Practicing autonomy: Zapatismo and decolonial liberation[1]

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Abstract

The Zapatista rebellion in Chiapas has contributed to the construction of indigenous autonomy in Mexico, a process which shares similar features to the struggles of social movements throughout Latin America. This article examines how autonomy became a central demand for the Zapatistas, the practices that they have instituted and the challenges they face. The analysis draws on recent debates over the political impact of indigenous movements, including the struggle for new models of post-liberal citizenship, the limitations of neoliberal multiculturalism and the adoption of decolonial forms of resistance. The paper argues that Zapatismo can be understood as an expression of decolonial liberation in which autonomy is constructed through the recreation of social ties in local, national and international spaces. In doing so, Zapatismo represents a political and theoretical shift that calls for greater attention to the processes and practices that can sustain autonomy.

*Keywords*: Zapatismo, autonomy, indigenous peoples

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On January 1, 1994 the uprising by the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) in the southern Mexican state of Chiapas gained national and international attention. More than three thousand indigenous people occupied seven towns in the central highlands and Lacandon jungle region, declaring war against the Mexican army and calling for the removal of then president Carlos Salinas de Gortari by the other branches of government. "We are a product of 500 years of struggle," began the Zapatistas' First Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle, referring to the long history of resistance to exploitation and oppression by foreign and national elites (EZLN 1994, 33-35). The declaration also called on the Mexican people to join in a national struggle for eleven basic demands: work, land, housing, food, health care, education, independence, freedom, democracy, justice and peace.

The government's attempt to put down the rebellion through military force led large sectors of Mexican society to carry out several large demonstrations and call for an end to hostilities and the opening of peace talks. The government declared a cease fire on January 12 and talks began the following month. Despite the subsequent lack of solution to the Zapatistas' demands, the process of engagement with civil society led the EZLN to develop its novel approach to seeking political change. The Zapatistas emphasized the collective construction of a broad, national alliance that would remain independent of political parties and the State and which would be respectful of the unique circumstances of each group and individual. The unifying theme was not the struggle for power, but the affirmation of dignity, particularly of all those exploited and humiliated by the existing forms of rule (Holloway 1998). The movement stressed peaceful, political struggle through local, national and international networks and the

construction of autonomous spaces from which to resist neoliberal policies and develop alternative projects.

Rather than relying on the presentation of demands to the State, the Zapatistas have built their own forms of autonomous government at community, municipal and regional levels. As such, they share some similarities with social movements elsewhere in Latin America that have created what Zibechi (2012) has called "territories in resistance." These similarities include territorialization (for example, through the recuperation of land), autonomy from the State and political parties, the affirmation of cultural identities, the emergence of new community leaders through autonomous education systems, the increasing participation of women in leadership positions, the reorganization of work in connection to nature, a shift from hierarchical to more horizontal forms of organization, and self-affirmation through the occupation of public spaces.

For two decades, the Zapatistas have sought to develop a new kind of politics through their own territories in resistance. Their experience offers significant lessons for the study of social movements and the importance and challenges of autonomy. This paper therefore poses two interrelated questions: why has autonomy become so central to the Zapatistas, and how have they sustained autonomy in the face of numerous challenges?

With regard to the first question, this paper argues that we need to understand autonomy as both a demand for indigenous rights as well as a practice of what, following Mignolo (2011), can be called "decolonial liberation." Whereas the former concerns the effort to build new institutional relationships between indigenous peoples and the State, the latter focuses attention on the process of creating new forms of community life. In Mexico, the convergence of all political parties and levels of government in blocking meaningful constitutional reforms in 2001

helps explain why the Zapatistas emphasized the strengthening of the non-institutional sphere of community autonomy in subsequent years.

If the first question involves an understanding of the interactions between the Zapatistas and political institutions, the second requires recognition of community-level processes of reflection and deliberation. This paper argues that sustaining autonomy involves the creation of collective responses to new challenges in an ongoing process that deals with unknown possibilities rather than confronting inherent limitations.

Although these questions are important for the Zapatistas, they also have significance beyond Chiapas. Autonomy has become a politically salient issue in several Latin American countries where the scope and meaning of indigenous rights are hotly contested. The first section of the paper will therefore situate the Zapatistas' struggle for autonomy within this wider context, paying particular attention to the dangers of co-optation and division that accompany what Hale (2002) has termed "neoliberal multiculturalism". The second section turns to Chiapas in order to trace the emergence of autonomy as both a demand and a practice, while the third section examines the creative ways in which the Zapatistas respond to the challenges of building autonomy. The paper concludes by arguing that one of the lessons of Zapatismo is that autonomy can be understood as a process rather than as a fixed structure or legal framework, which, in turn, allows itself to be renewed and remain an important point of reference for resistance movements more than twenty years since its first public appearance.

Citizenship, autonomy and neoliberal multiculturalism

During the last two decades of the twentieth century, indigenous movements became important political actors in many Latin American countries. In a region where ethnic divisions

had not been politically salient, the emergence of new organizations and demands in defense of communal lands and indigenous cultures placed the question of citizenship on national agendas. Scholars began to debate why new movements emerged and compared their impact on political change in different countries. Yashar (2005), for example, saw the rise of indigenous movements as a result of the shift from corporatist to neoliberal forms of citizenship. Whereas the former implied restrictions on civil and political rights in exchange for social benefits such as agrarian reform, the shift to neoliberal policies in the 1980s represented a threat to communal landholdings. At the same time, the decline of corporatist citizenship led to a weakening of the nationalist ideologies and class categories which had traditionally subsumed ethnic differences to a homogeneous *campesino* identity.

Although the shift from corporatist to neoliberal citizenship regimes occurred in most Latin American countries in the 1980s, Yashar noted variation in the capacity of indigenous movements to gain national presence. For example, the lack of strong trans-community networks in Peru contrasted with stronger national coordination in both Ecuador and Bolivia. In addition, the processes of democratization in Ecuador and Bolivia also afforded more political opportunities for new movements to press their demands, whereas the war between the military and Shining Path guerrillas constrained similar opportunities in Peru. Yashar concluded that national indigenous movements emerged in those countries where three factors were present: motivation (defense of autonomy in the face of neoliberal policies), capacity (the strength of trans-community networks), and opportunity (the availability of political associational space).

We may add to this an international context that was increasingly receptive to the discourse of indigenous rights, as demonstrated by the reform of Convention 169 of the International Labor Organization (ILO) in 1989, breaking with the old, assimilationist policies of the past and

recognizing the collective rights to land and indigenous forms of self-government within the framework of nation-states.

In discussing the significance of indigenous movements, Yashar argues that they are contesting liberal definitions of citizenship which have tended to privilege individual over collective rights. By contesting citizenship in this way, three aspects of a post-liberal form of citizenship come into view. First, the post-liberal challenge asks who counts as a citizen. Rejecting forced assimilation into a single, homogenous, mestizo identity, indigenous peoples have instead pushed for the constitutional recognition of ethnic differences, or what some scholars have termed "ethnic citizenship" (Cerda García 2011). Secondly, Yashar notes how indigenous movements call not only for the affirmation of individual rights, but also for recognition of autonomous units at local and regional levels and the representation of indigenous peoples in all branches of government, including state and national legislatures. Finally, the postliberal challenge requires the creation of new structures of government, or "autonomy regimes," that would transfer resources and decision-making powers to indigenous peoples, recognizing legal pluralism and indigenous management of land and natural resources in newly demarcated territories. In presenting these demands, indigenous movements are contesting the meaning of citizenship and democracy in Latin America's multicultural societies, although the outcomes remain contingent on political struggle.

In this regard, it is important to note that the emergence of indigenous rights in national politics coincided with the rise of neoliberalism. Latin American governments prioritized economic restructuring that favored large, export-oriented businesses and the attraction of foreign investment. As Hale (2002) has argued, the struggle for indigenous rights did not always clash with neoliberal reform. Instead, the State, the World Bank and the Inter-American

Development Bank adopted the least threatening aspects of multiculturalism and incorporated some indigenous representatives into new development programs. Drawing on examples from Guatemala in the 1990s, Hale noted how the government and economic elites shifted from an intransigent "*no*" towards indigenous rights, to a position of "*sí, pero*" in which the State retained the authority to determine permissible or inappropriate expressions of ethnic politics. This strategy serves to divide indigenous communities and movements, allowing for the cooptation of the "*indio permitido*" that does not pose a challenge to the continuity of neoliberal policies, while marginalizing the more radical "*indio tajante*" that articulates ethnic demands with broader social and political projects. In Hale's view, neoliberal multiculturalism could absorb the pressures for autonomy and post-liberal citizenship by linking the recognition of indigenous empowerment to market criteria of competitiveness, while sidelining the more transformative goal of replacing oligarchic power with more egalitarian social and economic relations. More importantly, by attempting to divide indigenous politics into "permitted" and "inappropriate" demands, the State has sought to "pro-actively shape the terrain on which future negotiations of cultural rights takes place." (Hale 2012, 488).  Rather than accepting the dichotomy of *indio permitido/indio tajante* that underlies neoliberal multiculturalism, Hale concludes that indigenous movements should seek other means of articulating their demands, potentially taking the form of cross-cultural alliances among popular sectors, or a new *mestizaje* 'from below'.

If new forms of rule rely in part on neoliberal multiculturalism it is because Latin American states have undergone a new passive revolution, understood in Gramsci's sense as a break with previous forms of economic management and political rule and the restoration of capitalist order for a new cycle of accumulation (Morton 2013, 18). Passive revolutions never

jeopardize the continuation of capitalism, but do involve the restructuring of the State through the emergence of new alliances of national and transnational class forces. Unlike the broader consensus characteristic of integral hegemony of consolidated democracies, passive revolution relies more on state coercion to back up the minimal hegemony exercised by the new dominant bloc.

The shift to neoliberalism in Mexico, for example, can be interpreted as the renewal of passive revolution following the debt crisis of the early 1980s. In this regard, Trevizo (2011) has shown how agrarian capitalists in northwestern Mexico mobilized in 1975 to protest land expropriations implemented by then president Luis Echeverría. This conflict led to the formation of new peak business associations, particularly the National Agrarian Council (Consejo Nacional Agrario, CNA) and the Businessmen's Coordinating Council (Consejo Coordinador Empresarial, CCE), which helped articulate an anti-statist, free market ideology that became more vociferous following the government's decision to nationalize the banking system in 1982. Politicization of leading business groups found electoral expression through the conservative National Action Party (Partido de Acción Nacional, PAN) in the mid-1980s. At the same time, the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (Partido Revolucionario Institucional, PRI), saw the rise to power of a new group of technocrats, particularly Carlos Salinas de Gortari, who, in accordance with neoliberal orthodoxy of the time, accelerated trade liberalization and the privatization of state enterprises during his presidency between 1988 and 1994. Crucially, the CNA and CCE had a direct role in the negotiation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in the early 1990s, and in the reforms to Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution which brought an end to the promise of land redistribution and opened the way for a re-concentration of agrarian property in private hands (Trevizo 2011, 141-46).

The apparent consolidation of a new passive revolution was dramatically upset by the Zapatista uprising on January 1, 1994, the same day that NAFTA came into effect. However, the State would attempt to minimize the significance of the rebellion, while accepting the need for some recognition of indigenous rights, reserving for itself the authority to decide the scope of such recognition. Indeed, the Salinas government had already made a concession to indigenous demands when, in 1992, it reformed Article 4 of the constitution and officially recognized Mexico as a multicultural nation. Nevertheless, the inability of passive revolution to develop more than minimal hegemony was particularly apparent in Chiapas, one of the poorest states in Mexico and a region that had seen violent repression of independent *campesino* organizations since the mid-1970s (Harvey, 1998).

As Morton (2013) argues, the Zapatistas can be seen as an expression of anti-passive revolution that not only challenged the legitimacy of Salinas's election, but also rejected the threat of oblivion facing the indigenous population under neoliberal rule. This struggle has evolved in the past twenty years and now takes place at different scales, ranging from local communities in Chiapas to transnational networks of solidarity, and can be interpreted as the creation of counter-spaces of resistance. As such, Zapatismo offers a unique experience that articulates indigenous struggles for autonomy with wider demands for alternative global economic and political relationships. From the perspective of neoliberal multiculturalism, such articulations are clearly inappropriate as they threaten the State's authority to regulate and direct permissible forms of indigenous politics. However, from the perspective of anti-passive revolution, the Zapatistas are creating a "way out" of neoliberal reconfigurations of space and authority (Morton 2013, 250).

While Morton's analysis helps us understand Zapatismo in terms of anti-passive revolution, the "way out" that is being constructed in Chiapas is shaped by the practices of the autonomous communities themselves, in dialogue with activists and solidarity groups from within and beyond Mexico. This dialogue is the result of a long process in which indigenous people have gained control of their own political organization, the EZLN, whose origins lie in the formation, in 1983, of a small nucleus comprised of three indigenous leaders and three university-educated, mestizo leaders from the Marxist revolutionary group, the National Liberation Forces (Fuerzas de Liberación Nacional, FLN). A year later, the group was joined by Subcomandante Marcos, another mestizo leader, who the Mexican government would, in 1995, claim to be Rafael Sebastián Guillén Vicente, a former professor at the Autonomous Metropolitan University (UAM) in Mexico City.

Rather than imposing a Marxist explanation for the conditions of exploitation in Chiapas, Marcos listened to how indigenous people themselves expressed their sense of injustice. In an interview given after the uprising, Marcos recalled how community members would tell him "your word is very hard, we don't understand it" (Castillo and Brisac 1995, 138). The communities that Marcos came into contact with already had experience in confronting the plantation owners, ranchers and local political bosses, or *caciques*. They expressed their struggle in terms of longer histories of abuses and humiliation, the hardships faced by their ancestors, as well as their hope in recovering dignity. Marcos recognized that listening and learning from indigenous communities was decisive in the evolution of the EZLN: "It obliged us (the mestizos) to adapt our politics and way of viewing our historical process as well as the national political process" (138). This opening was significant, given the difficulty that the mestizo Left had

traditionally had in accepting indigenous perspectives as equally valid in revolutionary theory, something which led to distrust and distancing in both Guatemala and Nicaragua (Hale 2002, 504-5). In Chiapas, the mestizo-indigenous dialogue created new possibilities and allowed for Zapatismo to grow as more community members joined the organization and gradually formed the structures that have sustained it ever since.

Mignolo has argued that indigenous experiences of injustice are an expression not solely of modern capitalism, but also of coloniality, that is, the darker side of Western modernity which has treated indigenous peoples as lesser humans (2011, 218). It was the continuation of coloniality under new forms of capital accumulation that kept the suffering of indigenous people hidden from the view, condemning them to the oblivion that the Zapatista uprising would reject. From this perspective, the way out from neoliberal passive revolution can only succeed if it involves decolonial liberation. Moving in such a direction would allow autonomy to be defined in different ways, through practices rooted in local histories. In discussing the meaning of autonomy in Chiapas, Stahler-Sholk has made a similar point. After reviewing several possible definitions of autonomy, he argues that: "the Zapatistas, rather than bargaining for a limited version of territorially based autonomy within a federal model, have insisted on the rights of each community to develop its own networks of relations." (2008, 120). This insistence reflects the desire to practice autonomy in accordance with different contexts, rather than define it once and for all. The following sections trace the emergence of autonomy as a demand and as a practice, while noting some of the challenges, responses and lessons of this struggle.

Autonomy as Demand and Practice

A continuous feature of indigenous struggles in Mexico has been the defense of local autonomy. Despite the increasing interventions of the State in the reorganization of agrarian communities, the goal of affirming greater autonomy remained an important part of the new rural social movements that emerged in the 1970s and 1980s. This was particularly the case for communities that had been established in the Lacandon Jungle region of eastern Chiapas as a result of migration from other parts of the state where landowners successfully resisted agrarian reform. However, the lack of guaranteed titles to communal land (or *ejidos*), combined with low prices for their products, particularly corn and coffee, and the inadequate provision of education and health services, led many communities to organize in new groups that were independent of the PRI and its affiliated National Peasant Confederation (Confederación Nacional Campesina, CNC).

This process of grassroots organizing was facilitated by Bishop Samuel Ruiz, priests and catechists of the Catholic Diocese of San Cristóbal de Las Casas, as well as by advisers from urban-based, leftist groups that had roots in the 1968 student movement. A key moment in this process was the holding of an Indigenous Congress in October 1974, in which representatives from more than 300 communities met and shared testimonies regarding the corruption of the agrarian authorities, widespread discrimination and lack of attention to local social, education and health needs. This Congress significantly gave rise to several new organizations that would continue their struggles in subsequent years. The largest of these new organizations was the Union of Ejido Unions and Campesino Solidarity Groups of Chiapas (Unión de Uniones Ejidales y Grupos Campesinos Solidarios de Chiapas, UU), which was formed in 1980 and claimed a membership of 12,000 families from 180 communities. Although the UU seemed to offer

possibilities for meeting local demands through legal channels, by the late 1980s many of its supporters were growing tired of the lack of solutions and frequent repression. In addition, other independent organizations had formed elsewhere in the state and had staged marches, demonstrations and hunger strikes to call attention to the violent eviction of peasants from their lands by the private guards, or *guardias blancas*, who worked for wealthy ranchers. For example, the Organización Campesina Emiliano Zapata (OCEZ) was active in the municipality of Venustiano Carranza in the central valleys, as well as in the border region with Guatemala and the northern oil-producing zone. The OCEZ insisted on maintaining its political independence from political parties, emphasizing instead broad participation from community members and local-level decision-making. Agrarian struggles intensified in many parts of rural Mexico in the late 1970s and early 1980s as the federal government attempted to bring an end to land redistribution. In the period following the debt crisis of 1982 government subsidies to small producers were also cut and the election of Carlos Salinas de Gortari in 1988 led, as noted in the previous section, to the definitive end of land reform through modifications to Article 27 of the Constitution. In Chiapas, the combined impact of violent repression, declining crop prices, and the closing of legal means to petition for land led many community members to support the Zapatista uprising.

The uprising helped focus national attention on the poverty and injustices faced by indigenous people in Chiapas. However, the Zapatistas decided to frame their demands in terms of a larger struggle for democracy and social change. As Subcomandante Marcos explained, the Zapatistas wanted to emphasize the national scope of their demands:

Following history – our history – when the revolutionary laws were being discussed in

1993 in the Clandestine Revolutionary Indigenous Committee…., it was debated whether we would emphasize certain indigenous demands of the EZLN in the moment of the uprising, and the side that argued better and won said that we had to give it a national character so that the movement wouldn't be seen as having just regional or "ethnic" objectives. The danger was that they would see our war as one of Indians against mestizos, and that was a danger to be avoided (as quoted in Muñoz Ramírez 2008, 298).

Although the government deployed the military in an attempt to put down the rebellion through force, the Zapatistas received a favorable response among a large part of civil society, which mobilized to demand an end to hostilities. In part, this reaction was due to widespread recognition of the historical discrimination towards indigenous people in Mexico. As Jonathan Fox noted:

Remarkably, even strong critics of the Zapatistas and their big city sympathizers have recognized the legitimacy of their demands. Reacting to a government offer of amnesty, Subcomandante Marcos asked: "Why should we be the ones to ask for pardon?" Acknowledging his eloquent challenge, Nobel Peace Prize-winning writer and Zapatista critic Octavio Paz said, "It really moved me – it's not the Indians of Mexico, but we who should be the ones to ask for pardon. I don't close my eyes to the responsibility of our authorities, especially those in Chiapas, nor to the less serious responsibilities of the selfish and narrow-minded comfortable classes of that rich province. But the responsibility also extends to Mexican society as a whole. Almost all of us, to a great or lesser extent, are guilty of the iniquitous situation of the Indians of Mexico, since we have allowed, with our passivity or our indifference, the extortions and abuses of the plantation owners, the ranchers, the *caciques* and corrupt politicians." (1994, 19).

During the months immediately after the uprising, the EZLN was able to establish new dialogues with different organizations, intellectuals and independent media, which led to the development of solidarity networks that surprised the Zapatistas themselves. Indigenous autonomy was not put forward as an isolated demand, nor as the overall solution to the problems facing the communities in Chiapas. Instead, it was democratization throughout the country, from the national to the most local levels that occupied the central place in the building of a popular movement that would reject electoral fraud, impunity and increasing social and economic inequality.

In fact, indigenous autonomy was expressed more in practice than in demands or proposals for constitutional reforms. In December 1994 the Zapatistas broke through the military encirclement and announced the creation of 38 autonomous municipalities (*Municipios Autónomos Rebeldes Zapatistas*, or MAREZ). This action led to a long and arduous defense of autonomous government, which has been marked by resistance to counter-insurgency tactics, including attacks perpetrated by paramilitary groups. In February 1995, the government of President Ernesto Zedillo ordered a new military offensive in Chiapas with the goal of arresting the Zapatista leaders. Although this was not achieved, the military did establish a more extensive and permanent presence in the Lacandón Jungle. The offensive also led to the forced displacement of thousands of people from their home communities and the destruction of their food and belongings by the soldiers.[2]

The clearest expression of the demand for indigenous autonomy emerged during the negotiations between the Zapatistas and the federal government which led to a set of accords on Indigenous Rights and Culture in February 1996 (known as the San Andrés Accords, after the town in highland Chiapas where they were signed). The process of elaborating the Zapatistas'

proposals involved discussions with advisers and representatives of a variety of indigenous organizations throughout Mexico (Arnson and Benítez 2000; Hernández and Vera 1996). Significantly, the accords recognized the right of indigenous peoples to decide on their own forms of government and development, thereby creating the opportunity to establish a new relationship with the State. Specific agreements included the rights of indigenous peoples to practice their own cultures, enact their own forms of self-government, and to use and benefit from the land and resources of their territories (in accordance with the International Labor Organization's Convention 169, which Mexico had ratified in 1990).

However, the government failed to implement the accords, and the dialogue on several other issues was suspended in September of 1996. In the final months of the year, the multi-party Commission for Harmony and Pacification in Chiapas (*Comisión por la Concordia y Pacificación*, COCOPA) carried out separate talks with the Zapatistas and the federal government and drafted a legislative proposal that contained the main points of the San Andrés Accords. The EZLN accepted the COCOPA proposal, but the government of President Zedillo raised objections, warning of a "balkanization" of Mexico if the proposal were made law. Although the Zapatistas maintained the demand for indigenous autonomy, the government sought to minimize the movement's importance through a combination of different actions. These included an electoral reform pacted between the leaders of the major political parties: PRI, PAN and the Party of the Democratic Revolution, (Partido de la Revolución Democrática, PRD) (Harvey 2007, 16); the increased investment in social programs in Chiapas (Stahler-Sholk 2011, 440-41; van der Haar 2001, 221-25 and 2009, 554-56); the negotiation of agrarian demands with other campesino organizations (Pérez Ruiz 2004, 2005; Reyes Ramos 2004), and a program of re-municipalization that led to the creation of seven new, official municipalities in the state

(Burguete and Leyva, eds. 2005). Unlike Colombia in 1991 or Ecuador in 1998, the national political crisis was handled by the government and political parties in ways that did not require electing a new constituent assembly (Van Cott 2001). Without this kind of political opportunity, the Zapatistas and their supporters would have to seek constitutional reforms in a less favorable context.

The defeat of the PRI by PAN candidate Vicente Fox in the presidential election in July 2000 created a new conjuncture in which the Zapatistas could once again call for constitutional reforms to recognize the right of indigenous peoples to autonomy. The new president submitted to Congress a bill reflecting the COCOPA initiative from 1996 and the Zapatistas held a march to Mexico City to put pressure on legislators to approve the reforms. However, the Senate subcommittee in charge of drafting the constitutional amendments was dominated by senators that wanted to avoid empowering the EZLN and the broader indigenous movement in Mexico. In addition, the Fox administration was simultaneously negotiating with Central American governments and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) the creation of a regional program for the establishment of assembly plants and agro-exporting industries, known as the Plan Puebla-Panamá. From the perspective of neoliberal multiculturalism, indigenous rights were only acceptable if they did not limit private sector investment and market-oriented public policies (Harvey 2004).

The resulting reforms (known as the Indigenous Law) were therefore much weaker than the San Andrés Accords and the COCOPA initiative. The Indigenous Law failed to identify the organizational structure and territorial scope for the exercise of indigenous autonomy, leaving this task to state legislatures and thereby removing such decisions from indigenous peoples themselves. Indigenous communities were also described as institutions of "public interest" and

not entities of "public right" (as had been proposed in the COCOPA initiative). The latter would have given indigenous peoples the right to govern as part of the organizational structure of the State, whereas an institution of public interest is a body which exists under the protection of the State. Similarly, the rights of indigenous peoples to use their land and resources were also undermined by the new law. Besides leaving their territorial scope to the decision of state legislatures, the Indigenous Law included the rights of other parties to land ownership within indigenous communities.

Finally, the weaker version of indigenous rights was expressed in Section B of the reformed Article 2 of the Constitution. This section reaffirmed the State's obligation to provide social welfare programs to indigenous communities. Rather than establishing the right of indigenous peoples to determine how such programs were to be delivered, new forms of paternalism were enshrined in the national constitution (Hernández Castillo, Paz and Sierra, eds. 2004; Higgins 2001; López Bárcenas 2005, 2011).

The passage of this reform reflected the State's attempt to subordinate indigenous rights to the priorities of capitalist development and the continuation of passive revolution. On the one hand, the reform repeats on several occasions that the nation is indivisible, signaling a nonexistent threat of fragmentation.[3] Neither the San Andrés Accords nor the COCOPA Initiative could be interpreted as a threat to national integrity. Instead, they reflect what Yashar (2005) referred to as the recognition of autonomous units of government within the framework of the nation-state. In addition, the reform limited indigenous peoples' ability to govern the territories they inhabit by upholding the existing agrarian laws that resulted from the reform of

Article 27 in 1992. This limitation can be seen by comparing the relevant sections of the COCOPA Initiative and the new Article. The former proposed that indigenous peoples would have the right:

> To have collective access to the use and enjoyment of natural resources in their lands and territories, understood as the totality of the habitat which indigenous peoples use or occupy, except for those whose dominion corresponds directly to the nation.[4]

However, the reform to Article 2, Section A: VI states that indigenous peoples have the right:

> To have access, *while respecting the forms and modalities of property and land ownership established in this Constitution and the legislation on this matter, as well as the rights acquired by third parties or community members*, to the preferential use and enjoyment of the natural resources in *the places* that the communities inhabit and occupy, except for those that are strategic areas in terms of the Constitution. For this end, communities may associate with each other within the terms of the law. [5] (Emphasis added).

The lack of a positive response to their demand for constitutional reform led the Zapatistas to focus their efforts on defending and promoting their own *de facto* autonomy. In August 2003 the EZLN announced the creation of five cultural and political centers, called *caracoles*, which would house the Zapatistas' new Councils of Good Government (*juntas de buen gobierno*, JBG's) (Muñoz Ramírez 2008; Subcomandante Marcos 2003).

Subcomandante Marcos explained that this new structure would allow the civilian bases of the movement to exercise authority without the interference of the military commanders of the

EZLN and would also promote a more equal relationship with outside solidarity groups and greater inclusion of more distant Zapatista communities within Chiapas. One of the challenges that the new JBG's have had to confront is how to ensure that the social and economic projects of solidarity groups reach the more remote communities and do not continue to disproportionately benefit those communities with easier access and longer relationships to external groups.[6]

With regard to the practice of autonomy, several achievements and obstacles were discussed at a meeting of Zapatistas, allies and supporters in July 2007. Almost 200 indigenous Zapatista authorities spoke at this week-long gathering. Although they referred to different issues and local contexts, they all noted that their autonomy is based the existence of 27 rebel municipalities (*Municipios Autónomos Rebeldes Zapatistas*, MAREZ). The uprising in 1994 allowed the Zapatistas to recuperate lands when the private landowners fled the conflict zone. With this territorial base, the EZLN was able to create new projects in the areas of health care, education and agriculture, in which women have the right of participation and work as promoters alongside Zapatista men. It should be noted that none of the people who occupy positions of authority within the MAREZ receive a salary and they can be removed through decisions taken by community assemblies.

The Zapatistas are organized at the community, municipal and regional levels. The communities (which the Zapatistas refer to as *pueblos*) have created their own authorities that parallel those of the official government structure but which are chosen directly by community assemblies and do not receive a salary. They include agrarian authorities who are responsible for dealing with land disputes with non-Zapatista groups, municipal representatives who ensure that drugs, alcohol and contraband do not enter the community, and health and education committees

to provide oversight of the work carried out by the autonomous municipality's promoters in these areas.

Community assemblies also elect representatives to the autonomous municipalities, who are responsible for coordinating projects in health, education and production, as well as evaluating proposals from communities and developing new proposals that are then debated back at the community level. The regional level (or *zona*) involves the work of the five JBG. As mentioned above, each JBG is tasked with ensuring equitable distribution of resources to communities within its area of responsibility, as well as seeking outside support from solidarity groups and coordinating tasks in areas such as communications, transportation and justice. Members of the JBG are elected in municipal assemblies for a three-year period. Individual members will carry out work of the JBG for a varying number of weeks, depending on each region, allowing time to return to their home communities to support their families and work their land (EZLN 2013a).

Collective production projects make up a central pillar of Zapatista autonomy. These projects are carried out on the lands recuperated after the uprising and include a wide variety of products and services. Gains from these projects are used to cover the expenses of the health and education promoters. For example, in the *Caracol* of La Realidad in the border region, the Zapatistas created projects to produce coffee, honey, citrus fruits, vegetables, chile, corn, beans, bread and services such as transportation, pharmacies and small taco stands. These projects are important for sustaining the unsalaried work of the health and education promoters. The Zapatistas have to compete with the government by providing good quality services to the local population, whether Zapatista or not (Barmeyer 2009). The Zapatistas reject government programs because they see them as attempts to dilute their struggle. As a result, they have sought

support from solidarity groups while also training their own members in different areas. This approach can be seen as an alternative to the clientelistic use of government subsidies that have been a common means of securing votes in rural areas at election time.

Deficiencies in health and education had long been a problem that indigenous organizations had denounced before 1994. Following the uprising, the Zapatista communities selected and trained their own promoters in these areas with the goal of providing better services that take into account the particular histories, cultures and languages of the communities themselves. For example, some communities are recuperating practices of traditional healing in order to make use of local medicinal plants and, in this way, support the work of midwives, bone-setters and herbalists (Forbis 2011). In the autonomous municipalities, the teachers come from the same communities rather than from the cities, and share the same economic conditions and cultural practices as the families of their students. For example, Baronnet (2011) has shown how communities, through their assemblies, support and assess the work of those who carry out the tasks of an education promoter. This relationship is different from the practice of teachers employed by the federal government who assume the power to decide on the content of the curriculum in a way that excludes the community and the recognition of its own needs. Baronnet (2011, 211) cites a young coordinator of autonomous education in the MAREZ of Francisco Villa, who remembers the lack of trust towards the official education system:

> We did not learn anything about our customs, the ideas that they brought were only ideas from the outside. It wasn't like what we are doing right now, with our own customs, creating education in our community; it wasn't like this before.

Zapatista Autonomy and Decolonial Liberation

Although the Zapatistas have achieved notable advances in building autonomy, the question of sustainability remains an important one. However, before considering some challenges to autonomy, it is important to address sustainability in terms of decolonial liberation. If, as Morton (2013) argues, Zapatismo can be understood as an expression of anti-passive revolution through the creation of counter-spaces of resistance, it is important to pay attention to the practices through which such spaces are constituted. As Zibechi has noted, one of the main characteristics of anti-capitalist social movements in Latin America is their commitment to recreating social ties. He refers specifically to the shift from traditional schooling to selfeducation in which the whole community participates, the emphasis on self-sufficiency and diversification in production, and the recuperation of traditional medicinal knowledge and health care practices (2012, 40). Zibechi adds that resistance depends on the social ties that sustain such efforts:

> Anti-capitalism no longer reflects only the place that one occupies in society – worker, peasant, Indian, etc. – or the program that advances it, or declarations of intent, or the intensity of the demonstrations; it also comes from *this kind of practice, from the character of the social bonds among activists*. (41). (Emphasis in the original).

The character of social bonds is central for the Zapatistas. Rather than sacrificing the present for the sake of a future goal, they emphasize the means of social interaction, the struggle itself, the formation of solidarities and collective deliberation as their practice of autonomy. This is how Mignolo (2011) interpreted the centrality of dignity in what he called the Zapatistas'

"theoretical revolution," the ethical dimension that has come from the communities themselves, to make their movement different from modern, hierarchical forms of organization. Decolonial liberation involves this distinctive move, a shift that displaces the authority of single leaders and generates social bonds of mutual support and learning. Sustainability of autonomy is not therefore a matter of external resources. Although this can help, it can also undermine autonomy by producing dependency and inequality among movement participants. The Zapatistas have sustained autonomy by connecting to wider networks of struggle, but also by working internally, recuperating and reinventing practices that underlie the success of their projects in agricultural production, education and health care.

The creation of new spaces for autonomous government is seen as a positive change by Zapatista supporters because the relationship between the community members and their authorities is a more horizontal one. They tend to share the same economic conditions, speak the same language and have participated together in the same political struggles. Although the Zapatista authorities do not have all the resources they would need to resolve the problems they are presented with, in comparison to the authorities of official municipalities and government teachers they are at least seen as accessible and respectful of those who seek their support (Baronnet 2011, 209-211; van der Haar 2001, 233).

The new autonomous institutions have also, in several cases, gained greater legitimacy than the official system of government. In many cases, even those community members who are not affiliated with the Zapatistas turn to the autonomous authorities to resolve conflicts. This is due to various factors, such as the fact that the Zapatistas do not charge for their services, are not corrupt, they speak the same language and use restorative rather than punitive forms of justice (Stahler-Sholk 2011, 443). For example, Cerda García has analyzed the way in which

autonomous municipalities in the area of *Caracol* Morelia have seen an increase in the requests of non-Zapatistas for their services and cites one of the members of the autonomous municipal council of 17 de noviembre:

> This is why the government is so afraid of the autonomous municipalities. Because they know that in the autonomous municipalities we are carrying out justice and it is more effective than in the government's municipalities. That is the case, for example, of how we resolved a conflict between the bus lines of Comitán and Altamirano. They are in talks with the government, they have had about twenty meetings but not resolved anything. But they came to the 17 de noviembre autonomous municipality and the people from Lucha Campesina (affiliated to the official *Confederación Nacional Campesin*a, CNC) agreed to start a dialogue. So, they see that it is possible to resolve the conflict and they are thinking of becoming Zapatistas. (2011, 268).

It is clear that the *de facto* autonomous governments have to resist and grow in adverse conditions, although the possibilities for consolidation are not pre-determined. In this sense, Díaz Polanco refers to autonomy as an "open horizon," full of hopes but also of risks and doubts. He cites Subcomandante Marcos who, when he asked himself if a new world was being built with the Caracoles, answered "maybe not…but maybe yes." (2008, 268).

The sustainability of the Zapatistas' autonomy depends on the effectiveness of their own actions and projects, but also on the wider political context which they have to negotiate. Díaz Polanco has emphasized the need for the Zapatistas to build national alliances that can contribute to a transformation of national political life in line with the multicultural nature of the country, and to not leave aside the need for the legal and institutional recognition of *de facto* autonomy.

According to Díaz Polanco, this does not imply acceptance of a legal framework imposed by the government but, on the contrary, the creation of political change that would be reflective of a new balance of political forces. This would provide the *de facto* autonomies with a constitutional basis and thereby remove the constant threat to their existence that comes from a counterinsurgency strategy that seeks to gradually wear down the support base (Díaz Polanco 2008, 264). Although national-level alliances have in fact been sought by the Zapatistas, such alliances have been established not with political parties, but rather with the more independent movements and associations of civil society that joined in the Zapatistas' non-electoral "Other Campaign" following the publication of the Sixth Declaration of the Lacandón Jungle in 2005 (Harvey,

2011). The Zapatistas have become less convinced of the possibilities for negotiation with state institutions and, noting the unequal resources at their disposal when compared to state power, they have opted instead for a long-term strategy of building alternatives through its network of support groups. This way of doing politics has been expressed by one Zapatista sympathizer and scholar in the following way: "The type of autonomy which is being fought for does not emerge as a counterweight to state power, but as something which makes state power superfluous." (Esteva 2011, 126).

In practice, the lack of a satisfactory constitutional reform has meant that, since 2001, the Zapatistas have focused their attention on building their own autonomous governments and defending their lands from outside encroachment. While this effort has been largely focused on local issues in Chiapas, the Zapatistas have also maintained a national presence through the holding of several meetings designed to address national problems (for example, the two *Encuentros de los Pueblos Zapatistas con los Pueblos del Mundo*, held in January and July 2007;

the *Encuentro de los Pueblos Indígenas de América*, held in the Yaqui community of Vicam,

Sonora, in October 2007; the *Encuentro de las Mujeres Zapatistas con las Mujeres del Mundo* in

December 2007; the first *Festival de la Digna Rabia*, held in December 2008 in Mexico City and

Chiapas; the first *Encuentro Americano contra la Impunidad* (June 2009); three meetings to

analyze the political significance of anti-systemic social movements; participation in the

National March for Justice and Against Impunity, led by the poet Javier Sicilia in May 2011 to

protest the deaths of thousands of people in the government's militarized strategy of combating

drug cartels; the organization of "little schools" or *escuelitas*, in August 2013 and December

2013-January 2014 to share their experiences of autonomy with outside groups; and, the holding

of two meetings with member organizations of the National Indigenous Congress (Congreso

Nacional Indigena, CNI), in August 2013 and August 2104, respectively.

At the local level, the main challenge facing Zapatismo has been how to achieve

economic and political sustainability of the autonomous municipalities. The presence of

autonomy defies the State's ability to control the region, and this defiance has been met with a

variety of tactics that seek to undermine the Zapatistas' appeal among local communities. These

tactics include increased social spending, the partial resolution of agrarian demands and the use

of military and paramilitary force. There are also limitations in the Zapatistas' own projects that

in some cases have led community members to leave the movement. For example the lack of

work or access to good land for a new generation of young people has led some to migrate to the

US or other areas in southern Mexico (principally to find work in construction or services in the

tourist areas of Quintana Roo). Another concern is that some of the Zapatistas' schools lack

sufficiently trained teachers to implement their projects. In addition, Zapatista-affiliated families

in more remote communities where they are a minority need more support, in contrast to the new

settlements that were established on recuperated lands and which do not have to compete with rival factions within their communities. In this context, the decision to continue as autonomous communities is not an easy one. Stahler-Sholk (2011), for example, bases his analysis of this issue on field work conducted in the four autonomous municipalities that make up the *caracol* of La Garrucha. He found that the education and health promoters there face serious problems to sustain the work that they have assumed within their communities:

> Since the communities live very close to subsistence level and their collective funds are minimal, it is frequently the case that the support that the community provides to its promoters is not enough to cover their basic needs. This can result in a vicious cycle in which the promoter abandons their work or does not put all their effort into their tasks, leading the community to have less reason to support them, and so on. On the other hand, sometimes the communities adopt flexible strategies to provide solidarity, such as the support from family members or permission to temporarily stop work as a promoter in order to work in the fields or in some other activity. (2011, 442).

The Zapatistas are constantly seeking new ways to respond to these challenges, and in the process building an alternative set of institutions that reveal their capacity for longer-term innovation. For example, the collective projects allow them to generate some savings for investment in education and health programs. They also charge outside contractors a fee of 10% on the value of their projects if they are to be implemented in areas with Zapatista presence. Since 2010, the Zapatistas have also operated their own banking system, which allows members to request loans with a 2% interest rate in order to cover emergency expenses, often related to serious health problems. The *bancos zapatistas* also allow for some funds to be invested in new

collective projects in order to create options for youth and women. Another approach has been to reallocate funds with the autonomous municipalities. For example, in the Caracol of La Realidad, some of the resources that were not being used by a Zapatista hospital in the area were reallocated for the repair of a warehouse that the government had left abandoned (EZLN 2013a, 13).

Even when the community finds a way to support the young unmarried males who are carrying out some task on its behalf, it is more difficult for women with children to fulfill the same roles. Gender equality is an ideal that is expressed in political declarations such as the Zapatistas' Revolutionary Women's Law of 1993. For example, the fourth point in the law states that:

> Women have the right to participate in the affairs of the community and occupy positions if they are elected freely and democratically. (EZLN 2013b, 26).

In each of the Caracoles, the number of women participating in the Councils of Good Government has been increasing since 2003. However, in practice, it is more difficult for women to carry out their duties as members of the JBGs (Zylberberg Panebianco, 2006). This is due to several factors, including attitudes of male dominance, or *machismo*, of some spouses and fathers, the lack of support in the home and in looking after children, fear of making mistakes, low levels of literacy in Spanish and lack of other skills.

As a result, there are situations in which women formally occupy the same number of positions as men, but in practice they are unable to have the same influence in how different tasks are carried out and they begin to reduce their level of participation. According to a former member of the JBG in La Realidad, it is difficult for a woman to take on responsibilities at the

municipal or regional level if they have never had a position within their community (EZLN 2013b, 7).

The Zapatistas have adopted different strategies to try and deal with this problem, including efforts to show the importance of family planning, the need for men to give support at home and in caring for children, as well as encouraging women to participate, so that once they are integrated into community work, they will begin to see that they can resolve problems and continue learning.

Despite the obstacles, there are cases in which women overcome problems and lack of support through their own efforts, showing that they do not depend on the decisions of men or local authorities. For example, Ceferino, a former member of the JBG in La Garrucha, says:

> In my community the *compañeras* sometimes ask for support form a local (Zapatista) authority, such as the *responsable* (person in charge of overseeing community projects), to get advice if they feel that sometimes they cannot participate fully…But sometimes the local authority is away somewhere else and so the *compañeras* do the work by themselves. For example, in my community there are two women who occupy the positions of municipal representative (*agente*) and supporting official (*suplente*) who have just solved problems on their own. They have dealt with issues related to the lands that we have recuperated on a couple of occasions now; they follow this example and make solutions.

> At the start it is true that the *compañeras* feel that they cannot do things well, so they ask for support from the *responsables* and other authorities who can accompany them, but now we are seeing that the *compañeras* carry out their work every day and provide

solutions. They organize themselves and it is no longer necessary to get the support of a *responsable* because more or less the *compañeras* are doing this work in the communities (EZLN 2013a, 46-47).

It should also be noted that many men also stop participating when the workload gets too heavy. Besides promoting women's participation, some Zapatista municipalities have seen the need to reduce the duration of the time that they spend as authorities, which also allows for more people to participate and gain experience. However, some women complain that the time may be too short and this prevents them from really learning how to govern and that they therefore are not advancing as much as they would like (EZLN, 2013a, 70-71).

The Zapatistas also argue that the obstacles to women's participation are rooted not so much in indigenous cultures but in the consequences of colonialism and capitalism, particularly the ways of their former employers on private coffee plantations. By situating gender inequality in a broader critique of patriarchy and class exploitation, the Zapatistas seek to counter the argument that women's rights and indigenous cultures are inevitably incompatible. Approaching the issue in this way allows for men and women to work together in changing different practices of oppression and discrimination in all areas of society, including their own homes and communities.

In some cases, the demands that resistance places on community members have become a problem. The EZLN refuses all government programs, which they see as means of political control linked to the overall counter-insurgency strategy. However, in practice, some communities, or Zapatista families who live in divided communities, manage to gain access to some of these same resources without having to deal directly with the government. For example,

there are cases where members of the PRI faction in a community will sell metal roofing or other building materials that they have received from the government to Zapatista families because what they want most is cash in order to finance migration to the US. Other means include the support from solidarity networks, the sale of coffee and other products in fair trade markets, and the creation of their own services such as transportation and radio.

It is also necessary to take into account the consequences of continual attacks and threats against Zapatista support bases (*Bases de Apoyo Zapatista*, BAZ). There are many denunciations, testimonies and communiqués that document the agrarian and political conflicts in which government-backed organizations confront Zapatista support bases. A summary of the denunciations made by the support bases between 2006 and 2012 was compiled by the NGO Red Contra la Represión (2013). This report notes that there were a total of 114 denunciations from all five caracoles in this period, many of which refer to multiple attacks. These attacks tend to reflect at least two different patterns. First, in those areas where the Zapatistas had recuperated land in 1994 and established new communities, we find attacks by competing peasant organizations, sometimes with backing of police and military, to take over the same land violently. These cases are mainly concentrated in La Garrucha, Morelia and Roberto Barrios in eastern and northern areas of the Lacandon jungle. For example, in La Garrucha, the report lists cases of forced eviction, the stealing of cattle, coffee, timber and corn; the destruction of fences, work tools and agricultural equipment; persecution, ambush and detention of Zapatista support base members; the cutting off of water supplies, arson, threats and arrest orders. In Morelia, we find threats, beatings, theft of crops and tools, as well as acts of ambush, kidnapping and torture; while in Roberto Barrios, there have been cases of homicide, disappearances, violent evictions from land, threats and destruction of crops. A second pattern can be found in La Realidad and

Oventik, where Zapatista bases often form part of communities that have many different political affiliations. As a result, they have been targeted for eviction of disputed lands, and services such as water and electricity have been cut off. In Oventik, for example, the report refers to constant threats against Zapatista supporters, including efforts to try and close autonomous schools and force people to leave the community. The following cases are illustrative of these attacks.

In April 2012, the JBG of La Garrucha denounced a steady increase in violent threats against Zapatista supporters since the start of 2011. According to the JBG, the attackers belong to three different organizations that are seeking to dispossess the Zapatistas of their lands. Their denunciations refer to the same tactics that were observed in the counter-insurgency operations of the mid-1990s: the contamination and poisoning of water, the stealing and destruction of crops such as corn and coffee, and threats of sexual assault against Zapatista women. Similar denunciations were published between 2011 and the spring of 2013 following attacks on Zapatista supporters in the community of San Marcos Avilés, municipality of Chilón; San Patricio, MAREZ La Dignidad, *Caracol* Roberto Barrios; Patria Nueva, MAREZ Lucio Cabañas, *Caracol* Morelia; and members of the Other Campaign in the ejido of San Sebastián Bachajón, Chilón (CDHFBC, 2011a, 2011b, 2013a, 2013b).

What these attacks have in common is that they are directed against Zapatista support bases or ejidatarios who are affiliated to the Other Campaign. They arise from the attempt to gain control over land and resources that form part of the government's development plans for the region, plans which lack consensus among the affected communities. The lack of recognition of indigenous peoples' right to freely decide how to use local resources is reflected in these acts of aggression which also extend to human rights defenders and those who have protested against mining concessions (CDHBC 2011b, 43-65; komanilel.org 2009).

Conclusions

The struggle for indigenous rights remains an important part of contemporary politics in Latin America. This paper has argued that the Zapatistas have made autonomy a central demand and practice of their movement. Rather than accepting neoliberal multiculturalism or the State's constitutional reforms, the Zapatistas have built autonomy at community, municipal and regional levels.

On December 12, 2012, the Zapatistas held silent marches in five major towns in Chiapas. The marches were noteworthy for many reasons, including the absence of clearly identified leaders. In a series of communiqués following the march, Subcomandante Marcos parodied the government's consternation at not being able to buy off indigenous leaders and its declining ability to control social unrest in the country, claiming that fear had now switched from the traditionally oppressed to the political elites, who realize they are becoming superfluous. In the first communiqué following the silent march, the Zapatistas simply asked "Did you hear it? It is the sound of your world collapsing. It is that of ours rising anew" (EZLN 2012; Desinformémonos.org, 2012).

In February 2013, Marcos announced that a new, indigenous subcomandante, Moisés, would direct the *escuelita zapatista* and subsequent meetings. During 2012-13, hundreds of Zapatista men and women shared their experiences with each other in a series of workshops that led to the production of teaching materials that were used to educate outside supporters at the week-long *escuelita zapatista*, held in the five *caracoles* and at the Universidad de la Tierra, in San Cristóbal de Las Casas, Chiapas, first in August 2013 and again in December 2013-January 2014.

One of the most frequent comments made by the Zapatista teachers at the *escuelita* was the fact that, for their communities, autonomy has emerged and evolved as a practical necessity rather than a pre-given model or theory. Autonomy is seen as a process in which mistakes are made and new problems arise, but which are then discussed and tackled through collective deliberation. As one of the members of the Caracol of Morelia stated:

> So, it is interesting that we realized that the plans that we make at the start can be modified as many times as necessary, according to what is needed to be done. We aren't obliged to carry out something just because that is how we thought it should be and should remain always. There are some things that are that way, but there are others that are not. (EZLN 2013a, 62).

The Zapatistas have had to learn as they go, without a manual or guide. Although this lack of a clear model makes the construction of autonomy a difficult task, it has the advantage of being something that they assume as their own project, rather than an outside imposition. The Zapatistas reject the offer of projects from government agencies and political party candidates. In their eyes, the government only produces division and dependency, obliging people to affiliate to a party in order to compete for access to the limited resources that are provided for agricultural or livestock production. For example, during the governorship of Juan Sabines Guerrero (2006-12), a new project to build 25 "sustainable rural cities" was initiated, claiming that rural poverty was due to the dispersion of a large number of small communities far from the main towns. However, the project generated many criticisms, including loss of access to agricultural land in home communities and the inadequate and poorly paid jobs in the rural cities. Most of the rural cities were abandoned and even private investors such as Fundación Azteca and Aurrerá

Pharmacies began to pull out. By the end of 2011, only two of the projects had been completed (Pickard 2012).

During the *escuelita* held in August 2013 at the Universidad de la Tierra, one of the Zapatista speakers said:

> The government has lots of projects that are like crumbs and which try to deceive people in order to control them. It says that it is meeting the demands for housing, but the rural cities are of no benefit. In order to try and demoralize us, the government sent in a lot of food baskets but we have our land and our projects, so it was not successful. Resistance is our weapon of struggle and it has managed to counter the strategy of the bad government. We no longer believe in the measures taken by the bad government. It provokes and tries to get us to fall into its trap, but we do not respond with violence. With work, it gave us more strength and made us braver. The bad government is nothing, although it is trying to intervene. It is just a hindrance that gets in our way (14 August 2013).

The fact that the Zapatistas have gained control of good land as a result of the uprising means that they do have a certain capacity to resist economically while simultaneously allowing them to distinguish their way of life from that of other community members who are affiliated to the political parties and depend on the clientelistic provision of cash supports. As a result, the latter no longer want to work their fields, so they sell their plots and their children are left without access to land. In contrast, the autonomous communities seek to build alternatives that sustain agricultural production and community cohesion. In this effort they have been supported by national and international networks of support in a variety of ways, including moral support, the sharing of experiences and the organization of solidarity in other countries. According to Patricia, a former member of the JBG in Oventik:

There are other people who visit us and do not belong to any organization; we see this

relationship as very important for our Zapatista struggle, because it adds strength to our

organization when they say that they make the struggle their own and also that we are an

example so that they can start to organize in their countries or in other parts of our

country. This form of relationship with other people and organizations is something that

has allowed us to advance in our struggle; the bad government has not been able to

exterminate us because it knows that our struggle extends to other places and that there

are organizations that sympathize with us. (EZLN 2013a, 33).

As noted above, the Zapatistas have also been targeted by paramilitary groups and

organizations that depend on state protection and support. In early May 2014, between fifteen

and twenty members of a faction of one such organization, the Independent Confederation of

Agricultural Workers and Peasants (Central Independiente de Organizaciones Agrícolas y

Campesinos, CIOAC) violently attacked the autonomous school and clinic in the community of

La Realidad and, in the process, beat and killed a Zapatista support base member and teacher,

Galeano, shooting him three times in the leg, chest and head. The Zapatistas denounced this

attack and postponed two scheduled meetings with supporters. At  the end of a homage to

Galeano later that month, Subcomandante Marcos announced that the figure of Marcos was no

longer necessary, referring not only to the inevitable generational change within the movement,

but more importantly, to shifts in other aspects:

In terms of class, from the educated middle-class person to the indigenous campesino; in

terms of race, from mestizo leadership to completely indigenous leadership; and the most

important of all: the shift in thought, from revolutionary vanguardism to governing by

obeying (*mandar obedeciendo*)…(a shift) from the seizure of power above to

construction from below; from professional politics to everyday politics; from leaders to peoples; from the marginalization of gender to the direct participation of women; from the ridiculing of the other to the celebration of difference. (EZLN, 2014).

Marcos concluded by announcing his "death" and the simultaneous rebirth of Galeano. This departure of Marcos symbolizes the generational, political and theoretical shifts that have transformed Zapatismo during the past twenty years, changes which continue to make it an important point of reference for other resistance movements in the world today.

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    we must raise our heads and look ahead": a Consideration of the Daily Life of Zapatista

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    Shannon Speed, Rosalva Aída Hernández Castillo, and Lynn Stephen, 222-237. Austin:

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[1] This article draws in part on my chapter "Zapatismo y Autonomía," to be published in José del Val and Carolina Sánchez, eds. *Estado del desarrollo económico y social de los pueblos indígenas de Chiapas*. Mexico: UNAM, in press. Previous versions were presented at the workshop on Human Rights and the Rule of Law in Mexico since 1810, Institute for the Study of the Americas, University of London, May 17, 2013, and the workshop on The Quality of Democracy in Latin America Today, Occidental College, Los Angeles, February 28, 2014. I am grateful for the discussion from the other panelists and audience, as well as the comments of Wendy Harvey and Bonny Wells on previous drafts. I acknowledge a grant from the Nick Franklin Faculty Development fund, Department of Government, New Mexico State University (NMSU), and a Faculty Travel grant from the College of Arts and Sciences, NMSU that enabled research trips to Chiapas in July 2012 and August 2013, respectively. I also thank Wolfgang Gabbert and two anonymous reviewers of Latin American and Caribbean Ethnic Studies for their helpful comments and suggestions on an earlier draft of this article.

[2] In March 1995 I participated in a delegation of human rights observers that went to the village of Guadalupe Tepeyac, site of the Zapatistas' first political and cultural center known as "Aguascalientes," located in the area close to the Guatemalan border. I saw how the clothes and sacks of corn and beans had been torn and ripped apart, with the food scattered on the ground. Tools and hose pipes had been broken, and even metal buckets had had their bottoms cut out. These actions were part of a strategy to make it impossible to carry out farm work or even daily tasks independently of the military presence and government programs.

[3] Article 2 of the constitution was reformed to state that "the Mexican nation is unified and *indivisible*" ("la nación mexicana es única e indivisible"). The same article adds that "the right of indigenous peoples to self-determination will be exercised in a constitutional framework of autonomy *that ensures national unity* ("el derecho de los pueblos indígenas a la libre determinación se ejercerá en un marco constitucional de autonomía que asegure la unidad nacional…"). Finally, Art. 2, part A, section 3 establishes the right of indigenous peoples to "elect, in accordance with their traditional norms, procedures and practices, authorities or representatives to exercise their own forms of internal governance, guaranteeing equal participation of women and men, *in a framework that respects the federal pact and the sovereignty of the states*" ("elegir de acuerdo con sus normas, procedimientos y prácticas tradicionales, a las autoridades o representantes para el ejercicio de sus formas propias de

gobierno interno, garantizando la participación de las mujeres en condiciones de equidad frente a los varones, en un marco que respete el pacto federal y la soberanía de los estados". (Emphasis added).

[4] Acceder de manera colectiva al uso y disfrute de los recursos naturales de sus tierras y territorios, entendidos estos como la totalidad del hábitat que los pueblos indígenas usan u ocupan, salvo aquellos cuyo dominio directo corresponde a la Nación.


[5] Acceder*, con respeto a las formas y modalidades de propiedad y tenencia de la tierra establecidas en esta Constitución y a las leyes de la material, así como a los derechos adquiridos por terceros o por integrantes de la comunidad*, al uso y disfrute preferente de los recursos naturales *de los lugares* que habitan y ocupan las comunidades, salvo aquellos que corresponden a las áreas estratégicas, en términos de la Constitución. Para estos efectos las comunidades podrán asociarse en términos de la ley." (Emphasis added).

[6] There are currently 27 autonomous municipalities (Municipio Autónomo Rebelde Zapatista, MAREZ) that are coordinated through in five Councils of Good Government (Juntas de Buen Gobierno, JBG). The five JBG are located in the following political-cultural centers, or *Caracoles*:

Caracol I Madre de los Caracoles, mar de nuestros sueños (JBG La Realidad): (MAREZ of San Pedro de Michoacán; Tierra y Libertad; Libertad de los Pueblos Mayas; and, General Emiliano Zapata)

Caracol II Resistencia y rebeldía por la humanidad (JBG Oventik): (MAREZ of San Andrés Sakamchen de los Pobres; San Juan de la Libertad; San Pedro Polhó; Santa Catarina; Santa Magdalena de la Paz; 16 de febrero; and, San Juan Apóstol Cancúc)

Caracol III Resistencia hacia un nuevo amanecer (JBG La Garrucha): (MAREZ of Francisco Gómez; Ricardo Flores Magón; San Manuel; and, Francisco Villa)

Caracol IV Torbellino de nuestras palabras (JBG Morelia): (MAREZ of Lucio Cabañas; 17 de noviembre; and, Comandanta Ramona)

Caracol V Que habla para todos (JBG Roberto Barrios): (MAREZ of Vicente Guerrero; El Trabajo; Francisco Villa; Campesino; La Paz; Benito Juárez; La Dignidad; Acabalná; and, Rubén Jaramillo, as well as two other areas which are not MAREZ, Felipe Angeles y Jacinto Canek).