined Zapata's forces, the rebels are demanding access to land and just wages to counteract growing discrepancies in wealth. The gains of the Constitution of 1917 were never realized in many regions of Chiapas, where large landowners succeeded in blocking land reform and where educational and medical services have remained minimal. The demands of the modern-day Zapatistas, however, go far beyond those of the earlier revolution in calling for recognition of ethnic distinctiveness and dignity as well as participation in the democratic process as the Mexican economy becomes integrated into global markets. Subcomandante Marcos announced that the rebels chose to initiate their war on the eve of implementation of NAFTA as a warning to the Mexican government not to leave indigenous peoples out of decisions that threaten their very survival as distinct ethnic groups.<sup>2</sup> The rebels also called for annulling a government elected fraudulently and installing a transition government to ensure democratic voting procedures in the 1994 presidential elections. Although the rebels recognize that their marginalization has resulted partly from free-market trends, they are not rejecting international exchange but are calling instead for participation by all sectors in decisions related to these changes.

Official attempts to link the rebels to Central American revolutionary groups have failed to counter the growing evidence that most of the rebels are Mexicans. The Unión Revolucionario Nacional Guatemalteca (URNG) and the Salvadoran Frente Farabundo Martí de Liberación Nacional (FMLN) have both denied relationships with the insurgents, and only one Guatemalan was found among the captives.<sup>3</sup> Ties have been suggested with the Unidad Popular de Trabajadores y Campesinos Revolucionarios based in Oaxaca and the Partido de los Pobres, which was active until the mid-1970s on the Pacific Coast.<sup>4</sup> But the youthful members of the revolutionary directorate have an agenda that is different, although related to issues endemic in the rural sector. They insist that they seek not to seize power but to open a path for democratic processes. The military command of the rebellion is made up of Tzeltales Tzotziles, Choles, Tojolabales, Mames, and Zoques. All of these groups speak indigenous languages of the region, including Mam-speaking Guatemalans

2. Guillermo Correa, Julio César, and Ignacio Ramírez, "Estallido que estremece a México," *Proceso*, no. 897, 10 Jan. 1994, pp. 6–21.

3. Tim Golden, "Mexico Offers an Amnesty to Rebels as They Retreat," *New York Times*, 7 Jan. 1994, p. A8.

4. Tim Golden, "Mexican Troops Battling Rebels, Toll at Least 57," *New York Times*, 3 Jan. 1994, p. A1.

who have lived on the Mexican side of the border for generations. Media interviews and reports have confirmed that the rebels are indigenous persons, many of them monolingual.

The rebellion attests to the extraordinary durability of distinctive cultures in Middle America. Anthropologists have attributed this persistence variously to indigenous withdrawal into zones of retreat (Aguirre Beltrán 1979), exploitation in the form of internal colonialism (González Casanova 1970), and Catholic traditions imposed by the conquerors to encumber native groups with debts for religious celebrations (Diener 1978; Harris 1964). These earlier theories stressed one side or the other of the dominant-subordinate hierarchy, with those maintaining the essentialist position emphasizing primordial cultural characteristics and those arguing domination from above emphasizing that forced acculturation has conditioned indigenous responses. Structuralists attacked the functionalism of those emphasizing the rational basis for distinctive indigenous characteristics (Stavenhagen 1965; Wasserstrom 1983), while their opponents challenged economic determinists for failing to recognize the prequest ideological constructs manifested across wide regions (Gossen 1974; Vogt 1976b).

Protagonists on both sides of this older debate have shown that the persistence of distinct beliefs and practices among indigenous populations of the Americas arises from internal resources and from pressures exerted by the dominant group. Current debates are taking into account the combined force of antagonistic but interpenetrating relationships between *indígenas* and *ladinos* as they generate and sustain ethnic diversity. While this conjuncture of forces has provided a basis for subordinate groups to mobilize claims on the state for resources (Ehrenreich 1989; Hill 1989; Selverston 1992) and to resist exploitation and repression (Nagengast and Kearney 1990; Smith 1984b), it has also reinforced relations of subordination and domination (Díaz-Polanco 1992). By looking inward at "narrative strategies for resisting terror" (Warren 1993), evoking dialogue between ancient and present traditions (Gossen and Leventhal 1989), and assessing the economic opportunities that condition their survival (Cancian 1992; Collier 1990; Nash 1993, 1994a), researchers are constructing a theory that recognizes both the structural imperatives of the colonial and postcolonial systems encapsulating indigenous peoples and their own search for a base from which to defend themselves and generate collective action.

The new social movement theorists who would separate these ethnic movements reasserting their identity from the economic conditions that give rise to their actions (Laclau and Mouffe 1985) miss as much of the dynamic as do those who would reduce these movements to class relations. The rebels themselves justify their recourse to war in both economic and cultural terms. According to Subcomandante Marcos, the

rebels are well aware that they have been excluded from power because as Indians, "We have always lived amidst a war that, up til now, was against us."<sup>5</sup> But today, their claims for dignity and autonomy are coupled with demands for land, schools, and medical services.

*Revindicación étnica*—the reclaiming of indigenous rights and autonomy—is the rationale being advanced for action based on the equation of shared poverty with indigenous identity from the colonial period to the present.<sup>6</sup> Growing differences in wealth among indígenas within corporate communities that have accommodated to the state power structure now contradict the communal basis for identification more apparent in the collective activity in colonizing areas in the new frontiers. In the face of internal divisions and external repression, reassertion of ethnic identity is finding distinct expressions among Mayas in highland communities and settlements on the border as they react to economic encroachment and violence that threaten their culture and their lives.

My purpose here is to compare reassertive actions by highland Mayas in corporate communities with those of colonizers and Guatemalan exiles in the Lacandón jungle area and the southern frontier of Mexico in order to clarify some of the distinct processes involved in ethnic rebellion. Despite the many differences among communities of both regions, more contrasts can be found in the histories that constituted ethnic awareness and the ways in which indígenas were integrated into the ladino-dominated economy and polity in these regional groupings than if one were to compare any of the language groups.<sup>7</sup>

5. Guillermo Correa, Julio César López, and Ignacio Ramírez, "La capacidad de convocatoria de organización de divisos políticos en el origen del estallido," *Proceso*, no. 897, 10 Jan. 1994, pp. 22–25.

6. The primary difference between Mayas who are rebelling and those who are not committed is that the former are aware that as Indians they have been marginalized by the state and experience discrimination in the markets they enter as sellers of labor and products.

7. Alicia Castellanos (1988) contrasted ethnic *revindicación* in two subregions of highland Chiapas that express distinct "forms of insertion in capitalism according to socially differentiated degrees produced within the groups" as well as distinct "forms in which groups have internationalized the dominant ideology and customs." The first subregion includes Simojovel, Huitiupan, Pantelhó, and the department of Chilón. Except for Oxchuc and Cancuc, these communities are found at lower altitudes where lands are more productive and indigenous communities live near the large landholders engaged in cattle herding and agroindustry. The second subregion includes San Martín and San Miguel Mitontic, Chalchihuitán, San Pedro Chenalhó, Tenejapa, and Chamula, communities that had greater autonomy. In the first group, indigenous groups united with poor mestizo cultivators in the struggle for land, but in the second, communities tended to construct their ethnic struggles according to "corporative tactics" shaping the formation of indigenous caciques. This categorization, however, ignores too many anomalous cases (particularly Oxchuc and Cancuc) to be satisfying. Cancian and Brown (1994) compare two communities in their analysis of the uprising, Zinacantán and Pantelhó, thus avoiding ambivalent cases. Yet the narrower scope also means that one misses the particular historical circumstances that shape events.

## ETHNICITY IN HIGHLAND CHIAPAS CORPORATE COMMUNITIES

Resistance to culture change forced during the colonial and independence periods required daily organization of life to enable *indígenas* to retain some degree of control over earning their livelihood, socializing their children, and exercising social control. The nexus for this social reproduction was provided by semi-subsistence cultivation of small plots organized by patriarchal households in which women were responsible for maintaining the domestic unit while men migrated seasonally in search of wage work. To sustain this structure, however, *indígenas* needed access to land, political channels, markets, and education to defend themselves in the nonindigenous world. Historically, this access was achieved by Spanish establishment of corporate communities with communal lands and autonomy in internal affairs run by a nonindigenous president and secretary assigned by the crown (MacLeod 1973; Wolf 1957). After independence, administrators maintained this pattern of control with some modifications up to the present day (Tax 1937; Wolf 1957).<sup>8</sup> Access to land and other resources was so limited that *indígenas* had to sell their products and labor power to the dominant ladinos, Spanish-speaking bearers of European culture who were often of mixed ancestry.

General Porfirio Díaz presided over the fragmentation of corporate landholdings of the Catholic Church and of state and local governments during his presidency (1875–1910). Better lands were seized or sold to large landowners, and most indigenous men were forced to work several months each year on coastal plantations (Wasserstrom 1983) or as transporters (Cancian 1992) and wage workers. Women maintained their families unassisted while men were working on distant plantations, and women transmitted cultural identification by socializing their children in the distinctive Maya patterns of work and beliefs, even taking over leadership of the *cargo* (the burden of supporting the annual cycle of fiestas for the saints) (see Rosenbaum 1993; Wasserstrom 1983). *Indígena* semi-subsistence farmers and artisans have also provisioned urban ladinos with corn, beans, and other staples as well as artisan products in ceramics, textiles, and woodwork, first as tribute and then as cheap commodities.

Following the Mexican Revolution, the Land Reform Act (Article 27 of the Constitution of 1917) allowed restitution of communal lands of

8. Recognition of these boundaries should not be interpreted as a denial of the integration of corporate communities within regional, national, and even international markets where they are subject to pressures from the capitalist enterprises in which they are bound. Researchers who have carried out long-term fieldwork are impressed with the perceptiveness of *indígenas* regarding the boundedness of their horizons even while they are involved in political, commercial, and ritual relations with ladinos and *indígenas* in other towns (Cancian 1965, 1992; Collier 1975, 1990; Gossen 1984; Nash 1970, 1993). The persistence of traditions like the twenty-day ceremonial calendar and beliefs about the four-path way of the world (Gossen 1984; Gossen and Leventhal 1993) is invoked not as part of pan-indigenous political identity but rather as an affirmation of distinct identity in separate communities.

indigenous communities lost during the liberal period and opened up national land for *ejidos* (collectively owned and individually cultivated plots allotted to cultivators who established residence in colonies). Land reform had a mixed effect in Chiapas, however. Some indigenous communities acted on it late, twenty years after land reform was enacted in the central plateau, while other communities never got state support to challenge large landowners. The few communities that managed to get title to ejido lands (as in Amatenango del Valle) were outnumbered by those that lacked good cultivable lands within municipal boundaries (as in San Juan Chamula) or fought unsuccessfully to win their claims, gaining only a fraction of eligible land (as in Venustiano Carranza).

Long considered the most backward and isolated of Mexico's thirty-one states, Chiapas lacked roads connecting indigenous villages, potable water, and electricity. Ladino mayors and secretaries mediated relations between indigenous communities and the state government, while a local hierarchy of civil and religious officers presided over town affairs. Until Lázaro Cárdenas became president, Chiapas had neither schools nor health services. This backwardness resulted from both neglect and planning: the lack of interest in promoting indigenous peoples, still feared because of their potential rebelliousness, combined with the desire to exploit their labor led to policies excluding them from the dominant culture while ensuring a labor supply for harvest seasons on the coastal coffee plantations (Fábregas Puig 1988).

The integration of indigenous communities into the "modern sector" of the economy as anything more than severely exploited wage laborers began in 1950 with the founding of the Instituto Nacional Indigenista (INI). Bilingual education programs and health clinics employing indigenous *promotores* (change agents) were introduced to villages, some not even connected by roads to the highland commercial center of San Cristóbal. The INI also promoted cooperatives to provision local stores and other enterprises serving an indigenous clientele.

Reinterpreting these innovations provides a key to how indigenous societies have managed to change in ways that preserved their cultural integrity. I discovered this pattern in Amatenango del Valle, where I carried out fieldwork first in 1957–1958 and each summer from 1963 to 1966. No nonindigenous people lived in the town center other than the schoolteachers, a couple with three daughters who later taught in the schools in the 1960s. The schoolmaster, retired from the Mexican army, often threatened those who menaced him with an arsenal of old army rifles. In previous years, two Mexican anthropologists had been asked to leave. My research team members were tolerated, the indigenous president told us after two months residence in the town, because we never said we wanted to civilize the indigenous people. Until the late 1960s, the town rejected the ladino pattern of modernization. Many Amatenanguero

families tried to keep their children out of the local school and ignored extension agents representing the INI and the Banco Ejidal. Some of the men who had gone to the boarding school in Chamula during the Cárdenas era were among the first cohort of indígenas to serve in the town offices, first as president in 1957 and then as secretary the following year. These posts were formerly occupied by ladinos from the neighboring town of Teopisca.

On returning in 1963 for another extended field period, I found that members of the community had organized several cooperatives based on the model of the INI store to promote liquor distilleries and bars where electrically amplified music attracted customers. The objective in organizing the cooperative of five or six owners was less to share the risk of loss than to share the risk of success, given that new opportunities for income excited the envy and potential charges of witchcraft by villagers lacking such revenues.

Innovation was adapted selectively to the prevailing ways of life. For example, when potable water was introduced by capturing spring water in pipes that went directly to the householders willing to pay a small fee, the *u'uletik* (curer-diviners) who bathed their patients in the spring water objected. An agreement was worked out whereby a stream of the spring water was diverted into a pool to providing access for curative bathing without contaminating the pipes carrying potable water. The son of the chief diviner-curer was trained as a paramedic, and father and son shared patients and consultations, yielding to modern medicine in cases where it had proved effective (as in immunizing against contagious diseases and antibiotic injections for common infections), while calling on the elder curer for diseases caused by witchcraft. Wheat was introduced to allow continuous cultivation of milpa because wheat replaced soil nutrients used up by the corn. Bilingual education was introduced into schools with native speakers of the Maya dialects acting as promotores. In some areas, these modernizing changes eliminated institutions that were subsequently reintegrated when the changes seemed to threaten traditional reciprocity between humans and the ecological system. For example, the religious office of *alférez* (captain of religious celebrations) was abandoned in 1971 after young men objected to the high costs of time and money for these posts, but it was resumed two years later when intervening droughts were blamed on the failure to celebrate saints' days.

The Amatenangueros' selective responses to innovation and abandonment of old traditions derived from a pragmatic assessment of what worked for them within their own cultural design. The Mexican development model in the 1950s and 1960s promoted existing techniques without highly capitalized and intensive agricultural techniques. Working with indigenous promotores, INI introduced bilingual education in grade schools (de la Fuente 1989), crop rotation rather than expensive fertilizers, and

other “green revolution” techniques as well as collective forms of capital accumulation in cooperatives (Nash 1966).

These changes, modest as they were, stirred antagonisms within the community. During my field research from 1963 to 1966, the major opposition to these signs of modernization came from the dual hierarchy of curer-diviners. Having literate indigenous young men as officeholders replacing the ladino president and secretary who had mediated relations with the regional and national government threatened control by the elder *principales* (men who had served in all the posts in the civil-religious hierarchy) over the curers, whose power was based on age and authority and backed by the *principales*. The curer-diviners’ decline in power and authority was marked by an outbreak of witchcraft accusations and homicide in the late 1960s as young curer-diviners, lacking the authority of their predecessors, vied for position in the eroded civil-religious hierarchy.

This involuted revolution led to reconstitution of an indigenous civil and religious hierarchy of offices that validated the modernizing processes undertaken in the previous decade. Young men served in the positions in which they confronted ladino authorities in San Cristóbal, while older men occupied the posts of judges and *principales* without threatening the people’s identification as *batzil winiketik*, true men who upheld traditions expressed in rituals related to a particular history and often dramatized in Catholic religious events. By deferring to elder statesmen on ceremonial occasions and ensuring the flow of funds into the celebrations, youthful authorities did not subvert the age-ordered hierarchy, and growing differences in wealth were tolerated as long as richer members of the community accepted the more expensive cargos in the cycle of fiestas. Anthropologists working in Zinacantán (Cancian 1965) and San Juan Chamula (Gossen 1974; Rus and Wasserstrom 1980; Rus n.d.) demonstrated the key role played by the civil-religious hierarchy in validating authority while modernization processes were eroding the old bases of community integration: shared poverty and gerontocracy.

The compromises achieved in this wedding of tradition and modernization did not come about without strife in the highland communities. Periodic outbursts have occurred with increasing frequency throughout the 1990s as dissidents within these communities have objected to the corrupt tactics of their leaders. Earlier accusations of witchcraft have been updated as political parties and state development agencies have encroached on the community, but the contest for legitimation in relation to ethnic traditions continues. The Zapatista uprising fueled latent resentment against corporatist control by the PRI.

An important element in this fictive or imagined representation of a distinct ethnic identity is the gender specialization in responsibility for



adhering to custom.<sup>9</sup> Women in most highland communities still wear the distinctive *huipil* (blouse) along with skirts that identify their community of origin and sometimes the onset of menses (as in San Juan Chamula). Because marriage occurs within townships, women's dress identifies marriageable partners. It also situates the woman who wears a hand-loomed and brocaded or embroidered garment in the universe. Marta Turok captured the textual significance of huipiles in Santa María Magdalena, where the richly brocaded central panel forms a great cross over the shoulders, breast, and back (Turok 1988, 47–52). According to her informant, a diamond-shaped design in the center represents the cosmos containing the world within it, which resembles a cube with three levels, with earth in the center between the sky and the underworld. The colors of the huipil—red, black, yellow and white—represent grains of corn and cardinal points in the diamond world, while symbols of death—bat, *zopilote* (turkey buzzard), and worm—represent the pueblo. A Magdalena woman wearing her huipil thus situates herself in her cultural and natural world.

Amatenango women are less articulate about the symbolism of their dress. But extrapolating from their vision of the universe as a set of contained squares from a sacrificial hole in their houses (representing the house itself, the milpa, and the world), anthropologists can perceive them situating themselves in that universe when they wear the broad bands of red and gold forming a square around the neck. The significance of this orientation occurred to me when my *comadre* reacted with horror on seeing a Protestant proselyte offering free clothing from U.S. Goodwill dump sites to townspeople. Women's clothing in Amatenango became even more richly embroidered with silk threads on backstrap-loomed cotton from Venustiano Carranza as Amatenangueros acquired more income from pottery production for tourists in the 1980s. Women prayer-makers serving the Virgin Lucia replaced her ladino-style satin and lace garments with indigenous clothing in the 1970s as they gained greater autonomy when the pottery cooperative was functioning.

Indigenous men of the highland region tend to be less traditional in their everyday clothing than women. In the thirty-year interval be-

9. The stereotype of women as culturally conservative carriers of tradition has been attacked in feminist revisions of Latin American history, and I have tried to show how this stereotyping falsifies female participation in the labor force over time (Nash 1982). This critique of the stereotype should not obscure the fact that at certain moments in history and in many parts of the world, women are indeed charged with conserving their culture. For example, indigenous women in Mexico and Guatemala preserve the artisan traditions that identify them as distinct cultures in cooking, weaving, and pottery (Nash 1993). This tendency is in part a response to impoverishment of the domestic economy but is also a conscious priority in daily practice and in socializing children. Paradoxically, women are also in the forefront of radical adaptive change when they become the preferred labor force in transnational factories (Safa 1981) or when they engage in selling "traditional" artisan products in global markets (Nash 1993).

tween my visits to Amatenango, men stopped wearing the distinctive backstrap-loomed cotton shirts and wrapped pants in their everyday life, although they still use the *kotonchu* (tunic, literally “heart covering”), which is made in San Juan Ixcay in Guatemala and imported clandestinely, for ceremonial occasions. The men of Zinacantán and San Juan Chamula differ from most men in highland communities in the increasing elaborateness of their tunics, which are hand-loomed by women. In these communities, where men are forced to seek income in areas farther and farther away, elaboration of their distinctive tunics may represent an attempt by the women to “brand” their men.

In the 1970s, the gender-specific integration of men in commercialization and transport of products while women were cut off from the burgeoning public realm of indígena-ladino encounters began to change as women’s artisan production started to attract a wider market and higher earnings. The INI, prodded by women from artisan-producing communities, promoted the organizing of marketing cooperatives. Through these cooperatives, women gained increasing control over the money they made from pottery and weaving, which were now being sold to tourists and, through museum outlets, to a national and even international public (Nash 1993). But when Petrona, leader of the pottery cooperative in Amatenango del Valle, used the political contacts she had made through the cooperative to run for political office, her male opponent hired a killer to gun her down. She was obviously attacked as a political leader and organizer, even though many other motives related to her nontraditional behavior as a woman were advanced. After Petrona challenged the male-dominated power structure and her accusation that her opponent had misappropriated funds given to the town led to her death, other active leaders fled the town. No one dared revive the cooperative until 1995, when women in the Partido Revolucionario Democrático (PRD) gained support from the new party challenging the PRI monopoly of power through caciques (an Arawak word for leader carried to New Spain by Spaniards and now applied to indigenous authority figures).

Thus although women are becoming educated, acquiring Spanish language and writing skills, and venturing directly into markets, they are still more restricted to the home than men. The level of control exercised by men over women varies considerably in highland communities, from San Juan Chamula, where women are enjoined to walk barefoot “with their heads bowed” (Rosenbaum 1993), to Venustiano Carranza, where they reputedly browbeat men. It is clear nonetheless that their adherence to custom gives men the security to venture farther into the ladino world. Women did not vote until 1994, when the PRI, stung by accusations of fraud in the 1988 elections, insisted that the law requiring all citizens to vote be upheld. In indigenous villages co-opted by the PRI, the fine for failing to vote had been ignored with impunity

by patriarchal *caciques*. Petrona's fate made clear the danger for women in seeking public office.

Cooperatives of weavers in Chenalhó, Tenejapa, Oxchuc, and San Andrés Larainzar have often been undermined by the very development projects designed to promote their efforts. Credit from the Inter-American Development Bank remains channeled through the Desarrollo Integral de la Familia (DIF), whose titular leader is the wife of the governor of Chiapas. This agency purchases stock for its artisan retail outlets from individual producers, thus bypassing the cooperatives that provided an independent power base for women. This practice also makes it possible to keep prices low for work commissioned with individuals, given the lack of a bargaining agent to defend the women's interests.

The convoluted mixture of indigenous and Hispanic beliefs and practices that makes up "tradition" is manifested in the celebrations of Christian saints identified with the community. This custom is manifested most grandly from Carnival to Easter week in San Juan Chamula, the largest township in the region and the one closest to the ladino-dominated city of San Cristóbal de las Casas. Although the population of more than eighty thousand is distributed in many separate villages, all inhabitants have retained distinctive dress, woven of wool sheared from the flocks tended by women. All villagers contribute money for the communal festivals related to the saints' celebrations, and officials rent houses in the center during their term of office. This sacrifice of time and money guarantees them entry into positions in the civil-religious hierarchy that validates the authority of traditional *caciques*. During the religious celebrations between Carnival and Easter, the younger men, watched over by the elder officials, reenact at least seven historical events that Victoria Rifler Bricker (1981) has identified with conquest and independence uprisings. The most outstanding one is the "Caste War" (1867–1870), when Chamulans threatened to invade the governing center of San Cristóbal.<sup>10</sup> The costume worn by dancers reenacting the Chamulan rebellion is that of the French grenadier, a ladino officer in Maximilian's imperial army who allied himself with the Chamulans. During the nineteenth-century rebellion, religious devotees of a cult promising reinstatement of indigenous rule crucified a youth as their own martyred Christ in a vain attempt to gain the power of Catholic overlords (Bricker 1981). The rebellion failed, but its memory is kept alive in the drama reenacted each year. The entire event was ignored in Mexican history books and has only recently been recognized officially in school texts as an attempt to overcome the brutal repression of indigenas by ladinos.

10. Jan Rus (n.d.) questioned the official interpretation of the war as a "caste rebellion" of Indians versus ladinos because the aggression was initiated by ladinos and indigenous self-defense turned into a rebellion against intolerable oppression.

In other communities as well, religious dramatizations served as a venue for acting out subversively the latent antagonisms that have characterized relations between *indígenas* and *ladinos*, often beneath the gaze of church and state authorities who were unaware of the actors' latent intent. These "traditions" have changed along with the ethnic relations on which they were scripted. For example, in Amatenango del Valle, I witnessed the Holy Week pageant of the jailing and crucifixion of Christ in 1966 and again in 1993. I perceived a shift in dramatization from a hostile encounter between polarized ethnic groups to a hilarious contest between *indígenas* and specific "change agents." In 1966, after the *mayordomos* attended to the crucified Christ, Judas was hung from the church belfry on Saturday in order "to show the world that he killed Christ." On the surface, the attack on his swinging body seemed to enact vengeance for Judas's role in killing Christ, as it had just been described in the sermon presented by the *ladino* priest. But the indigenous portrayal of Judas—wearing sun glasses, a cigarette dangling from his lips, and dressed in a somber jacket, shirt, pants, boots, and cowboy hat—could also be read as a caricature of a *ladino rancharo*, one they might even have worked for. When the effigy was cut down from the gallows on Sunday, the *mayordomos* (caretakers of the saints) beat it with sticks in mocking castration of a clearly hated figure. Later it was carried around town on horseback—itsself an ironic act because in early colonial times only *ladinos* were allowed to ride horses (Colby 1966)—while the *mayordomos* collected money from the curers to buy liquor. Finally, the assembled audience tore the figure apart, saving the wooden mask but burning the straw body. This sequence seemed to me a subversive attack on the dominant *ladinos*, mimicking the *indígenas* own desire to kill their opponent (the *ladino* oppressor) (Nash 1968).

The overt hatred and intense attack on the effigy in the earlier ritual were absent when I witnessed the same occasion twenty-seven years later. In 1993 Judas was dressed in a red shirt, jogging pants, and Nikes, sporting a blue helmet like those worn by engineers in the field and carrying a plastic attaché case. When I asked the meaning of this costume, the *mayordomo* told me with a smile that it represented a forestry agent. Known for their penchant for soliciting bribes from town officials for violating any one of a hundred rules on cutting trees, these agents now symbolize the quintessential corrupt representative of the government. The scene was a hilarious spoof of ethnic encounter, now focused on particular agents: boys accompanied the Judas on horseback, led by a *mayordomo* on a tour of the town center. Much joking and laughing ensued when the men dismantled the figure and burned the straw. They were no longer handling a figure of fear but rather a comical interloper whom they humiliated rather than attacked.

During the lengthy interval between my visits, relations between

indigenous groups and ladinos had changed. Indigenous men were competing in local elections as members of the ruling PRI, the opposition Partido Revolucionario Democrático (PRD), or the Partido de Acción Nacional (PAN). They had become familiar with populist tactics of co-optation and knew how to reap rewards within that system. Most of the men elected as president had garnered enough money from the allotments for public works to buy television sets, trucks, or cattle. Now they were making demands on a system that had been glad to co-opt them into the corporatist framework of government. These officeholders knew how to bribe officials in the numerous overlapping agencies dealing with indigenous affairs in the Comisión de Reforma Agraria, the Secretaría de Agraria y Recursos Hidráulicos (SARH), and the agency directly concerned with indigenous affairs, the Oficina de Asuntos Indígenas. Thus the participants acted in the ladino scenes with self-assurance rather than the temerity combined with outbreaks of rage that characterized their demeanor in the past. The same men were increasingly using their power while in office to take advantage of members of their own village, allotting the best ejido lands to themselves and using state government funds for their own purposes.

In the 1970s and early 1980s, the PRI increased control over caciques and their local communities through freewheeling spending by the Programa de Desarrollo para Chiapas (PRODESCH). In the absence of strict accounting controls, these expenditures were little more than payoffs to local caciques to deliver the vote to the PRI. In Amatenango a group of bilingual teachers who were indígenas from other communities opposed the local caciques, men belonging to an extended family whose members had taken advantage of funds funneled through PRODESCH to buy themselves trucks and expand their own commercial activities. The teachers demanded the removal of one cacique whom they had identified as the assassin of Petrona, the president of the pottery cooperative. In retaliation, the caciques killed the older, most-venerated educational promotor, a native of the community. The teachers' attempt to bring the suspect to justice failed because PRI-dominated state officials were unwilling to intervene as long as the caciques continued to support the official party.

The reaction against corrupt local officials peaked in 1994. On 14 July, more than a thousand Zinacantecos seized and beat the mayor and four other Indians whom they charged with misappropriating government funds for community projects.<sup>11</sup> The same month, Chenalhó townspeople openly accused PRI-backed officials, and even in the PRI stronghold of San Juan Chamula, townspeople criticized the mayor's expulsion of compatriots and circulated rumors that he would be forced to resign. Amid the growing critique of PRI politics following the Zapatista upris-

11. *Tiempo*, 15 July 1994, 16, no. 2256 (published in San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas).

ing, the tactics used to co-opt local leaders (detailed in Cancian 1992) were no longer acceptable.

President Salinas de Gortari had introduced more efficient accounting practices when he took office in 1988, funneling international aid and discretionary public funds from the newly created PRONASOL (Programas Nacionales de Solidaridad) to reward local power brokers and curb rebellious constituencies (Nash and Kovic n.d.). During his *sexenio*, money tended to be expended where protest was greatest—except in the jungle area where there were no polling booths and the settlers never voted.

Caciques in many indigenous villages who had won control of political offices during the decade of co-optive giveaways developed a new tactic for enriching themselves: they began to expel Protestants and others whom they claimed were not following “traditions,” seizing their lands, homes, and animals. The wealth gap within indigenous communities has also widened due to the rise of trucking and other commercial ventures. Moreover, it had become clear that the growing population could not be sustained by subsistence crop production, especially in Chamula, where good farm land is even more scarce than elsewhere. Starting in 1972, the caciques instigated massive expulsions of more than fifteen thousand locals charged with being Protestants or not following tradition (Tickell 1991). Those expelled now live in the “*cinturones de miseria*” (poverty belts) on the outskirts of San Cristóbal or on land along the Pan American Highway bought by Protestant churches. Women are bearing the burden of these expulsions because they are often abandoned by their husbands after fleeing to the city and attempting to earn a living by selling artisan products of their own or those purchased wholesale (Sullivan 1992).

Urban exiles organized to protest the violation of their rights to land in their own communities in a peaceful demonstration in San Cristóbal de las Casas in 1992. In response, the Chamulan caciques threatened to fine each head of household a week’s wages unless members of the community went to the city and confronted the urban exiles with a counterdemonstration in their barrio, La Hormiga. When violence resulted, some in the crowd were injured by stones thrown, and arrests were made. This failure by the municipal authorities in San Cristóbal to punish aggressors follows a stance historically justified in terms of the autonomy of indigenous peoples, a right mainly recognized when only indígenas are the victims. Although these expulsions violate religious freedom as sanctioned by the Mexican Constitution, PRI state officials have not responded to the appeals of the expelled.

The most recent group expelled consisted of 485 men, women, and children forced to flee several Chamula hamlets in September 1993. Unlike their predecessors, however, these exiles did not establish homes in

the urban "poverty belts" but took up residence in the vacated offices of the Oficina de Asuntos Indígenas. They also acquired weapons, and when the Chamula authorities came after them in August 1994, the Protestants fired on them and killed two. After months of trying to negotiate with the interim governor of Chiapas, the families finally returned to their homes in August 1994, just before the elections. Although the leaders had not succeeded in gaining any guarantees of safety from state or local officials, they reasoned that if they waited until after the elections, they would have to wait six more years to call attention to their plight. Their situation is now being monitored by civil rights advocates and national and international media, and they have not vacated their homes as yet, even though two were killed in September. Although the interim governor of Chiapas did not provide legal guarantees or seek compensation for the exiled Protestants, his willingness to enter into negotiations with their leaders was unprecedented for a PRI official.

The involution of the political struggle in Amatenango, Chamula, and other established communities involves a class and gender struggle masked as religious and cultural "purification." Sometimes this struggle takes the form of abuse of women, alcoholism, and homicide directed against individuals in the same village (Eber 1994; Nash 1970, 1993; Rosenbaum 1993). But increasingly, it has resulted in wholesale expulsions of thousands of compatriots, as in Chamula where more than twenty thousand have been expelled since 1972. Frequently, the targets of the repression are poorer members of the community who have protested control by the caciques. Women like those who left Chamula only to be abandoned by their husbands once they had established residence in San Cristóbal or those from Amatenango who were forced to flee when their cooperative leader was assassinated have now become activists in changes that are disrupting domestic units as well as communities (Nash 1993; Sullivan 1992).

This dominance by a few leaders in the center has engendered resentment on the part of community members who are excluded from the indigenous power structure within their own township. Sometimes this resentment has been channeled in the opposition of center versus the peripheral hamlets and *aldeas*, as in Amatenango. At other times, it is expressed in the opposition of wealthy families who have taken funds and resources coming into the municipio versus the poor who do not have access to offices or public funds, as in Zinacantán. This opposition is now expressed in party affiliation as the highland villages, inspired by the Zapatista uprising, seek redress for the many injuries and abuses they have suffered. Following the elections in August 1994, PRD militants seized town halls in fifty-seven communities in the state of Chiapas where they had strength and declared the right to autonomy in the choice of authority guaranteed in Article 39 of the constitution.

Amatenango was one the municipios where PRD followers took over the town hall two days after PRI officials assumed office in the formal ceremony on New Year's Day, which began with a mass in the church and continued with the keys being handed over to the new officials and a procession with banners across the plaza. The town offices of president and *sindico* have always been held by residents of the nucleated center, with residents of the aldeas holding only judgeships and police duties. These officials are paid less and have no access to funds coming into the township. Following the takeover, a plebiscite was held, and women's participation was encouraged by both parties. The resulting vote (892 for the PRI to 1,095 for the PRD) was closer than in August, when the PRI got slightly over one-half of the votes. Although PRI officials chose to consider all PRD supporters as "outsiders" or members of the hamlets, I recognized many center residents. PRD supporters characterized the opposition as being under the sway of Protestants, although they were not a numerically predominant force, despite the conversion of the mayor.

Amatenango's rebellion reflects the currents of change affecting the corporate communities due to the unsettled conflict in the jungle. New cohorts are demanding a voice within as well as outside the boundaries erected to defend ethnic divisions. Women, who constituted the majority (600 of 1,095 votes for the PRD), may become a decisive force as male power blocs seek their support. The stimulus for change emanating from the uprising is being channeled through ancient divisions as the new course of action is being set.

One of the few townships where the classical struggle between *campesinos* and large landowners has continued to rage since the eighteenth century is Venustiano Carranza, where large landowners prevented implementation of land reform long after the revolution. Unlike the lands belonging to indigenous communities at higher altitudes, the lands in the township are more fertile and are irrigated by the rivers running through the town. The Organización de Campesinos "Emiliano Zapata" (OCEZ) staged protests there and also dramatized the campesinos' plight with a hunger strike in San Cristóbal and the state capital of Tuxtla Gutiérrez, all to no avail.

Shortly after the Revolution of 1910, the caciques who were to dominate the town for the next half-century seized the best land and ruled the civil government, preventing the passage of revolutionary reforms. When Indians tried to seize land according to the agrarian reform in 1923, the town mayor imprisoned the ejido commissioner. This violent pattern was repeated in 1929, when leaders of land seizures were killed, and again in 1945. In May 1976, soldiers were sent in UNICEF vans commandeered by the government to put down a protest, and in September, soldiers using these vans photographed campesinos in the Casa del Pueblo.



They were forced to kneel and make a victory sign while holding machine guns placed in their hands to prove that they were part of an armed uprising (Guzmán 1977). In 1974, the Departamento de Asuntos Agrarios y Colonización had notified cattlemen to abandon lands officially granted to Indians, but the order was ignored. Construction of the Angostura hydroelectric dam reduced the land available for peasants, who received seven million pesos (equaling seven thousand new pesos). Fifteen campesinos were killed in a fight in August 1984, and others were tortured while in prison.<sup>12</sup> Throughout the governorship of Castellanos and his successor, Patrocinio González Garrido, conflicts over land embroiled hundreds of campesinos and resulted in scores of deaths.

My direct knowledge of the conflict began in June 1991, shortly after I visited the town. At that time, the cane growers of the township of Venustiano Carranza confronted the new owners of the sugar refinery in Pujilic (a settlement within the township) over failure to pay adequate prices for the growers' sugar, and they were fired on by a detachment of military police sent from barracks just outside San Cristóbal. The refinery had been denationalized in 1986 in the wave of privatizations required by the International Monetary Fund to renegotiate the national debt, and the new owners, a consortium of Japanese and Mexican owners, retained ownership just long enough to sell the reserve sugar supplies in the warehouses. Meanwhile, government efforts to stabilize the regional economy by offering subsidies to local farmers in the form of low-interest loans and low-cost fertilizers and pesticides were stopped. These events all contributed to the sense of injustice arising among indígenas as they watch the area's rich resources being confiscated by the government, which has consistently favored wealthy businessmen and large land-owners in its neoliberal reforms.

Reforms in government spending brought an even greater threat to local autonomy: the so-called reform of the Reforma Agraria. Corporate landholdings guaranteed by Article 27 of the Constitution of 1917 are again being threatened, as they were during the Porfiriato, by changes in the agrarian law. A new law passed in 1992 allows for the sale of ejido (collectively held) lands as well as for joint ventures with private enterprises. The law was modified in the negotiations that took place while the act was being discussed, adding guarantees that indigenous ejido lands would not be alienated, but most indigenous groups are aware that if *ejidatarios* are not able to repay loans made in joint enterprises on communal lands, banks could take the lands.

Breakdown of the fragile balance between co-optive spending and outright repression in Mexico came with the 1994 New Year's guerrilla

12. See the "Declaración de los Presos Políticos en Chiapas, al Gobernador Absalón Castellanos Domínguez, Tuxtla Gutiérrez, 25 de agosto 1984," documents in INAREMAC.

insurrection that challenged the legitimacy of the ruling PRI. By resorting to armed force, Mayas in Mexico seemed to be paralleling the developments in Guatemala since the 1970s (Carmack 1984; Jonas 1984). Subsequent developments in the conflict zone, however, indicate that this apparent similarity obscures different premises and an alternative path to achieving political goals.

#### ETHNIC CONSCIOUSNESS IN LOWLAND CHIAPAS

Indigenous culture survives more easily *in situ*. The Mayan landscape reveals shrines built to ancestors and Christian saints that often mask an indigenous deity identified with a Christian counterpart. During the annual cycle of religious festivals, rituals carried out at these shrines imprint their significance on each succeeding generation. For example, on the third day of May, the Day of the Cross in the Christian calendar, *Amatenangueros* accompany the captains of the fiesta cycle to the hill of the ancestors. They are believed to live in a cave there, coming out to climb a precipitous rock spire in order to keep vigil over the town and make certain that no evil enters it (Nash 1970). *Zinacantecos* worship at altars set out in the open at each water hole, from which they derive a spiritual relation to the lineage ancestors and the spirits inhabiting the environs. Each cave and hill are the potential residence of spirits who must be propitiated to ensure survival (Vogt 1976a). Inhabitants of *Chenalhó*, for example, can identify much of their mythic history in the surrounding landscape (Arias 1985).

This kind of situational identity is lost in migrations that upset the sense of living in a sacred environment. Yet ethnic identification persists even in the inhospitable areas of the *Lacandón* jungle and on the rocky hilltops, which were previously considered unfit for occupation until purchased by dissident Protestants forced to flee their communities. But the meaning of such situational identity has been transformed for both the bearers and the state. Mexican and Guatemalan Mayan migrants into the lowlands of the *Lacandón* jungle and the border area have found a new basis for identity that relies on communalistic norms forged in the reconstituting of their ethnicity.

#### *Mexican Colonizers in the Lacandón Jungle*

The jungle began to be colonized soon after independence as private companies started to exploit the land for lumber and oil and to introduce cattle and coffee. Few indigenous settlers arrived until after World War II, when *indígenas* from nearby townships in the department of *Ocosingo* who were seeking land were followed by *Tzeltales* from *Palenque*. Four colonies were established—*Nueva Esperanza*, *El Lacan-*

dón, 11 de Julio, and Ricardo Flores Magón—during the presidencies of Adolfo López Mateos and Gustavo Díaz Ordaz, both of whom emphasized ejidos over large landholders to promote basic production of subsistence crops (Arizpe, Paz, and Velázquez 1993, 82). Colonizers after 1970 came from Guerrero, Puebla, Oaxaca, Michoacán, and Chiapas. After being granted fifty hectares of land, the ejidatarios received cattle credits and a promise that the state would buy the wood they cut. These policies promoted devastation of the forest at a rate so alarming that the situation attracted world attention. In 1972 the Mexican government decreed that more than six hundred thousand hectares would be ceded to sixty-six Lacandón heads of families, knowing that it would be easier to bypass controls if concessions were mediated by indígenas. Simultaneous delineation of a biosphere reserve in the central-west jungle impeded the sale of lands in a restricted area. Despite the fact that colonizers have experienced increasing aridity and heat accompanied by high winds and torrential rains as the jungle disappeared, some still resent the government's urging them to save the forest (Arizpe, Paz, and Velázquez 1993, 123).

The experience of the colony named Marqués de Comillas in the department of Ocosingo encompasses most of the problems affecting indígenas in their new environment. Four ejido plots located in the Montañas de Oriente on the banks of the Usumacinta were carved out of the jungle in 1963. Hemmed in by the large Lacandón land grants and the Reserva Biosfera Montes Azules, new immigrants are now encroaching on colonies established prior to 1972, when the first land grant was made. The region now includes Choles, Zoques, Nahuas, Chinantecos, Tojolobales, Tzeltales, and Tzotziles along with mestizos and ladinos who have settled on ejido land.

The lack of clear policies on forest exploitation and other natural resources has occasioned many political conflicts in the Lacandón jungle. Contradictory goals are being pursued in the colonies settled by indigenous inhabitants versus those where mestizo settlers predominate. Arturo Coutino Ferrera (1987) found that in the indigenous colonies, indígenas in Flor de Cacao and Nueva Unión show a strict respect for the forest reserves, while mestizos are cutting the forest with chain saws for commercial sales or burning woodlands for cattle *fincas* in their settlements. The presence of employees of PEMEX (Petroleros Mexicanos) distorts market prices for local buyers. Also, indigenous colonizers have often gotten into disputes with the cattle ranchers, oil explorers, and the state.

The ambiguities and contradictions inherent in government policies led to a protest march in 1991 by hundreds of colonizers in Marqués de Comillas. The government ruled that trees could be cut but could not be sold for lumber. When colonizers cut down the trees to plant their crops, government trucks arrived without warning, loaded up the wood, and carried it off to sell. Many of the various groups colonizing the area

objected, and more than 150 individuals began a march to Mexico City to protest the corruption of the government. They were met by 700 military troops stationed in the area, and men, women, and children were imprisoned in Palenque and Tuxtla Gutiérrez jails and held incommunicado for several days, without the food offered by relief agencies. The coincidental meeting of a United Nations group in Mexico at the time of the jailing led to a declaration calling for their release. Despite this experience, the same group re-formed several months later to protest the government's failure to uphold the terms of the agreement (Nash and Sullivan 1992).

Such protests have demonstrated the political potential of these communities. Despite the diversity of Mayan linguistic groups in this new setting, they have shown a greater ability to coordinate political action than the corporate communities they left behind. The general poverty of the colonists contrasts with the growing differences in wealth in corporate communities, where "tradition" is invoked to validate the arbitrary rule of caciques, and the shared poverty creates a class solidarity that reinforces ethnic identity as *indígenas* rather than as members of distinct communities.

The change in Article 27 regarding claims to land is affecting the colonizers in the Lacandón jungle more than the *indígenas* in corporate communities. For those who lacked title, it dashed the hope that they would ever obtain legal rights to land some had occupied for decades, the same land promised when they migrated there twenty years ago. Colonizers who have titles to their lands are now more prone to sell because they became indebted while trying to establish their new homesteads. The new law also re-creates the conditions for *latifundismo*, thus breaking the social contract established by the Mexican Revolution. José Luis Calvo claims in *La disputa para la tierra* that via corporations operating through contracts with communities, the maximum amount of land held can be multiplied up to twenty-five times above the legal limit of a hundred hectares of irrigated land per person.<sup>13</sup> With titleholders being able to include allotments for children and spouses as part of a single domain, cattlemen in the Lacandón rain forest have been able to increase their holdings to as many as 250 hectares of irrigated land, 20,000 hectares of wooded land, and up to 300,000 of pasturage.

Neil Harvey (1994) summarized the policies of President Salinas that precipitated the rebellion: the withdrawal of subsidies in the form of credit; cutbacks or discontinuation of government programs providing technical aid and marketing assistance; privatization of nationalized companies that often sustained regional economies; and the elimination of price subsidies. In Chiapas, these policies had negative effects on output as well as the environment because *campesinos* tried to increase the

13. For a review of this work, see *Proceso*, no. 905, 7 Mar. 1994, p. 18.

cultivated area to make up for their losses, thus contributing to deforestation and soil depletion (Harvey 1994, 12). Nor did increased expenditures of PRONASOL money in the jungle on social welfare programs, which grew by 130 percent in 1989–1990, make up for the losses in production caused by neoliberal policies (Harvey 1994, 18).

The population of 200,000 settlers in the vast tract that was once the Lacandón *selva* is now split between the majority of those who support the Zapatistas and those who are neutral. The cattle ranchers have opposed all colonizers even before the uprising and have tried to drive them out or kill them by hiring *guardias blancas*. None have taken a stand against the Zapatistas, although thirty families who had converted to Protestantism went into self-exile in Guatemala in June 1994. Others have retreated to refugee camps in towns near the conflict zone, such as Altamirano and Las Margaritas. The 60,000 inhabitants of the “conflict zone” (where the Zapatistas have a majority of supporters) are clearly identified with the movement and are encircled by the army, which limits their movements beyond the military outposts. Their ability to sell their crops has also been hurt: they were forced to sell their cash crops like coffee and fruits from the last harvest at a tenth of the normal retail price that settlers receive.

In June 1994, I visited Flor del Río, a Tojolobal town in the *municipio* of Las Margaritas in the territory held by the Zapatistas, with María Eugenia Santana who has worked there in an applied anthropology program for the past four years. The colonizers arrived in 1972. The elders speak Tojolobal, but the younger members have lost their Mayan language. They farm their land in common, with men and women working side by side cultivating and harvesting their crops, which are then distributed collectively or sold in common. The houses were even more miserable than those of the Guatemalan refugees I visited, and the public buildings clearly had not benefited from PRONASOL funding. Like most of the jungle colonies, the community has no clinic, and medical service in the neighboring town offers few medicines and only sporadic visits by a doctor. The high power lines visible overhead send no feeder lines into the village. The school has one teacher for over a hundred children and was closed due to his absence when we arrived, a situation described to me as typical.

Even more poorly served was Pathuitz, a community about two hours by car from Ocosingo (in Zapatista territory), which we visited on election day. The schoolhouse and town offices were more wretched than those in any of the communities of Guatemalan exiles after twenty-five years of settlement. We saw no signs of traditional artisan production in the houses or yards, although the wooden houses were thatched in the same manner as reconstructions of housing in Classic Maya sites. Most of the women were monolingual. Disarming in their bright synthetic dresses

and aprons, with rows of metal barrettes flashing like ammunition clips in their hair, these young women were clearly constituents of the Zapatista army arrayed at the Convención Nacional Democrática. Their camera-shyness related more to the ongoing danger that they would be identified by army security forces than to the sense of *vergüenza* (shame) cultivated among women in Hispanic society.

When the Zapatistas opened the area for the convention held 6–9 August 1994, more than 5,000 delegates and 600 press representatives witnessed the impoverished conditions and experienced them firsthand when they camped on the ground cleared for the occasion. The introduction by Subcomandante Marcos of the “army” brought tears along with applause as a few hundred of the “soldiers” marched on the cement walkway bordering the grandstand, painstakingly constructed by the colonizers for their guests. The few soldiers in uniforms of a sort, masked and bearing weapons, were followed by young men and women often bearing sticks. The last group to file by had tied white binding on the barrels of their rifles, a symbol of their search for peace. Women, many of whom had babies in carrying cloths, wore aprons over printed cotton or synthetic dresses much like those described by B. Traven in his novel of the jungle written in the 1930s, *El puente en la selva*. The flimsy nylon kerchiefs masking their faces and wooden sticks carried like arms symbolized their new status as revolutionaries. Except for the roads constructed for the benefit of cattle ranchers and oil explorers, the villages have no more amenities in the mid-1990s than those found by B. Traven while living among indígenas in the wilderness sixty years ago.

In an impassioned speech, Subcomandante Marcos invoked patriotism, the desire of the Zapatistas to become full citizens in civil society, and their commitment to peaceful negotiations. The discussions by participants in the Convención Nacional Democrática that preceded the trip to the jungle in San Cristóbal introduced the themes of cultural autonomy and the tolerance of differences, dignity, and justice. The verbal messages contained nothing new, but the articulation of many different groups who made up the convention and the interaction taking place at the discussion tables in San Cristóbal and later in the jungle presented an alternative political process. Given the PRI's monopoly on power, little hope existed that the issues could be resolved in the convention or in elections on 21 August, but the spirit of compromise, unity, and democracy keynoted by Pablo González Casanova in his speech in the natural amphitheater gave listeners hope for fundamental change. The Convención demonstrated the possibility of incorporating all ethnic groups into the democratic agenda, an objective never attained by the revolutions of the past three centuries.

The uprising has already affected the Mexican political process. Even before the negotiations in March, President Salinas de Gortari agreed

to provide economic aid to the region, recognize human rights provisions for the insurgents and their supporters, and limit campaign spending in the coming elections. As a step toward overcoming discrimination against indígenas in the region, he dismissed acting governor Elmar Setzer Marseille and his predecessor Patrocinio González Garrido, who had held the post of interior minister in the nation's capital until recent events revealed the depth of resentment against his suppression of protest movements while he was governor. The state and federal governments also agreed to assist agriculturalists adversely affected by NAFTA and promised a series of economic and social improvements to include increased medical attention, electrification, and improved bilingual schooling. But the PRI has not yet addressed the issues of land redistribution and title to land allocated to colonizers that has been encroached on with impunity by oil, lumber, and cattle enterprises. Negotiations have not been resumed. After the elections, the Zapatistas warned that violence would erupt again if new governor Eduardo Robledo Rincón, whom they claim was fraudulently elected, did not step down.<sup>14</sup> Later, on 18 September 1994, they announced that the Mexican army had doubled its troops in Chiapas. This claim was denied by the Mexican Departamento de Defensa, which stated that troops had not been increased above the 20,000 stationed there since January.<sup>15</sup> By October, it was evident nevertheless that troops had indeed been increased,<sup>16</sup> and Mexican paramilitary troops were rumored to be infiltrating the Zapatista area.

### *Guatemalan Exiles along the Southern Mexican Border*

Chiapas was part of the province of Guatemala throughout the colonial period, and the choice by elites to align the region with Mexico was made years after independence from Spain in 1821. The resulting border divides Mayas who have more in common with each other than with Mexico's indigenous peoples to the north. They also share a similar history in their relations with the national government. After independence, liberal policies pursued in both Guatemala and Mexico were aimed at promoting export production and a free market by breaking up corporate landholdings. Because of their limited resources, however, neither government could overcome the power of regional caudillos (military leaders) for half a century. Díaz Ordaz's counterpart in Guatemala was General Justo Rufino Barrios, who became president after the liberal revolution in 1871. He permitted indigenous communities to retain limited allotments of communal lands because cultivation of small plots allowed

14. Anthony DePalma, *New York Times*, 8 Sept. 1994.

15. Anthony DePalma, *New York Times*, 18 Sept. 1994.

16. Tim Golden, *New York Times*, 18 Oct. 1994.

them to survive while forcing them to work for the abysmal wages paid in the coffee and fruit plantations (McCreery 1990; Smith 1984a, 1984b).

Mayas in the border area have always moved back and forth across the artificial line separating them. During the Mexican Revolution of 1910, many indigenous Chiapanecos fled to Guatemala. The flow reversed starting in the 1920s, as 10,000 to 20,000 Guatemalans crossed the border periodically to work in coffee harvests. After the coup in 1954 by Carlos Castillo Armas, their numbers swelled to 60,000 (Hamilton and Chinchilla 1991). Some of these indigenous and mestizo workers settled in Chiapas, blending into Mexican society or retaining their distinctive cultures (Hamilton and Chinchilla 1991). The seasonal exodus of indígenas leaving Guatemala for Mexico increased in the late 1970s and reached a flood in 1981 and 1982, as political exiles augmented the flow. In a startling reversal in June 1994, 30 families of Mexican Mayas, most of them Protestant converts, joined Guatemalan exiles who had returned to their country because they were unwilling to face the dangers of living in the conflict zone in the Lacandón selva.

Increased settlement in the frontier regions on the Guatemalan side of the border paralleled that on the Mexican side in the 1970s as Mam-speaking indígenas began to colonize the jungle area of the Ixil triangle. Pressure on land had been growing since the coup led by Castillo Armas in 1954, after which lands granted under the Land Reform Act of 1946 were returned to their previous owners and all peasant cooperatives were dissolved (Kinzer and Schlesinger 1981). With households becoming more dependent on the market, few of them could grow more than half of their own food needs. Most relied on seasonal wage labor on export-oriented plantations and artisan production (Smith 1984b, 147). Rural Guatemalans with no land were forced to work in highly exploitative conditions.

Attacks on indigenous peoples intensified in the late 1970s, peaking under General Romeo Lucas García (1978–1982) and his successor, Efraín Ríos Montt (1982–1983). The purpose of disarticulating the populations that served as the social basis for the insurgents became increasingly clear during the Lucas García presidency, when 5000 indigenous Guatemalan campesinos were captured and assassinated. Ríos Montt launched a scorched-earth policy from April to November 1982, destroying harvests and entire villages in some thirty collective massacres (Jonas, McCaughan, and Martínez 1984, 1). In the ensuing conflict, the Guatemalan army forced more than a hundred thousand peasants off land they legally owned, and thousands of activists were assassinated by paramilitary groups organized by the Guatemalan army with the help of U.S. counterinsurgency forces (Jonas, McCaughan, and Martínez 1984). Indígenas were displaced from their homes and forced into “model villages” under militarized regimentation. Patrols of the countryside initiated under Ríos Montt continued under President Oscar Humberto Mejía Victores



(1983–1985), especially in the Ixil triangle in the department of El Quiché (adjacent to Chiapas), where 400 hamlets were destroyed (Warren 1993). Those who claim that indígenas are the unwitting victims of two armies—the Guatemalan military and the guerrilla—ignore or reject the evidence of researchers intimately associated with the region.<sup>17</sup> According to Carol Smith, massacres “were carried out by the state against unarmed, non-politicized, rural people located either in zones planned for future capitalist development or in zones thought to have considerable potential commercial development” (1984b, 151). Quoting S. Davis and J. Hodson, she adds that anyone perceived as Indian, especially an Indian traditionalist, was also targeted.

Thus when class divisions were beginning to fragment the indigenous populations in Mexico, the extreme poverty and genocidal policies of the Guatemalan government forced more than 150,000 indigenous Guatemalans to flee into exile in the border states of Mexico. The alternative, as Beatriz Manz indicated, was to be relocated by the Guatemalan national army in militarized communities or risk death (Manz 1988, 145ff). The political refugees who tried to enter Mexico in 1980 were not accepted until the end of 1982, when they gained the cooperation of the Mexican government, the Catholic Church, and international agencies who assisted the families in relocating along the border. Some joined Mexican communities in the jungle area.

Multiple massacres and destruction of aldeas and communities by the Guatemalan army disarticulated the indigenous communities (Green 1992). But this outcome had the unplanned consequence of overcoming the diversity of indigenous communities (Escalona and Nava 1992, 202) and reactivated the communitarian and regional exchanges that had also been part of their tradition as they adapted to the new setting (Watanabe 1992). Re-creating a community requires space to build its houses and cultivate crops, undertakings in which communities were assisted by Mexican and international agencies, but it also requires a basis for rebuilding their identity. Some Guatemalan indígenas brought marimbas and introduced their religious festivals into the communities where they settled. Often they named the camps after aldeas or cooperatives of origin or the linguistic group to which they belonged (Escalona and Nava 1992, 203). With funding received from international sources, they soon outpaced their Mexican neighbors in the health and education services organized by promoters among the refugees. Agents of the Comisión Mex-

17. Stoll's (1993) image of indigenous Guatemalans caught between two armies is not reflected in the narratives of Guatemalans who fled into exile starting in 1981. Manz recounts their stories of gruesome killings, unheard-of torture, and destruction of entire villages by the Guatemalan army (Manz 1987, 146). The Guatemalan Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres arose as an alternative course for resisting genocide. Analysts with divergent theoretical leanings concur on the precipitating causes of the violence (Smith 1984a; Warren 1993).

icana para la Ayuda de los Refugiados (COMAR) drew on skills of the Guatemalan refugees in bicultural education and artisan programs and were impressed with the creative results (Manz 1988, 148).

I witnessed this remarkable reconstitution in 1991 in Pozas Ricas and Porvenir, two border communities. Pozas Ricas includes hundreds of exiled Guatemalans who are living peacefully with Mexican indígenas and ladinos. They work in the milpas of both ethnic groups at half the minimum wage of five U.S. dollars a day. Guatemalan merchants travel throughout the area regularly, selling Guatemalan artisan products like traditional tie-dyed skirts from Totonicapan and other commercial craft items. Pozas Ricas is unusual in having a clinic staffed by dedicated doctors and health care agents who serve the surrounding area, including those Guatemalans who risk crossing the border illegally to use the clinic. Exile communities like Porvenir that received aid from UN and Catholic relief agencies have built their own schools and churches, where lay people conduct classes and religious services. Their programs started to reflect issues of ethnic revindication and a search for their own cultural roots as they began to make themselves the subject of the histories they taught the children.

More than 20,000 of the 150,000 Guatemalan Mayas who fled across the border have remained in Chiapas, even after relocation of the exiles in Quintano Roo and Campeche in 1984 and the repatriation movement led by Rigoberta Menchú in January 1993. Their presence sharpens competition for resources and in the labor force but has also led to some positive exchanges. In their struggle to overcome the alienating experience of military repression and exile, the Guatemalan indigenous exiles have certainly reinvigorated the Mexican Mayan sense of a distinct identity. Ana Maria Garza Caligaris has studied ejidatario attitudes in Nuevo San Juan Chamula, Nuevo Huixtán, and Nuevo Matzam regarding Guatemalan exiles in their midst (Garza Caligaris 1992). Mexican ejidatarios view themselves in a similar position vis-à-vis the expansion of capitalism in the south of Mexico. Like the Guatemalans, they too are trying to escape having to work on the plantations, and they too find themselves harassed by military and immigration agents who treat them little better than the Guatemalans (Garza Caligaris 1992, 207). The suspicion that Guatemalans living in sanctuary in Chiapas may have instigated the uprising (a claim denied by the Zapatistas) has exacerbated the prejudicial treatment of both groups by the augmented troops in the area (Earle 1994). This shared persecution has undoubtedly sharpened indigenous awareness of the common problems they face as Indians. Once the Guatemalans arrived with the permission of the Mexican government, the Mexicans already settled in the area accepted them in their midst. Few Mexicans were taken in by the claim that the new arrivals were guerrillas and have judged them instead by their willingness to work and their cooperativeness in communal affairs.

## CONCLUSIONS

Cultural autonomy, defended throughout five hundred years of conquest and colonization, is a powerful resource in providing the ideological context in which indígenas are framing their new world. Theoreticians who focus exclusively on identity forget the struggles for bread and land in which it was forged and thus bring a Eurocentric perspective to their analyses of such movements (see Laclau and Mouffe 1985; Laclau 1990; Slater 1992). Theories that emphasize culture and identity (especially Hall 1986; Escobar 1992) amplify understanding of how and why individuals and groups become actors in history, but their success also derives from the contextualization in the reality that indígenas endure. As subordinated groups within the capitalist framework of production and exchange, indígenas need protection for their land against further privatization in order to allow the collective strategies with which they have defended themselves to flourish (Stephen 1994)—but they also need the credit, technology, and modern techniques that will enable them to sustain growing populations with limited land resources (Collier 1993). They need access to information and the skills to use it for their own ends—but they also need a democratic arena where their distinct aims and values will be tolerated by ethnically distinct groups.

Appeals to ethnic cohesiveness may be effective in times of political crisis, but the distinctive histories of Chiapas Mayas work against the possibilities of pan-indigenous movements at this time. The contrast between highland Mayan communities and the settlers in the lowland jungle and frontier areas illustrates the different experiences of these diverse Mayan populations that have shaped future regional alliances in terms of ethnic identity. Highland communities split by growing class differences have used alliances with the ruling PRI to take advantage of their own townspeople, expelling some in the name of a specious tradition and seizing public funds for private use. These wealthier individuals are the beneficiaries of gains from the Revolution of 1910, from which other Mayan populations—especially those who have colonized the jungle—are being systematically excluded. Wealthier highlanders enjoy a degree of local autonomy and are governed by officials indigenous to the community, while many selva communities are governed by cattlemen who are mestizos or ladinos. Moreover, highland communities' access to public funds has made those in power insensitive to the rebels' claims and less committed to regional movements for land. In the lowland areas, indigenous and mestizo campesinos participate to a greater extent in regional associations such as the Central Independiente de Obreros Agrícolas y Campesinos (CIOAC), the Unión de Ejidos Kiptikta Lekubtesel Unidos por la Fuerza en Chiapas, and the Unión de Uniones Ejidales y Grupos Campesinos Solidarios de Chiapas (UU). These associations operate indepen-

dently of the PRI-controlled Confederación Nacional de Campesinos (CNC). Simojovel in the northern highlands and Venustiano Carranza in the central highlands, which contain good agricultural lands held by large landowners, manifest the same willingness as settlers in the selva to participate in regional movements for revindication.

At this point in history, Guatemalan Mayas in exile have found accommodation within Mexican colonies in the selva. Mexican Mayas, like the cattlemen and plantation owners along the border and in the Lacandón selva, are taking advantage of this very cheap labor force. But unlike the powerful landowners, Mexican Mayas have problems in common with the exiles due to their marginalization from the centers of political and economic power. Like Guatemalan Mayas, they have separated themselves from invidious ranking systems operating in and among highland Maya communities. Whereas highland indígenas farm ejido lands individually and even scheme to expel compatriots to take advantage of their plots, lowland Mayas in the colonizing area have adapted communalistic forms of work and redistribute harvests in the jungle. They have initiated peaceful protests over the past decade, calling for legalized claims on land, an end to corruption in government, and resistance to new laws that permit privatization of communal land and resources. All these protests have met with armed repression. Encounters with armed troops and police agents ordered into action by the former governor of Chiapas, General Patrocinio González Garrido, and his predecessor, General Absalón Castellanos Domínguez, aggravated the frustration that erupted in the uprising on the eve of 1994. Mexican Mayas consequently are sympathetic to the protests of Guatemalan Mayas against state policies in both countries that have excluded them from meaningful participation in decisions regarding the global processes affecting their lives.

Despite these similarities, the goals of the Zapatistas are not phrased in terms of pan-Indian political revindication, as are those of some leaders of Guatemalan Mayas who are involved in repatriating exiles to their country (Menchú 1992). The support of international agencies in sponsoring the return of the exiles to Guatemala (Manz 1988) and gaining the release of Mexican Mayas jailed in past protests (Nash and Sullivan 1992) will undoubtedly reinforce a tendency (seen especially in South America) in which indígenas seek recognition as nations within the new world order. Indigenous commitment to a worldview distinct from that of ladinos still animates Mexican and Guatemalan Mayas, but few Mexican Mayas have entrusted their destiny to international movements.

The absence of this kind of rhetoric is notable in the official reports from the Convención Nacional Democrática called by the Zapatistas. In their search for alternative paths of development, the delegates emphasized the need for changes in national political processes in rhetoric in-

voking patriotism and commitment to revolutionary goals in the Mexican tradition. Although the discussions preceding the meeting in the jungle called for local autonomy, dignity, and justice for persons of distinct cultures, they did not echo the clamor for hemispheric resistance set forth in the pamphlet *Quinientos años de resistencia indígena* at the 1991 meeting preparing for the quincentennial year in Guatemala.<sup>18</sup> The Zapatistas' new vision of federalism is that of a multinational state with territorial autonomy for indigenous peoples as part of the Mexican nation. The cultural autonomy they call for would make a living reality of the bicultural policies now part of the rhetoric of the Secretaría de Educación Pública (SEP). But their perspective remained tied to the national context. Native Americans from the United States attending the National Democratic Convention held by the Zapatistas in August 1994 complained privately that the convention lacked an orientation toward a distinctive indigenous mobilization for change.

Clearly, individualized production on small ejido plots, which formerly enabled Mayas to carry on their distinctive cultures, is not viable in an increasingly integrated world market. Neoliberal policies have removed the subsidies that promoted entry for indigenous producers in commercial enterprises in past sexenios. Mayas have demonstrated a talent for reclaiming collective cultural practices amid far-reaching development processes in Mexico (Collier 1990, 198; Nigh 1992) and in the face of massive military attacks in Guatemala (compare Smith 1984b and Warren 1992). Mayas are now generating innovative solutions as they change enough to remain identified as Mayas. The new "associative corporations" that provide collective control over commercialization, technical assistance, and redistribution of profits (Nigh 1992) are providing a new model that allows the combined efforts of household labor engaged in a community-wide collective enterprise to deal with the vagaries of the market.

But even with their more modest agenda, the Zapatistas represent the threat that subsistence systems might pose to global trade agreements heading policy agendas in Mexico and around the world. The generally favorable attention that the strike has attracted in the world press attests to the development of a global moral community that may set standards for more egalitarian redistribution of profits from production.

Theorists studying European movements exclude such "Third World

18. Resolutions of the Comisión sobre la Posición de los Pueblos Indígenas ante el V Centenario 1992 opposed modernization, privatization, subordination to U.S., Israeli, Japanese, and European imperialism (meaning seizure of lands or natural resources), and the imposition of multinational companies "converting us into exploited workers of industrial enterprises and plantations." Dedicating itself to the struggle for agrarian reform and rights to education and health services, the group appealed to the United Nations to recognize the right to self-determination of indigenous communities.

struggles . . . between more clearly demarcated camps" (Laclau and Mouffe 1985, 166). But their emphasis on the significance of the symbolic function of such movements as they experiment "with direct practice of alternative frameworks of meaning" (Melucci 1988, 248, as cited in Escobar 1992, 405) strikes a resonant chord in analyzing this first postmodern movement in the Third World. As the Zapatistas have shown, despite their lack of military force to win an armed struggle, the space they have occupied in international news media has magnified the stage on which they are symbolically enacting guerrilla warfare (Nash n.d.). Their firearms—no more than wooden sticks or plastic toys for some of the soldiers—evidence the desperation of their actions, and yet their very existence has caused the Mexican stock market to plunge and has brought about more reform in the Mexican political process than has been witnessed in the past sixty-five years of PRI dominance.

New social movement theorists remind anthropologists of the cultural context of political and economic struggles that is intrinsic to good ethnography, which many have acknowledged even when the discipline was mired in colonialism. But new social movement theorists also err in making the same universalizing premises that its proponents criticize in Marxism. Some have rescued the best of Marx, specifically his emphasis on particular historical contexts demonstrated in *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, by inventing some changes to make it acceptable to the new discourse. The proposition by John and Jean Comaroff that ethnicity emerges out of specific historical forces that are simultaneously structural and cultural situates the experience of ethnicity in a field of forces that allows analysis of the many distinct manifestations of ethnicity in an area like Chiapas (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992, 50). Comparison of these experiences in highland corporate communities, where caciques have until recently been reinforcing their appropriation of diminishing resources by brandishing their claims to ethnic traditions, with those of lowland small plot farmers and laborers opposing powerful agroindustrial interests in their midst, indicates that both groups are engaged in ethnic reassertion. But while highland caciques reinforce the power of entrenched political and economic interests, lowland smallholders and laborers demonstrate an alternative to ethnic stratification. For the campesinos of indigenous origin who have moved into the jungle, ethnicity is not the irreducible substratum for action but an identification that provides collective strength and a sense of self denied by the dominant ladinos. The indígenas work with poor mestizos who share common problems, and their ultimate goals are pluri-ethnicity within democratic structures. As highland Indians join the forces in rebellion against the monopoly of power by the PRI, they are upsetting the old power structures and creating new forms of democratic participation. They thus present one of the few alternatives that offer hope in this postmodern world.

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