

## Globalization and Social Movement Resistance: The Zapatista Rebellion in Chiapas, Mexico

Richard Stahler-Sholk  
*Eastern Michigan University*

**Abstract** *The rebellion launched by the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) in 1994 in Chiapas, Mexico is best understood not as a guerrilla struggle for state power, but rather a social movement resisting the dominant mode of globalization being imposed from above. Examining the political, economic, and cultural dimensions of globalization as a set of contested processes, this case study of resistance shows how the Zapatistas have contested power in spheres above and below the nation-state, appealing to global networks and universal rights, but also to local practices and identities. Globalization can paradoxically open new political space for contestation as it ruptures existing patterns of relations between state and civil society. This movement points to an important alternative strategy of “globalization from below,” based on the radically democratic demand for autonomy, defined as the right to choose the forms of interaction with forces that are reorganizing on a global scale.*

The Zapatista rebellion of indigenous Maya people in Chiapas, Mexico seems paradoxical in that it is very locally rooted, yet it is enmeshed in a complex web of global processes. In contrast to the traditional model of guerrilla movements, the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) has focused more on the political mobilization of civil society than on the armed seizure of state power. Indeed, following the ceasefire 12 days after their January 1, 1994 rebellion, the Zapatistas concentrated on building a grassroots autonomy movement at the community level in Chiapas, and on redefining links between those communities and the wider world. Both the radical-democratic aspect of their community organizing and the boldness of their global outreach have generated considerable interest in the Zapatista movement, as they have shifted the locus of power contestation to spheres above and below the nation-state.

Scholars and activists alike have been captivated by these unorthodox rebels, who organized a national convention in the Lacandón jungle of Chiapas in August, 1994 to discuss democracy with anyone who cared,<sup>1</sup> and an “intergalactic” meeting on neoliberalism and humanity in July, 1996; who regularly interrupted peace talks to go back to their support villages for consultations and consensus decision-making, and after negotiations broke down, bypassed federal authorities by fanning out to municipalities across the country to present the issues in a “national consultation” in March, 1999. On the one hand, their lyrical and ironic communiqués rebound around the Internet,

---

<sup>1</sup>Lynne Stephen, “The Zapatista Army of National Liberation and the National Democratic Convention,” *Latin American Perspectives* 22:4 (1995), pp. 88–100.

galvanizing networks of supporters of indigenous and human rights; on the other hand, transnational financial and military networks have mobilized in response to the Zapatista “threat.”

The Zapatista movement illustrates the complex and often contradictory implications of globalization for democracy. Globalization may be usefully understood not only in terms of the spatio-temporal effects of the growing volume, intensity, and velocity of global interconnectedness; but also as a set of contested processes involving the reorganization of the scale on which power is exercised.<sup>2</sup> These processes in the contemporary era of globalization involve overlapping political, economic, and cultural realms, which will be examined here in the specific case of the Zapatista rebellion.

In its *political* dimensions, globalization reframes the concept of citizenship and the implied pact between state and civil society. The territorially bounded construct of the modern nation-state, shaped by earlier historical processes of globalization, now coexists uneasily with the emerging concept of a global civil society. The Zapatista discourse of rights—appealing to global norms of indigenous and human rights—has changed the context in which the Mexican state has responded to the rebellion, and indeed to broader demands for democratization. In the *economic* dimensions of globalization, the global integration of markets under the framework of neoliberalism has met a variety of forms of resistance. The retreat of the state in effect opens up new space which may be contested from below, with contingent outcomes. In Mexico, neoliberal reforms undermined the longstanding clientelist mechanisms of political control which sustained the 71-year rule of the hegemonic party. At the *cultural* level, globalization has produced neither homogenization nor a dichotomous East/West “clash of civilizations,” but rather multiple renegotiations of identity and relations among social actors. In the case of Chiapas, that involves people simultaneously redefining and asserting their identities as peasants, indigenous communities, Mexicans, and claimants of universal rights. At each of these levels, the power is contested in new forms, creating possibilities for a democratizing “globalization from below.”

### **The Politics of Globalization: Reframing Citizenship**

The contemporary era of globalization is breaking down the relevance of geographical distance to social interactions, affecting global flows of everything from capital to information to coercive force. National and international regulatory frameworks have not disappeared, but they are strained by the processes of globalization. This can be seen, for example, in the breakdown and ongoing reformulation of the Bretton Woods economic order, the rapidly evolving regimes governing everything from human rights to global warming, and the blurring of the lines between national sovereignty and the “humanitarian/peacekeeping” purview of the United Nations.

---

<sup>2</sup> For variants of this interpretation of globalization, see David Held *et al.*, *Global Transformations: Politics, Economics and Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), pp. 21–28; James H. Mittelman, *The Globalization Syndrome: Transformation and Resistance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press); and Michael Burawoy *et al.* (eds) *Global Ethnography: Forces, Connections, and Imaginations in a Postmodern World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

Similarly, the “national” identities that helped forge the territorial definitions of states as the highest sovereign political authority in the last few centuries (or vice versa, particularly in the case of ex-colonial states in the decades after WWII) seem newly open to challenge. This trend was partly a function of the collapse of the Cold War inter-state system. Yet it also reflects the increasing difficulty of states defining identities, in an era when there is less need for political community to be geographically contiguous.

These trends have been accompanied by the phenomenal increase in international non-governmental organizations,<sup>3</sup> transnational social movements, and other associational networks on a global scale. While state authority has not been replaced by a global governance structure, concepts such as global civil society or “cosmopolitan citizenship”<sup>4</sup> are affecting the way people around the world think about the exchange of rights and obligations between state and society.

In Mexico, the citizenship compact since the 1910–1917 revolution included elements of individual citizenship rights derived from liberal ideology (such as effective suffrage and free public, secular education), together with a corporatist model of the representation of interests of the major social “sectors.” State policy toward the indigenous population, estimated at 8–11% of the population in 1990,<sup>5</sup> was based on the official ideology of *indigenismo*. This was a paternalistic, welfare-oriented, assimilationist ideology, designed to forestall autonomy claims and absorb the indigenous population into peasant and Mexican national identities.<sup>6</sup> Indigenous communal land-holdings and self-determination had long been seen by the state as obstacles to capitalist modernization. The compromise institutionalized in the 1940s–1970s set aside a social property sector in the form of *ejidos*, protected under Article 27 of the Constitution; with peasant and Indian-as-peasant interests supposedly represented by a monopolistic sectoral association sponsored by the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). Actual and potential beneficiaries of agrarian reform thus owed loyalty to the party, which was uniquely positioned to deliver on those corporate rights guaranteed to peasants as part of the legacy of the Mexican Revolution. The National Indigenist Institute (INI), created in 1948, in effect supplanted indigenous self-organization with state-directed development initiatives.

In the 1980s and 1990s, the new phase of globalization following the 1982 Mexican debt crisis (and subsequent economic opening) affected the existing citizenship pact. Facing increasing militancy of regional indigenous organizations within Mexico, and growing pressure to present a “modern” image to transnational lenders and investors, the Mexican government became the first in Latin America to ratify Convention 169 of the International Labor Organization

---

<sup>3</sup> Held *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

<sup>4</sup> Richard Falk, “The Making of Global Citizenship,” in Jeremy Brecher, John Brown Childs and Jill Cutler (eds), *Global Visions: Beyond the New World Order* (Boston: South End Press, 1993), pp. 39–59; and David Held, *Democracy and the Global Order: From the Modern State to Cosmopolitan Governance* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995).

<sup>5</sup> Jonathan Fox, Gaspar Rivera and Lynn Stephen (eds), “Indigenous Rights and Self-Determination in Mexico,” *Cultural Survival Quarterly* 23:1 (1999), p. 25.

<sup>6</sup> Julio C. Tresierra, “Mexico: Indigenous Peoples and the Nation-State,” in Donna Lee Van Cott (ed.), *Indigenous Peoples and Democracy in Latin America* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1994), pp. 187–210; and Héctor Díaz-Polanco, *La rebelión zapatista y la autonomía* (Mexico: Siglo XXI, 1997).

in 1989, recognizing rights of indigenous people. This required a reform of Article 4 of the Mexican Constitution on individual guarantees in 1990, for the first time explicitly recognizing that “the Mexican nation has a multicultural composition originally based on its indigenous peoples.” However, the hasty and inadequate consultations arranged by the state left out many organizations; and the wording of the reforms stressed “cultural” rights to the exclusion of economic, social and political rights—thus falling short of the international commitments which the government had signed in ILO Convention 169, as indigenous organizers denounced.<sup>7</sup> Many indigenous groups—already organizing to reclaim the historical memory of 500 years of colonialism in 1992, in opposition to the celebrations of the quincentennial “Encounter” by transnational elites—were further galvanized to reopen the question of identity and rights in the Mexican historical context.

Also at the end of 1991, the Salinas administration introduced amendments to Article 27 that would take effect in January, 1992, in effect eliminating the protections for communal and *ejido* property. Article 27 had been a cornerstone of the collective rights won in the Mexican Revolution, reflecting the mass mobilization of peasants by Emiliano Zapata. The “reforms” of Article 27, again responding to the demands of neoliberal globalization to remove all national impediments to private property ownership and market-based commerce, potentially affected 54% of all agricultural land in the country.<sup>8</sup> With the evisceration of Article 27, the clash between the global reorganization of capital and the rise of autonomous peasant organizations in Mexico came to a head.<sup>9</sup> In the case of Chiapas, the specific conditions of a large backlog of agrarian reform claims, boss rule (*caciquismo*), and repression combined to radicalize many of the independent peasant organizations that became the support base of the Zapatista rebellion.<sup>10</sup>

The Zapatista demands for citizenship rights (not just liberal-individual, but also collective rights) were only one manifestation of the growth of popular movements in the 1980s and 1990s pressuring for democratization of a corrupt, clientelistic, and arbitrary system.<sup>11</sup> The democratizing content of their challenge to state authority was underscored by the fact that Salinas himself had come to power in 1988 through the most fraudulent election since the Mexican Revolution, and therefore symbolized the violation of several key components of the

---

<sup>7</sup> Fox *et al.*, *op. cit.*; Tresierra, *op. cit.*, p. 202; and Neil Harvey, “Resisting Neoliberalism, Constructing Citizenship: Indigenous Movements in Chiapas,” in Wayne A. Cornelius, Todd A. Eisenstadt and Jane Hindley (eds), *Subnational Politics and Democratization in Mexico* (La Jolla, CA: Center for US–Mexican Studies, University of California–San Diego, 1999), pp. 248–250.

<sup>8</sup> Deborah J. Yashar, “Contesting Citizenship: Indigeneous Movements and Democracy in Latin America,” *Comparative Politics* 31:1 (1998), p. 35.

<sup>9</sup> Julio Moguel, “Crisis del capital y reorganización productiva en el medio rural,” in Julio Moguel, Carlota Botey and Luis Hernández (eds), *Autonomía y nuevos sujetos sociales en el desarrollo rural* (Mexico: Siglo XXI, 1992); and David Barkin, Irene Ortiz and Fred Rosen, “Globalization and Resistance: The Remaking of Mexico,” *NACLA Report on the Americas* 30:4 (1997), pp. 14–27.

<sup>10</sup> Neil Harvey, “Impact of Reforms to Article 27 on Chiapas: Peasant Resistance in the Neoliberal Public Sphere,” in Laura Randall (ed.), *Reforming Mexico’s Agrarian Reform* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1996), pp. 151–171.

<sup>11</sup> Harvey, “Resisting Neoliberalism,” *op. cit.*, p. 242.

historical claims to legitimate rule of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (effective suffrage and agrarian reform). Electoral legitimation was further undermined by the August, 1994 gubernatorial elections in Chiapas, in which peasant and indigenous groups mobilizing in support of an independent candidate were effectively disenfranchised by the fraudulent imposition of the PRI's choice (after the opposition candidate survived a suspicious "accident").

The Zapatistas concentrated their efforts on organizing civil society from below, keeping a distance from partisan electoral projects. They conducted an informal referendum on their own political strategy in June, 1995, which apparently ratified their position of pursuing negotiations and nonviolent political transformation but not merging with or converting the EZLN into a political party. Their cool stance toward the center-left PRD opposition party was a source of constant frustration to the party at the national level, though at the local level in Chiapas many grassroots Zapatista sympathizers were also PRD militants. Indeed, in other states there were rural and indigenous PRI supporters who identified with the "revolutionary" mythology of the ruling party, and also considered themselves pro-Zapatista.<sup>12</sup>

In a very thoughtful position statement on the July 2, 2000 national election, the Zapatistas reviewed the many shortcomings that would have to be corrected to democratize the Mexican political system, concluding that "... No election in these conditions can be qualified as 'democratic'"; and that while they would respect the process as one form of civic struggle:

Mexico is at war ... The extreme poverty, persecution and the lack of recognition of Indian rights have provoked the continuation of resistance, not only of the Zapatista communities of the Mexican southeast ... For the Zapatistas, democracy is much more than the electoral contest or alternation in power ... Electoral democracy does not exhaust democracy, but it is an important part of it. Therefore we are not anti-electoral ... [But] election time is not the time of the Zapatistas. Not only because we are faceless and ours is an armed resistance. [But] also, and above all, because of our dedication to finding a *new way of doing politics* which has little or nothing to do with the current one. We want to find a politics that goes from the bottom up; one in which "leading by obeying" is more than a slogan ... Democracy is when, independently of who is in office, the majority of the people have decision-making power over the matters that affect them ... Democracy is the exercise of power by the people all the time and in all places. Today, facing the current electoral process, the Zapatistas reaffirm our struggle for democracy, not *only* for electoral democracy, but *also* for electoral democracy.<sup>13</sup>

This election did turn out to be historic in the sense that it ended the 71-year lock on the presidency by the PRI, but it had serious defects in terms of electoral democracy as well as the broader democratization of Mexico.<sup>14</sup>

As they had promised, the EZLN refrained from disrupting the July, 2000 election or from giving any voting recommendation to their support bases.

<sup>12</sup> Lynn Stephen, "Pro-Zapatista and Pro-PRI: Resolving the Contradictions of Zapatismo in Rural Oaxaca," *Latin American Research Review* 32:2 (1997), pp. 41-70.

<sup>13</sup> EZLN (Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional), "Comunicado del Comité Clandestino Revolucionario Indígena-Comandancia General," available online at: <<http://www.ezln.org/archive/ezln000619.htm>> (Mexico, June 19, 2000); my translation, emphasis added.

<sup>14</sup> Global Exchange and Alianza Cívica, "Mexican Federal Elections 2000: Electoral Observation Report," available online at: <<http://www.globalexchange.org/campaigns/mexico/elections2000>> (San Francisco, Global Exchange, August, 2000).

Many Zapatista supporters in the conflicted areas of Chiapas abstained,<sup>15</sup> and the state had the highest abstention rate in the nation at 48% (up from 33% abstention among Chiapas voters in 1994). Overall the PRI surpassed the PAN vote 49–38% in rural Mexico, where clientelist networks and intimidation weighed heavily.<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, the Zapatista rebellion influenced the electoral environment. Chiapas figured prominently as an election issue, and the winning candidate from the PAN party, Vicente Fox—who ran more on a democratization platform than on his conservative ideology—made campaign promises to withdraw the military from Chiapas and to implement the 1996 San Andrés Accords recognizing indigenous rights.<sup>17</sup>

Chiapas and the rural south of Mexico are traditional repositories of votes for the PRI. In many indigenous areas, the PRI for decades had carefully grafted its clientelist structures onto the traditional political/religious hierarchies associated with “*usos y costumbres*” (customary law) of the indigenous communities.<sup>18</sup> The successful use of this machinery had historically made Chiapas an important part of the PRI’s national electoral strategy, as indigenous *caciques* (bosses) delivered blocs of votes from their communities. This link was disrupted by the Zapatista rebellion of January, 1994, forcing the PRI to rely more heavily on fraud and coercion for the Chiapas gubernatorial elections of August, 1994 (a strategy which was no longer viable by the time of the 2000 elections).

Also during the 1994–2000 administration of Ernesto Zedillo—the weakest presidency since the Mexican Revolution, with a technocrat seeking to manage combined economic and political shocks—economic resources were poured into the Chiapas patronage machine as part of the effort to silence the rebellion. In fact, the expansion of targeted social programs, compensating for the effects of neoliberal globalization, had begun earlier with the Salinas administration’s National Solidarity Program (PRONASOL). The budget of the National Indigenous Institute (INI) was increased by a factor of 18 during the first half of Salinas’ six-year term.<sup>19</sup> Programs such as PRONASOL had a mixed impact, as they were designed to mitigate the political effects of neoliberal policies that

---

<sup>15</sup> Interviews conducted in Zapatista support communities and divided communities in conflict zones of Chiapas, July 1–2, 2000. I participated as an international election observer with a Global Exchange delegation (June 25–July 5, 2000) sponsored by the Mexican NGO Alianza Cívica, accredited by Mexico’s Federal Electoral Institute.

<sup>16</sup> Alianza Cívica, “Tareas pendientes. Informe preliminar de Alianza Cívica sobre la calidad de la jornada electoral del 2 de julio de 2000,” available online at: <<http://www.laneta.apc.org/alianza/caljor.doc>> (Mexico City, July 12, 2000).

<sup>17</sup> The San Andrés Accords on indigenous rights and culture were signed between the EZLN and Mexican government in February 1996, but the government essentially reneged by never passing the necessary implementing legislation. For the text of the accords, related documents, and excellent commentary, see Luis Hernández Navarro and Ramón Vera Herrera (eds), *Acuerdos de San Andrés* (Mexico City: Ediciones Era, 1998).

<sup>18</sup> Jan Rus, “The ‘Comunidad Revolucionaria Institucional’: The Subversion of Native Government in Highland Chiapas, 1936–1968,” in Gilbert Joseph and Daniel Nugent (eds), *Everyday Forms of State Formation: Revolution and the Negotiation of Rule in Modern Mexico* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994).

<sup>19</sup> Jonathan Fox, “Targeting the Poorest: The Role of the National Indigenous Institute in Mexico’s Solidarity Program,” in Wayne Cornelius, Ann Craig and Jonathan Fox (eds), *Transforming State–Society Relations in Mexico: The National Solidarity Strategy* (La Jolla, CA: University of California–San Diego, Center for US–Mexican Studies, 1994), p. 188; and Harvey, “Resisting Neoliberalism,” pp. 247–251.

eroded the PRI's traditional electoral base, yet the new programs also made resources available to a broader range of intermediaries than the old party machinery.<sup>20</sup> Thus the hegemonic party could portray itself as responding to popular demands and respecting local indigenous custom, in a kind of modernized approach to clientelism. By 1994, however, the Zapatista rebellion had clearly presented the case that citizenship, not clientelism, was essential to the democratization of Mexico.<sup>21</sup>

The demand for recognition of effective citizenship rights had broad appeal to other sectors of Mexican society, including indigenous peoples outside the state of Chiapas. The Zapatista rebellion and the subsequent process of negotiations, particularly surrounding the San Andrés Accords on indigenous rights and culture, spurred the creation of the National Indigenous Congress (CNI) as a significant new pluriethnic social and political actor in Mexico.<sup>22</sup> In its founding declaration, "Never Again a Mexico Without Us," on the symbolic date of October 12, 1996, the 500 CNI delegates from 36 ethnic groups across Mexico demanded:

FIRST: Constitutional legal *recognition of our full existence as peoples* and our inalienable right to self-determination expressed as autonomy within the framework of the Mexican State.

SECOND: Constitutional recognition of our ancestral *lands* and territories ...

THIRD: The recognition of our indigenous normative systems in the building of a *pluralist legal system* ...

FOURTH: The recognition of *our differences and our capacity to govern ourselves* according to our own vision in which autonomy and democracy are expressed as the power of the people.

FIFTH: ... recognition of all of our *social, political, and cultural rights* ...

SIXTH: The immediate and complete *compliance with the Accords* from Session One on Indigenous Rights and Culture of the Dialogues of *San Andrés* ...

SEVENTH: The *demilitarization* of the indigenous zones of the country, an end to the harassment of indigenous organizations, social movements and their leaders ...<sup>23</sup>

This articulation of demands flowed from the recognition that citizenship (in the form of individual rights) had been unevenly extended over the national territory in many parts of Latin America.<sup>24</sup> In that historic context, the neoliberal

<sup>20</sup> Denise Dresser, *Neopopulist Solutions to Neoliberal Problems: Mexico's National Solidarity Program* (La Jolla, CA: University of California—San Diego, Center for US—Mexican Studies, 1991); and Juan Molinar Horcasitas and Jeffrey Weldon, "Electoral Determinants and Consequences of National Solidarity," in *Transforming State—Society Relations in Mexico: The National Solidarity Strategy*, *op. cit.*

<sup>21</sup> Jonathan Fox, "The Difficult Transition from Clientelism to Citizenship: Lessons from Mexico," in Douglas A. Chalmers *et al.* (eds), *The New Politics of Inequality in Latin America: Rethinking Participation and Representation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 391–420.

<sup>22</sup> Andrés Aubry, "Autonomy in the San Andrés Accords: Expression and Execution of a New Federal Pact," in Jan Rus, Aída Hernández Castillo and Shannan L. Mattiace (eds), *Land, Liberty and Autonomy: Zapatismo and the Indigenous Peoples of Chiapas* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, forthcoming).

<sup>23</sup> Congreso Nacional Indígena (CNI), "Declaration: 'Never Again a Mexico Without Us,'" Lynn Stephen (trans.), *Cultural Survival Quarterly* 23:1 (1999), pp. 39–40; emphasis added.

<sup>24</sup> Rodolfo Stavenhagen, "Challenging the Nation-State in Latin America," *Journal of International Affairs* 45:2 (1992), pp. 421–40; Guillermo O'Donnell, "On the State, Democra-

retreat of the state from social commitments to collectivities of citizens left indigenous people and other marginalized groups without any effective form of interest intermediation *vis-à-vis* the state.<sup>25</sup> Thus the demand for “ethnic citizenship” or “the collective right to difference”<sup>26</sup> did not seek separation from other groups or from the nation-state, but rather the right to negotiate the terms of those links; i.e. contesting citizenship, in a framework that had been altered in part by processes of globalization.

The Zapatistas modeled their vision of democratization from below in the form of the autonomy movement, developing at the village level since they declared themselves in rebellion against the “*mal gobierno*” (misgovernment). Zapatista supporters in Chiapas reject government “gifts” of social programs and aid; not because the autonomy movement proposes secession or autarky, but rather because they insist that such benefits must come within a framework of recognition of rights.<sup>27</sup> The Zapatista support bases proceeded to develop village-level productive projects emphasizing self-sufficiency, as well as parallel social infrastructure (such as schools and clinics) and locally elected political administration at the municipal level. While locally rooted, these projects linked themselves to global networks of human rights and humanitarian civil society organizations.

The Mexican state responded to this global reconfiguration of political communities by attempting to forcibly reimpose localism, bottling up and isolating the rebel contagion. Following the January 1, 1994 armed uprising and the ceasefire 12 days later, the government began what would be a continually escalating militarization in Chiapas, deploying one-third of the federal army in a state containing less than 4% of the Mexican population.<sup>28</sup> In December, 1994, federal troops encircled the Lacandón Jungle region of eastern Chiapas and began to close the noose around what they saw as the center of the Zapatista rebellion. Defying this definition of where the Zapatista movement was “located,” the EZLN responded in December, 1994 by declaring 38 autonomous municipalities, most of them outside the besieged territory. The government persisted in viewing the EZLN as a contained phenomenon that could be surgically removed, as reflected in the February, 1995 military offensive by the federal army. The operation violated the “Law of Dialogue” which banned troop deployments while negotiations were in progress, and it failed in its objective of capturing the Zapatista leadership.

---

(Footnote continued)

tion and Some Conceptual Problems: A Latin American View with Glances at Some Postcommunist Countries,” *World Development* 21:8 (1993), pp. 1355–1369.

<sup>25</sup> Deborah J. Yashar, “Democracy, Indigenous Movements, and the Postliberal Challenge in Latin America,” *World Politics* 52:1 (1999), p. 85.

<sup>26</sup> Neil Harvey, *The Chiapas Rebellion: The Struggle for Land and Democracy* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998); Yashar, “Contesting Citizenship,” *op. cit.*

<sup>27</sup> Richard Stahler-Sholk, “Neoliberalism and Democratic Transition: Looking for Autonomy in the Jungles of Chiapas,” paper presented at 56th Annual Meeting, Midwest Political Science Association, Chicago, April 23–25, 1998.

<sup>28</sup> Centro de Derechos Humanos Fray Bartolomé de las Casas, “La guerra en Chiapas: ¿Incidente en la historia?” available online at: <<http://www.laneta.apc.org/cdhbcasas>> (San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas, Mexico, 1999). See also: Global Exchange/CIEPAC/CENCOS, *Always Near, Always Far: The Armed Forces in Mexico* (San Francisco: Global Exchange, 2000).



In the subsequent years, both the Zapatista political strategy and state responses involved a process of contesting rights within an increasingly globalized context. The Zapatistas redoubled their efforts to mobilize civil society networks, issuing their January, 1996 Fourth Declaration of the Lacandón Jungle calling for a broad civic front (FZLN), and organizing a July, 1996 International Encounter for Humanity and Against Neoliberalism.<sup>29</sup> Following the December, 1996 breakdown of negotiations over the government's unwillingness to pass legislation implementing the San Andrés Accords, the Zapatistas resumed their political outreach, sending 1111 delegates to the Mexico City founding of the FZLN civic front in September, 1997. Even after the December, 1997 Acteal massacre by government-backed paramilitaries, which was followed by increased militarization, the Zapatistas continued the *de facto* implementation of San Andrés by modeling participatory government and development in the self-proclaimed autonomous municipalities.<sup>30</sup> These initiatives included inviting international human rights observers into Zapatista communities as "accompaniers," providing a kind of protection based on the globalization of human rights norms. This would seem to be an example of what Keck and Sikkink have called the "boomerang effect,"<sup>31</sup> connecting to "transnational advocacy networks" as a way of doing end runs around repressive states. The EZLN spokesperson, Subcommander Marcos, explicitly recognized that globalization creates new space for this kind of reorganizing of civil society:

... Contact with this international zapatismo means, for the communities, the possibility of resisting and having a more effective shield than the EZLN, than civil organization, than national zapatismo. And that has to do with the very logic of neoliberalism in Mexico, which stakes a lot on its international image.<sup>32</sup>

Yet the "transnational advocacy network" approach is limited in that it conceives of those networks essentially as backboards for bouncing off shots that will hit the state from another direction. It focuses on the resources and political opportunities for domestic mobilization, rather than the multiple causes which often involve interaction between structural opportunity and subjective agency of social actors. It still treats the state as autonomous, rather than analyzing the opposing networks of transnational class alliances. A more nuanced approach to civil society organizing in response to globalization would locate both state and oppositional networks in their historical contexts, and also consider the "meso-level" networking that allows local communities (e.g. Zapatistas) to connect with each other across state-structured divides.<sup>33</sup> The real novelty of the Zapatista movement is not just that it connects the very local to the global, but rather in its insistence on the autonomous right of local communities to choose and define the manner of their connection to larger structures.

---

<sup>29</sup> EZLN, *Crónicas intergalácticas: Primer Encuentro Intercontinental por la Humanidad y contra el Neoliberalismo* (Mexico: Planeta Tierra, 1996).

<sup>30</sup> Richard Stahler-Sholk, "Massacre in Chiapas," *Latin American Perspectives* 25:4 (1998), pp. 63–75.

<sup>31</sup> Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), p. 86.

<sup>32</sup> Quoted in Yvon LeBot, *Subcomandante Marcos: El sueño zapatista* (Mexico: Plaza and Janés, 1997), p. 260.

<sup>33</sup> Yashar, "Contesting Citizenship," *op. cit.*

As spokesperson Marcos explained, the Zapatistas saw their role as catalysts in a dynamic struggle in which local and global actors influence each other:

... It took awhile for zapatismo to become known abroad, digested, assimilated ... They come here and have their own idea of what zapatismo is, their own wish for what zapatismo should be, in reality their own project. But it is a phenomenon that exists, that is real, that keeps branching off beyond the indigenous question ... It cannot pretend to constitute itself into a universal doctrine, to lead the new international or anything like that.<sup>34</sup>

In keeping with their commitment to “lead by obeying,” the Zapatistas organized regular consultations with civil society, following the orders they received from the grassroots to pursue negotiations while building a social movement. Welcoming the diversity of local struggles, they rejected vanguard status, as Marcos put it:

... The definition of the classic revolutionary doesn't fit us ... Because a revolutionary proposes fundamentally to transform things from above, not from below ... The social rebel organizes the masses and from below goes about transforming without having to propose the question of taking power ... Violence will always be useless ... That's why we say military figures should never govern, and that includes us.<sup>35</sup>

The Zapatistas assert the right of indigenous peoples in Chiapas to embrace multiple political communities, leading some to categorize the movement as the “first postmodern rebellion.”<sup>36</sup> Yet in the ensuing polemic,<sup>37</sup> critics of the postmodernist label correctly point out that the EZLN is very much engaged with the state (through arms and negotiations) on concrete issues such as land and economic justice, in contrast to the postmodern emphasis on subjectivity and relativism. Theirs is an explicitly class-based opposition to capitalism, in the specific historical context of the impact of neoliberal policies in Mexico.<sup>38</sup> On the other hand, it seems a false dichotomy to dismiss struggles to renegotiate the state–civil society link as “the involution of their strategic objective: democracy rather than social transformation or the conquest of state power,” reducible to old Latin American debates over “reform or revolution.”<sup>39</sup> In certain historical contexts, the struggle for citizenship rights and universal human rights can pose a radical, even revolutionary challenge to state power; e.g. in the struggle of “ethnic guerrillas” such as the Zapatistas, not to replace state power, but to force

---

<sup>34</sup> In LeBot, *op. cit.*, pp. 256–260.

<sup>35</sup> “Soy rebelde, no revolucionario,” *Proceso* (Mexico City) 1271 (March 11, 2001), pp. 14–15.

<sup>36</sup> Roger Burbach, “Roots of Postmodern Rebellion in Chiapas,” *New Left Review* 205 (1994), pp. 113–124.

<sup>37</sup> Daniel Nugent, “Northern Intellectuals and the EZLN,” *Monthly Review* 47 (1995), pp. 124–138; Roger Burbach, “For a Zapatista Style Postmodernist Perspective,” *Monthly Review* 47 (1996), pp. 34–41; Neil Harvey, “Impact of Reforms,” *op. cit.*, pp. 151, 167–168, footnote 1; Mark T. Berger, “Romancing the Zapatistas: International Intellectuals and the Chiapas Rebellion,” *Latin American Perspectives* 28:2 (2001), pp. 149–170.

<sup>38</sup> EZLN, *Crónicas intergalácticas*, p. 151.

<sup>39</sup> This argument is advanced in Henry Veltmeyer, “The Dynamics of Social Change and Mexico's EZLN,” *Latin American Perspectives* 27:5 (2000), pp. 88–110.

it to cede autonomy.<sup>40</sup> In rejecting a vanguardist position, the EZLN has recognized that their engagement with other national and transnational actors will change them all in some dialectical fashion; but that does not mean losing sight of the objective conditions that gave rise to the rebellion.

As part of the dynamic struggle over the redefinition of political communities, the Mexican government's counterinsurgency program in Chiapas included creating and exploiting rifts among villagers through selective handouts (*despensas*) and public works programs in the conflict zones; sponsoring a multiplicity of indigenous paramilitary groups; and redistricting (*re-municipalización*) to restructure the lines of local political authority.<sup>41</sup> The army and police began a series of joint operations to invade and dismantle the autonomous municipalities, starting with the renamed "Ricardo Flores Magón" (Taniperlas) on April 10, 1998—the anniversary of Zapata's assassination—followed by invasions of six more municipalities over the subsequent year. The Zapatistas responded by sponsoring meetings with other sectors of civil society and with the Congressional peace commission, COCOPA, from November 20–22, 1998. These were followed by a "National Consultation" on March 21, 1999, in which 5000 Zapatistas fanned out from Chiapas to over half the municipalities in the country, with over 3 million Mexicans participating in over 15,000 roundtables and discussions.<sup>42</sup> Chicano groups in the US set up parallel consultations among Mexican nationals north of the border.

The March, 1999 "Consulta" had the effect of modeling participatory democracy at the national (and transnational) level, and puncturing the military and information siege of Chiapas. It was also tremendously empowering in terms of leadership training for the delegates themselves, many of whom had never left the environs of their local communities before. Even in areas where government forces had invaded the autonomous municipalities, the communities sometimes quietly rebuilt new structures of self-government under the noses of the occupying army, and/or invited national and international human rights observers into their communities to raise the political cost of state repression.<sup>43</sup>

The Mexican government was acutely aware of the political implications of these transnational dimensions of the conflict. The authorities began detaining and expelling foreign human rights observers and humanitarian development workers, totaling 144 by mid-1999,<sup>44</sup> though there was some backpedaling on this, as international attention to the issue grew and the July, 2000 national election approached. One revealing incident in this cat-and-mouse game occurred following the July, 1998 arrest and deportation of a San Diego school-

---

<sup>40</sup> Alison Brysk, *From Tribal Village to Global Village: Indian Rights and International Relations in Latin America* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), pp. 42–53, 72.

<sup>41</sup> Richard Stahler-Sholk, "The Lessons of Acteal," *NACLA Report on the Americas* 31:5 (1998), pp. 11–14.

<sup>42</sup> George Collier with Elizabeth Lowery Quaratiello, *Basta! Land and the Zapatista Rebellion in Chiapas*, rev. ed. (Oakland, CA: Food First, 1999), pp. 173–175; and Gustavo Esteva, "The Meaning and Scope of the Struggle for Autonomy," *Latin American Perspectives* 28:2 (2001), pp. 120–148.

<sup>43</sup> Interviews with participants in the national *Consulta* (informal referendum) from autonomous municipalities in Chiapas, January and July, 1999.

<sup>44</sup> Global Exchange, *Foreigners of Conscience: The Mexican Government's Campaign Against International Human Rights Observers in Chiapas* (San Francisco: Global Exchange, 1999).

teacher who had been organizing caravans of supporters to help build an independent school in the Zapatista highlands center of Oventic. Invoking national sovereignty, the government alleged that the project violated the Mexican constitution by designing curriculum without state permission. The Mexican ambassador, meeting with the organizer's US Congressional representative, reportedly said that they could build a school anywhere *else* in the country, but that the Mexican government could not tolerate the autonomy of indigenous people.<sup>45</sup> The government first expelled, then backed down and readmitted, the head of the largest international observer delegation just before the July 2, 2000 national election, though Federal Judicial Police agents staked out the human rights office where the group held meetings in Mexico City.<sup>46</sup> As paramilitary violence in Chiapas escalated in the weeks leading up to the August 20, 2000 gubernatorial election, international visibility rose when Nobel laureate and indigenous rights activist Rigoberta Menchú of Guatemala announced that she would be an election observer.<sup>47</sup>

The government had its own international networks to draw on, including transnational banks interested in stability in Mexico, as well as US military aid and increased training for counterinsurgency. By the late 1990s, Mexico had more enrollees than any other country at the US Army School of the Americas in Ft. Benning, Georgia. Also from 1996–1999, 3200 members of Mexico's elite Airborne Special Forces Group (GAFF) received training mainly at Ft. Bragg, North Carolina.<sup>48</sup> President-elect Vicente Fox seemed to persist in this view that the Zapatistas represented a "local problem" that could be easily contained in space and time, to be solved "in 15 minutes," as he repeatedly declared during his campaign.<sup>49</sup>

Enthusiasts of the democratizing potential of the Internet, with its decentralized restructuring of information flows, celebrated the Zapatistas' extensive use of this global medium.<sup>50</sup> Yet at the same time, counterinsurgency strategists at

---

<sup>45</sup> Brysk, *From Tribal Village to Global Village*, *op. cit.*, p. 205. The expulsion order barring educator Peter Brown from Mexico was revoked in December, 2000 by incoming Mexican President Vicente Fox. Brown remarked that US President Bill Clinton should follow suit by granting clemency to Native American prisoner Leonard Peltier.

<sup>46</sup> Personal observation as a participant in the Global Exchange election observer delegation, June 25–July 5, 2000. The government rejected the idea of international election observation as an interference with national sovereignty, but finally agreed to issue special visas for "foreign electoral visitors."

<sup>47</sup> "Observadores denuncian campaña de linchamiento en Chiapas," *La Jornada* (Mexico City) (August 18, 2000). Observers denounced the "lynching campaign" whipped up in the state media against election observers, who were portrayed as radical outside agitators. Rigoberta Menchú commented that "the eyes of all of Mexico and a good part of world public opinion are on the elections ..."

<sup>48</sup> Latin America Working Group and Center for International Policy, *Just the Facts: A Civilian's Guide to U.S. Defense and Security Assistance to Latin America and the Caribbean* (Washington, DC: 1999). See also Brian Willson, "The Slippery Slope: U.S. Military Moves Into Mexico," available online at: <<http://www.globalexchange.org/campaigns/mexico/slope>> (San Francisco, Global Exchange, April, 1998).

<sup>49</sup> See e.g.: "El conflicto en Chiapas 'local'; se circunscribe a ese estado: Fox," *La Jornada* (Mexico City) (August 12, 2000).

<sup>50</sup> Harry Cleaver, "The Zapatistas and the Electronic Fabric of Struggle," in John Holloway and Eloina Peláez (eds), *Zapatista! Reinventing Revolution in Mexico* (Sterling, VA: Pluto Press, 1998), pp. 81–103.

the RAND Corporation began studying what they consider the Zapatista "terrorist" threat to hierarchy, and calling for the powerful to learn the arts of "social netwar."<sup>51</sup> Clearly the Zapatista movement is not reducible to the Internet, though they used it both strategically and symbolically;<sup>52</sup> nor is the technology itself predestined to favor a political power shift in one direction or the other. Rather, this is one more contested terrain of globalization in which the Zapatista struggle is joined.

The Zapatista rebellion illustrates some of the ways in which political communities, and the associated claims of political rights, are being reshaped in the context of globalization. These processes are conflictual, and the political dimension is only one of several overlapping dimensions of globalization.

### **The Economics of Globalization: Neoliberalism and Resistance from Below**

The economic aspect of globalization has been dominated by the neoliberal paradigm, spreading the operating principles of unrestricted market forces on a new global scale. The global spread of market-based economic restructuring, rollback of the scope of state activity in the economic realm, and privatization, has resulted in different kinds of impacts depending on the structural place of each nation-state in the world economy and the existing configuration of class and state structures. On a global scale, the increasing concentrations of capital and new inequalities tend to reinforce a transnational stratification of classes, changing the way power is contested, e.g. in Latin America.<sup>53</sup>

The implications of neoliberal globalization for democracy are complex. As economic activity is integrated at a higher level on a global scale, the locus of decision-making power becomes further removed from the social subjects, creating something like the "democracy deficit" often noted in the field of international organization. The globalization of the economy has outpaced the creation of legitimate structures of global governance (since sovereignty still resides essentially at the level of the nation-state). Power is in effect shifting to the hands of unelected national and transnational technocrats, who structurally represent interests at odds with those of the popular classes, as the Seattle protesters at the November, 1999 WTO ministerial meeting pointed out. At the national level, the neoliberal model seems to promote what O'Donnell calls "delegative democracy,"<sup>54</sup> emptied of substantive content and depth as important decisions are made by the IMF, World Bank, and WTO. Indeed, in place of the elective affinity once posited to exist between multinational corporations and authoritarian regimes in Latin America, the strategic interests of transnational

---

<sup>51</sup> See e.g.: David Ronfeldt *et al.*, *The Zapatista Social Netwar in Mexico* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1998); and John Arquilla, David Ronfeldt and Michele Zanini, "Information-Age Terrorism," *Current History* 99:636 (2000), pp. 179–185.

<sup>52</sup> Brysk, *op. cit.*, p. 160.

<sup>53</sup> William I. Robinson, "Latin America in the Age of Inequality: Confronting the New Utopia," *International Studies Review* 1:3 (1999), pp. 41–67.

<sup>54</sup> Guillermo O'Donnell, "Delegative Democracy," *Journal of Democracy* 5:1 (1994), pp. 55–69.

capital might now be better served by this kind of restricted democracy or “polyarchy.”<sup>55</sup>

In the case of Mexico, the implementation of neoliberal policies since 1982 has increased the concentration of wealth, seriously eroded the purchasing power of workers’ wages and massively disrupted peasant agriculture, all affecting the balance of social forces in the country.<sup>56</sup> At the same time, opposition social movement organizing—including the Zapatistas, among many other sectors of civil society—has grown,<sup>57</sup> and to varying degrees linked to transnational networks (ranging from cross-border labor organizing to human rights groups). One comparison of the political impact of neoliberal policies in Latin America suggests that they are most likely to clash with political liberalization when the rollback of the state eliminates channels for popular participation, and when the burden of adjustment falls mainly on groups that are also challengers to national identity, such as the Zapatistas.<sup>58</sup>

The Mexican party-state during the last three six-year presidential administrations (1982–2000) sought to implement a relatively gradual process of neoliberal reforms. Their impact was cushioned in part by large US-promoted loan packages, motivated by US interests in stability in Mexico and in the smooth implementation of NAFTA. Both the US and Mexican governments had information about the existence of the EZLN even before the rebels went public on the day NAFTA took effect on January 1, 1994; but both governments suppressed the news to avoid frightening investors and disrupting the NAFTA fast-track. The connection between the transnational investment climate and the Zapatista rebellion was made clear by a leaked memo from Chase Manhattan Bank—participant in one of the largest bailout loans to Mexico following the December, 1994 peso crash—to its corporate investors. The document suggested that the Mexican government would have to “eliminate the Zapatistas,” and “carefully consider whether or not to allow opposition victories if fairly won at the ballot box.”<sup>59</sup> This warning came when the Zapatistas had just declared 38 municipalities in Chiapas to be autonomous, and it was followed by the February, 1995 Mexican military offensive, which violated the ceasefire in an unsuccessful effort to capture the Zapatista leadership.

The military offensive shored up the sagging credentials of the neoliberal technocrat Zedillo with the powerbrokers in the PRI’s “dinosaur” wing. However, the political fallout, combined with rising popular discontent over the social and economic costs of neoliberalism, helped force Zedillo into accepting the 1995–1996 electoral reforms which he mistakenly believed the PRI could

---

<sup>55</sup> William I. Robinson, *Promoting Polyarchy: Globalization, U.S. Intervention, and Hegemony* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

<sup>56</sup> Gerardo Otero (ed.) *Neoliberalism Revisited: Economic Restructuring and Mexico’s Political Future* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1996); and Barkin *et al.*, *op. cit.*

<sup>57</sup> See Dan LaBotz, *Democracy in Mexico: Peasant Rebellion and Political Reform* (Boston: South End Press, 1995).

<sup>58</sup> Alison Brysk and Carol Wise, “Liberalization and Ethnic Conflict in Latin America,” *Studies in Comparative International Development* 323:2 (1997), pp. 76–104.

<sup>59</sup> Riordan Roett, “Chase Manhattan’s Emerging Markets Group Memo,” in Ken Silverstein and Alexander Cockburn, “Major U.S. Bank Urges Zapatista Wipe-Out: ‘A Litmus Test for Mexico’s Stability,’” *Counterpunch* 2:3 (1995).

outmaneuver.<sup>60</sup> Neoliberalism did not exactly cause democratization, but the changing global context did combine with domestic political mobilization to inadvertently open political space.

The impact of neoliberal policies in the 1980s and 1990s was devastating for peasant agriculture, and interacted with political conditions in Chiapas in complex ways to generate the Zapatista rebellion.<sup>61</sup> The oil boom and bust, followed by market liberalization—dismantling of the coffee marketing board INMECAFE, withdrawal of corn price supports, and the threat of a flood of cheap grain imports when NAFTA opened the floodgates for US agribusiness—combined to have a major impact on poor peasant producers. After INMECAFE withdrew from coffee marketing and the International Coffee Organization failed to fix production quotas in 1989, world prices fell 50%, in a sector where 70% of the producers were small growers on plots of less than two hectares.<sup>62</sup> For grain producers, the financial liberalization (peso devaluation) raised input prices at a time when rural credit was being cut and price supports removed in the 1980s. These policies were intensified under the terms of a 1989 World Bank structural adjustment loan, which weakened the traditional role of the state as the political intermediary for transnational capital in managing the national agro-food system.<sup>63</sup>

The impact was particularly severe in Chiapas, which produced more corn for the national market than any other state. Indeed, the stark contrast between the wealth of natural resources in Chiapas and the poverty of most of its population, particularly in the indigenous areas, was the point of departure for the Zapatistas' critique of global capitalism, as outlined in Subcommander Marcos' ironic "tourist guide to Chiapas."<sup>64</sup> Moreover, the 1992 "reform" of Article 27 of the Constitution in preparation for NAFTA (eliminating the last hope of land reform for poor peasants) had a harsh effect in Chiapas, where 27% of the national backlog of unresolved land reform claims were concentrated.<sup>65</sup> Independent peasant organizations that had been forming in Chiapas since the 1990s to promote alternative credit, marketing, and land solutions—precursors to the Zapatistas—pressured the government to negotiate with autonomous groups outside the official PRI-controlled National Peasant Confederation, CNC.<sup>66</sup> However, in a state where local bosses from the corrupt "dinosaur" wing of the PRI prevailed, these autonomous initiatives were routinely bypassed or repressed, ultimately driving many into the ranks of the rebellion.

At the national level, the neoliberal shift to state withdrawal jeopardized the

---

<sup>60</sup> For details of Zedillo's miscalculated strategy of liberalization, see Pamela K. Starr, "Monetary Mismanagement and Inadvertent Democratization in Technocratic Mexico," *Studies in Comparative International Development* 33:4 (1999), pp. 45–47.

<sup>61</sup> See Harvey, *The Chiapas Rebellion*, *op. cit.*; and Collier and Quaratiello, *op. cit.*

<sup>62</sup> Harvey, *The Chiapas Rebellion*, *op. cit.*, pp. 176–180.

<sup>63</sup> Philip McMichael and David Myhre, "Global Regulation vs. the Nation-State: Agro-Food Systems and the New Politics of Capital," *Capital and Class* 43:43–45 (1991), pp. 83–105.

<sup>64</sup> Subcomandante Marcos, "A Tourist Guide to Chiapas," *Monthly Review* 46 (1994), pp. 8–18. See also Thomas Benjamin, *A Rich Land, A Poor People: Politics and Society in Modern Chiapas*, 2nd edn (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996).

<sup>65</sup> Harvey, "Impact of Reforms," *op. cit.*, p. 163.

<sup>66</sup> Harvey, *The Chiapas Rebellion*, *op. cit.*, pp. 118–168; Collier and Quaratiello, *op. cit.*, pp. 70–83.

elaborate structure of clientelism built into the Mexican political system since its institutionalization in the 1930s. The PRI had historically controlled the exchange of material resources for political loyalties, through its corporatist system of monopolistic sectoral associations (of labor, peasants, and the “popular organizations” of civil servants and the self-employed). In the neoliberal era, the downsized state had to offer material resources on a more competitive basis to independent as well as officialist organizations, in a more pluralistic variant of clientelism.<sup>67</sup> The premier example of this kind of “targeted social compensation” was the National Solidarity Program (PRONASOL), implemented with great fanfare during the 1988–1994 Salinas administration. This program, involving funding for public works and other projects in areas affected by neoliberal austerity, was initially controlled directly by the presidency, and made use of party and national symbols and colors to deflect political opposition to the neoliberal agenda. It was followed by programs to provide adjustment support for small farmers losing price supports for their crops (PROCAMPO), and direct welfare payments to poor households to offset education, health, and food expenses (PROGRESA).

All of these programs represented a precarious strategy for reformulating clientelism, both because of the financial constraints imposed by neoliberalism, and because of pressure from the PRI’s “dinosaur” wing to channel resources for personal or electoral gain.<sup>68</sup> The political strategy for implementing neoliberal policies turned out to have major holes in those local areas where political bosses were entrenched; or among entire sectors of the population such as indigenous people in Chiapas, historically denied space to organize around their collective interests.<sup>69</sup> It is in this space that the Zapatistas’ combined economic and political appeal resonated, not only in Chiapas but as a broader protest against neoliberal globalization.

After January, 1994, land invasions accelerated in Chiapas as peasants were emboldened by the Zapatista rebellion. The government attempted to exploit divisions with promises of resources and new land distribution to be channeled through pro-PRI organizations. However, this strategy tended to discredit the coopted organizations, particularly when large landowners were the main beneficiaries of compensation payments for lands allegedly affected by the unrest, and violent evictions continued with impunity.<sup>70</sup>

Autonomous indigenous and peasant control of land and resources posed a threat to both political hegemony and the neoliberal model of market-determined priorities. Privatization and removing barriers to foreign investment would privilege global market forces over local priorities. Marketable resources in Chiapas, particularly in the conflicted region of the canyons (*Las Cañadas*) of the Lacandón Jungle, include: (1) oil and natural gas reserves, perhaps even

---

<sup>67</sup> Judith Adler Hellman, “Mexican Popular Movements, Clientelism, and the Process of Democratization,” *Latin American Perspectives* 81:2 (1994), pp. 124–142.

<sup>68</sup> Judith Teichman, “Neoliberalism and the Transformation of Mexican Authoritarianism,” *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos* 13:1 (1997), pp. 121–147.

<sup>69</sup> Fox, “Targeting the Poorest,” *op. cit.*; Brysk and Wise, *op. cit.*, pp. 94–97; Neil Harvey, “Rural Reforms and the Question of Autonomy in Chiapas,” in Wayne A. Cornelius and David Myhre (eds), *The Transformation of Rural Mexico: Reforming the Ejido Sector* (La Jolla, CA: University of California–San Diego, Center for US–Mexican Studies, 1998), pp. 71–85.

<sup>70</sup> Harvey, “Rural Reforms,” *op. cit.*, pp. 76–83.



greater than publicly acknowledged in the Ocosingo field; (2) the tremendous hydroelectric potential of the Usumacinta River system, in a state which already supplies over half the country's hydroelectric power; and (3) biodiversity in the Montes Azules biosphere reserve.<sup>71</sup>

In late 1999 and early 2000, the Mexican government began planning with a consortium of domestic and international investors and World Bank financing for a major integrated development scheme in the Lacandón region.<sup>72</sup> This planning was accompanied by large-scale road construction and forcible evictions of peasant communities, which also reinforced counterinsurgency strategies in the region. Transnational controversy also developed over a \$2.5 million US government-funded bioprospecting project, led by researchers at the University of Georgia and the Mexican research center ECOSUR, criticized by local indigenous groups, who appealed to international NGOs. The recent introduction into Chiapas of genetically modified seeds by Monsanto and other TNCs has further sharpened the debates over control of development policy.<sup>73</sup> In each of these cases, the point raised by indigenous groups is not necessarily that the projects have no merit. After all, communities in Chiapas have been petitioning for roads for decades, and indigenous groups also experiment with biodiversity in traditional medicine and agriculture. Rather, the objection is that global market-oriented structures and institutions are undercutting self-determination, depriving communities of the power to set priorities and to negotiate the terms of access and distribution of benefits.

Despite the symbolic warning of the Zapatista rebellion timed to coincide with the day NAFTA went into effect, the Zedillo administration rushed to complete a spate of free trade agreements before the July 2, 2000 election. By the time of the election, these agreements broke down economic borders between Mexico and some 37 countries.<sup>74</sup> One of the biggest prizes for the globalizers was the European Union–Mexico Free Trade Agreement, which was signed in March and entered into force on July 1, 2000 (the day before the election). However, globalization also raised the costs of ignoring or repressing the Zapatista

---

<sup>71</sup> Ana Esther Ceceña and Andrés Barreda, "Chiapas and the Global Restructuring of Capital, in John Holloway and Eloísa Peláez (eds), *Zapatista! Reinventing Revolution in Mexico* (Sterling, VA: Pluto Press, 1998), pp. 44–49.

<sup>72</sup> Elio Henríquez, "Millonario programa productivo en zonas de influencia zapatista," *La Jornada* (Mexico City) (June 29, 1999); Matilde Pérez U., "En el nuevo milenio, otro valor económico para la Lacandona," *La Jornada* (January 3, 2000), and "Disputan grupos empresariales recursos de la selva Lacandona," *La Jornada* (January 4, 2000).

<sup>73</sup> Rural Advancement Foundation International, "Biopiracy Project in Chiapas, Mexico Denounced by Mayan Indigenous Groups," RAFI News Release (December 1, 1999), and "Agreeing to Disagree—Or Agreeing to Disappear? Biopiracy Project in Chiapas, Mexico," RAFI Communique No. 65 (May–June, 2000), available online at: <<http://www.rafi.org>> (Osborne, Winnipeg, Canada). On the distribution of genetically modified seeds that create dependency on TNC suppliers, see: "Los organismos genéticamente modificados: Implicaciones para México y Chiapas," CIEPAC, *Chiapas al Día* 175–176 (September 18–25, 1999), and "Monsanto y Novartis, su expresión del Tratado de Libre Comercio en el campo chiapaneco," *Chiapas al Día* 176 (September 25, 1999). There were reports that Monsanto's infamous "Roundup-Ready" seeds—specially engineered to resist the company's herbicides—were being distributed to communities supportive of the ruling PRI party.

<sup>74</sup> Gustavo Castro Soto, "Los tratados de libre comercio y las elecciones," *Chiapas al Día* 198, available online at: <<http://www.ciepac.org/bulletins/bolec198.html>> (San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas, Mexico, June 13, 2000).

resistance to neoliberalism. The Italian government withheld ratification of the free trade agreement at least until after the election, delaying implementation of some areas of trade liberalization as leverage to press for political liberalization. The continually escalating militarization of Chiapas had attracted visits in the preceding year by the European Human Rights Commission and by the United Nations Commissioner for Human Rights, Mary Robinson. Public opinion in Italy had been sensitized after the Mexican government expelled an Italian delegation (including a member of parliament) that attempted to visit the seat of the autonomous municipality at Taniperlas, following the military invasion and arrests there in April, 1998. US public awareness of Chiapas lagged behind Europe, but "sense of the Congress" resolutions introduced in November, 1999 reflected growing awareness and concern over the Mexican government's human rights record, militarization, expulsion of foreign observers, and apparent lack of interest in a negotiated solution in Chiapas.<sup>75</sup> The presence of observers in Chiapas, and the transnational human rights networks which gave some protection and amplified voice to Mexican civil society, had some effect on the state's negotiation of access to global markets.

The clash between the neoliberal model and the Zapatista model of autonomy is illustrated in the World Bank's documents outlining its development scheme for the Lacandón Jungle. The promoters of the project lament that "... the youth have in their aspirations the goal of reproducing themselves as peasants, which leads to strong pressure on the land, at the same time accumulating powerful social explosiveness."<sup>76</sup> The neoliberal model would turn those stubborn peasants into interchangeable workers in a global economy, "free" to be relocated from valuable land and other marketable commodities. Under the logic of time-space compression that defines globalization, the accidents of geography and history are irrelevant to the strictly market-determined use of resources in the most profitable combinations. Thus biodiversity is seen as a natural resource, and the rights to exploit it are considered the property of those who have the necessary concentration of capital. Transnational corporations assert a right to appropriate, modify, and patent genetic forms as their "intellectual property," without regard for the non-market custodianship of native peoples of Chiapas or the Amazon or India, nor for the local preferences of US or European consumers to be free of genetically modified foods. In this sense, the Zapatista insistence on autonomy can be seen as linked to the Seattle protests against the WTO and other emerging networks of resistance against globalization.

Yet the autonomy project was not without its ambiguities in defining alternative ways to connect the local to the global. The Zapatistas promoted the development of community-level self-government, but they resisted efforts to confine autonomy to the community level alone within the overall framework of the existing nation-state. Rather, they insisted throughout the San Andrés negotiations that autonomy must be pushed from the bottom up, recognizing the autonomy of indigenous people at the national level.<sup>77</sup> After all, a form of

---

<sup>75</sup> The resolutions were introduced by Senator Patrick J. Leahy (S.Con.Res.76) and Representative Nancy Pelosi (H.Con.Res.238) on November 18, 1999.

<sup>76</sup> *Henríquez, op. cit.*

<sup>77</sup> *Esteva, op. cit.*

atomized autonomy of communities had historically been fostered by the central state as a way to maintain political control through indigenous *caciques*, preventing the formulation of collective demands. Some indigenous leaders in Chiapas had for decades been promoting a regional autonomy project of "Pluriethnic Autonomous Regions," aimed at giving the diverse ethnic groups effective representation in the national polity.<sup>78</sup> Yet the process of formulating the autonomy model during the San Andrés negotiations made it clear that the Zapatistas demanded more than decentralization, which would simply create a fourth layer of government within the existing federal/state/municipal structure.<sup>79</sup> Purely formal democracy, such as the restricted choice reflected in the July, 2000 presidential election, was not what the Zapatistas envisioned. Rather, they were creating a new, radically democratic model which would allow communities to establish their own spaces and forms of autonomy, while also recognizing collective rights to create alternative legal systems and non-market-based regulation of land and resource use.<sup>80</sup> This was the model that the government felt politically constrained to sign onto in the February, 1996 San Andrés Accords, yet was unwilling to accept the radical implications of its actual implementation.

The PAN administration under President Vicente Fox appeared at least as firmly committed to neoliberal ideology as the last three technocratic/internationalist administrations of the PRI. PAN officials during the campaign contrasted their "pure neoliberalism" with the PRI's "crony capitalism," while at the same time criticizing the PRI's inconsistent "globalization of the economy, but not of human rights."<sup>81</sup> The PAN apparently believed that some political liberalization without altering neoliberal fundamentals would suffice to end the Zapatista rebellion. The EZLN responded to the president-elect's calls for a summit meeting to that effect with an eloquent silence; followed by a December, 2000 announcement that Marcos and 23 members of the rebel General Command would travel in a caravan from Chiapas to Mexico City in February/March, 2001 to address Congress, "regardless of whether or not the dialogue with the federal government has been resumed."<sup>82</sup> Fox's main substantive proposal was his "Puebla-Panama Plan," a mega-development scheme of infrastructural investment to turn all of southern Mexico into a low wage export-processing and transshipment zone for transnational investors. Meanwhile, the Zapatistas continued to concentrate on mobilizing national and international civil society, with their caravan culminating in a massive rally in Mexico City in March, 2001 that was comparable to the March on Washington in the US civil rights movement.

---

<sup>78</sup> Shannan I. Mattiace, "¡Zapata Vive! The EZLN, Indigenous Politics, and the Autonomy Movement in Mexico," *Journal of Latin American Anthropology* 3:1 (1997), pp. 32–71.

<sup>79</sup> Díaz Polanco, *op. cit.*

<sup>80</sup> Aubry, *op. cit.*

<sup>81</sup> Panel presentation by Carlos Salazar, director of international relations of the Partido de Acción Nacional (PAN), for Alianza Cívica/Global Exchange election observer delegation, Mexico City (June 27, 2000).

<sup>82</sup> Subcomandante Marcos, "Zapatista Delegation Will Travel to Mexico City," available online at: <<http://www.ezln.org/archive/ezln001202d-eng.htm>> (Mexico, December 2, 2000).

## Culture and Identity in the Context of Globalization

Globalization creates a kind of simulated closeness among people scattered around the globe. However, the global reach of instantaneous transmission (e.g. a CNN news flash or a global Coca Cola ad) does not mean the messages are received in the same way in different local cultures, much less that community is created, in the sense implied by the cliché “global village.” At the cultural level, globalization has meant a renegotiation of identities. As with the other realms of globalization, the process is a contested one, marked by a variety of reactions to globalization ranging from “culture jamming” (such as billboard modification) to Islamist rejections of Western hegemony.

The Zapatista movement has sought to reinterpret identities of ethnicity, class, and nation, and to assert the right to autonomously renegotiate the terms on which groups in society would relate to the state. Identities are reinforced by cultural symbols which resonate in the imagination, yet those symbols are rooted in concrete historical experiences and social structures. Thus to be a peasant (*campesino*) in Mexico has a meaning tied to the history of agrarian structures, the revolutionary struggle of Emiliano Zapata, and the *ejido* social property sector enshrined in Article 27 of the Constitution. In the neoliberal era, as the state withdrew from social commitments and attempted to construct a reformulated clientelism, the Zapatistas rejected that model of state/society relations and drew on cultural referents in their struggle for democratic citizenship.<sup>83</sup>

By demanding both individual (political) and collective rights in the form of “ethnic citizenship,”<sup>84</sup> the Zapatistas were in effect issuing a general invitation for all to participate in the democratic construction of citizenship. Adapting the unfulfilled promise of the liberal construct of citizenship, this was a struggle for “the right to have rights.”<sup>85</sup> In this sense it was analogous to the efforts of African Americans after the US Civil War, Third World national liberation movements after WWII, and black South Africans in the anti-apartheid movement, to expand the applicability of existing concepts of political rights.

Other indigenous groups in Mexico, claiming a collective ethnic identity through the new National Indigenous Congress, took up the rallying cry of “Never again a Mexico without us.”<sup>86</sup> In Chiapas, the Zapatista autonomy movement contributed to an emerging new pluriethnic consciousness among indigenous peoples (somewhat akin to the pan-Maya movement that had developed across the border in Guatemala during the recent genocidal era in that country). This reformulated identity had roots that predated the EZLN, and can be traced at least to the 1974 First Indigenous Congress in Chiapas, which generated a list of demands that were incorporated into the Zapatista program 20 years later. Further development of this identity can be seen in the Tojtzotze group—named for the first three letters of the Tojolabal, Tzotzil, and Tzeltal

---

<sup>83</sup> Fox, “The Difficult Transition from Clientelism to Citizenship,” *op. cit.*

<sup>84</sup> Discussed in Shannan I. Mattiace, “Indian Autonomy in Mexico: Alternative Nationalisms and the Politics of Difference,” paper presented at Latin American Studies Association meeting, Chicago, September 24–26, 1998; and Aubry, *op. cit.*

<sup>85</sup> Harvey, *The Chiapas Rebellion*, *op. cit.*, pp. 11–12, 26–27.

<sup>86</sup> Congreso Nacional Indígena (CNI), *op. cit.*

ethnic groups—formed at the end of 1994 in the new autonomous municipality of Tierra y Libertad, in a remote part of the Lacandón Jungle.<sup>87</sup>

The fact that these identities were newly forged, shaped by the contemporary circumstances of struggle, did not make them any less “real.” With their self-redefined ethnic identities, indigenous people in Chiapas also reconnected to global networks by linking their autonomy demands to Convention 169 of the International Labor Organization, which recognized the collective rights of indigenous peoples to control resources in their habitat. Like other indigenous movements in the Americas,<sup>88</sup> the mobilization around ethnicity in Chiapas used symbolic politics to assert identity and a “collective right to difference,” while simultaneously claiming national rights and engaging in global outreach.

The active insertion of the Zapatistas into global information networks, and particularly the Internet, has generated a lively polemic about the relation between the EZLN and a supposedly transnationalized civil society. One recent critique of the global fascination with an electronic “virtual Chiapas” argues that it oversimplifies the complex dimensions of the conflict, exaggerates the degree of organizational coherence in “civil society,” and overlooks real divisions over the definition of autonomy because it perpetuates “romanticized, essentialized notions of indigenous people.”<sup>89</sup> This line of critique also raises concerns that the ease of Internet transmission does not necessarily insure democratic equality of access for all viewpoints; and that it may even create an illusory sense of efficacy that actually decreases movement participation. Cyberspatial optimists counter that electronic information, more traditionally formatted academic analysis, and face-to-face activism are not mutually exclusive; that communication flows on the Internet are interactive flows rather than stocks of information; and that Zapatistas in Chiapas are hardly passive recipients of initiatives organized by outside NGOs.<sup>90</sup> The two sides of this debate may be talking past each other, but the debate itself highlights the point that globalization creates new terrain on which power is contested, but does not predetermine the outcome of the struggle. The Internet, like any technology, will both reflect existing social configurations of power and rearrange the forms of struggle for subverting the power structure.<sup>91</sup>

The debate also serves as a useful cautionary note against romanticizing a static view of either “indigenous tradition” or the autonomy of a movement from “outside” influence. In short, outside contact happens. In the case of Chiapas, despite an earlier generation of anthropologists laboring under the mistaken premise of the indigenous “closed corporate community,” it is becoming increasingly clear that market and other outside forces have led to a dynamic

---

<sup>87</sup> Collier and Quaratiello, *op. cit.*; and Aubry, *op. cit.*

<sup>88</sup> Brysk, *op. cit.*, pp. 37–42.

<sup>89</sup> Judith Adler Hellman, “Real and Virtual Chiapas: Magic Realism and the Left,” in Leo Panitch and Colin Leys (eds), *Socialist Register 2000* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1999), pp. 161–186.

<sup>90</sup> Harry Cleaver, “The Virtual and Real Chiapas Support Network: A Review and Critique of Judith Adler Hellman’s ‘Real and Virtual Chiapas: Magic Realism and the Left,’” available online at: <<http://www.eco.utexas.edu/Homepages/faculty/Cleaver/anti-hellman.html>> (Austin, TX, 2000).

<sup>91</sup> Gustavo Lins Ribeiro, “Cybercultural Politics: Political Activism at a Distance in a Transnational World,” in Sonia Alvarez, Evelina Dagnino and Arturo Escobar (eds), *Cultures of Politics, Politics of Cultures* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1998), pp. 325–352.

process in which “tradition” is continually reshaped. Under the political system consolidated by the PRI, a particular version of “tradition” was carefully cultivated in indigenous communities, based on a distinctive form of religious syncretism and local authority structure that was adapted to the party’s purposes of political control.<sup>92</sup> In this historic context, challenges to the vertical authority structure at the community level—which in fact was linked to undemocratic structures of national political control—often took on a cultural expression as religious dissidence. One form of this was the Liberation Theology departure from traditional Catholicism, but other forms included variants of Protestantism, which in the context of indigenous communities in Chiapas represented a challenge to the political hierarchy by rejecting alcohol and mandatory contributions for saints’ feasts and other components of the *cargo* system of village authority. This generated intense local power struggles and often expulsions from the communities (mainly of Protestants), which appeared to be religious conflicts internal to the local communities, but in fact had another dimension.<sup>93</sup> The confluence between “religious dissidence” and those squeezed out of the Chiapas highlands by an increasingly unsustainable agricultural model fueled the major migration of land colonizers into the canyons of the Lacandón Jungle in the decades leading up to the Zapatista rebellion. While a number of ideological influences shaped the new traditions that emerged on this agricultural frontier, part of the Zapatista appeal came from their ability to mobilize around class and ethnic identities of poor indigenous peasants, cutting across religious lines and also offering participatory opportunities to women that did not fit “traditional” gender roles.<sup>94</sup>

The Zapatista mobilization around cultural identity was based on a dynamic concept of culture, recognizing that existing “traditions” had in fact been shaped by economic and political structures dating back to the Spanish invasion.<sup>95</sup> Paradoxically, their struggle for indigenous rights was counterposed against those claiming to defend local tradition against the “outside”:

The defense of the traditions and culture of ethnic groups in the region, whether through declarations or expulsion of those who no longer participate in them, might suggest ... resistance, that is, mobilizations against the penetration of “the West,” “modernity,” and the national society. However ... frequently this defense, rather than a resistance of the ethnic group to the impact of the national society in the communities, is a defense mechanism for the interests of a sector that has used certain elements of ethnicity (free communal labor, quotas of monetary contributions, religious ritual) as a way to maintain and increase their economic and political influence. In fact, as a reaction, we see an inverse process of voluntary “reacculturation” where the indigenous people integrate and reorganize new cultural elements into their daily lives.<sup>96</sup>

---

<sup>92</sup> Rus, *op. cit.*

<sup>93</sup> See Christine Eber, “Buscando una nueva vida: Liberation Through Autonomy in San Pedro Chenalhó, 1970–1998,” *Latin American Perspectives*, 28:2 (2001), pp. 45–72.

<sup>94</sup> Collier and Quaratiello, *op. cit.*

<sup>95</sup> See the documents and essays in John Womack, Jr., *Rebellion in Chiapas: An Historical Reader* (New York: The New Press, 1999).

<sup>96</sup> Héctor Tejera Gaona, *Identidad, formación regional y conflicto político en Chiapas* (Mexico City: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia/CIHMECH–UNAM, 1997), pp. 88–89; my translation.

In drawing on a reinterpreted cultural tradition to demand democratic rights, the EZLN did not create a dichotomy between the indigenous/local and the national. Zapatista communiqués regularly invoke the figure of “Votán Zapata,” fusing the pre-Columbian god Votán (representing the “guardian and heart of the people”) with the revolutionary peasant leader.<sup>97</sup> When the Zapatistas cleared a site in the jungle to hold their National Democratic Convention after the initial uprising, they named the spot Aguascalientes, after the locale of the constitutional convention in the era of the Mexican Revolution. When the federal army demolished the Lacandón Jungle site, the Zapatistas built five of them and called them all Aguascalientes, turning them into multiservice and cultural resistance centers for the surrounding communities. Many of the names of the autonomous municipalities, such as “Tierra y Libertad” and “Ricardo Flores Magón,” echo the slogans and national heroes of the Mexican Revolution. In reclaiming cultural symbols and remembering the historical continuity of struggles for justice from below, the Zapatistas tapped into symbols that have powerful significance for what anthropologist Guillermo Bonfil called “deep Mexico.”<sup>98</sup>

Using symbols such as the national anthem and flag, the Zapatistas contrast their inclusive nationalism with the government’s repressive nationalism.<sup>99</sup> In the contest over national symbols, the authorities invoke national sovereignty in expelling foreign scrutinizers of human rights and democracy. To be sure, the government’s xenophobic response to international solidarity—in effect, blaming the rebellion on outside agitators—is both paternalistic in denying agency to indigenous peoples, and hypocritical coming from the promoters of neoliberal policies that subordinated national interests to transnational capital. At the same time, since the Zapatista movement is not formulated in terms of state (sovereign) power, this puts the EZLN in the seemingly awkward position of defending their vision of nationalism in alliance with foreign (non-governmental) actors.<sup>100</sup> The distinction comes down to autonomy and democracy: who gets to define the nation and represent the interests of its citizens? The Mexican state seeks to position itself as the protector of “its” indigenous people and their supposed traditional ways against “outside” contamination. The state seeks to control the globalization process, including its cultural dimension. On the other hand, as one Zapatista community leader put it, “Not all traditions are good. The important thing is, we want to choose what we want to accept from outside and how we want to live.”<sup>101</sup>

---

<sup>97</sup> José Rabasa, “Of Zapatismo: Reflections on the Folkloric and the Impossible in a Subaltern Insurrection,” in Lisa Lowe and David Lloyd (eds), *The Politics of Culture in the Shadow of Capital* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), pp. 399–431.

<sup>98</sup> Guillermo Bonfil, *México Profundo: Reclaiming a Civilization* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996); Adolfo Gilly, “Chiapas and the Rebellion of the Enchanted World,” in Daniel Nugent (ed.), *Rural Revolt in Mexico: U.S. Intervention and the Domain of Subaltern Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), pp. 261–333; and Esteva, *op. cit.*

<sup>99</sup> Ryan Long, “Challenges to State Hegemony, Competing Nationalisms and the Staging of the Conflict in Chiapas,” *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies* 8:1 (1999), pp. 101–113.

<sup>100</sup> Hellman, “Real and Virtual Chiapas,” *op. cit.*, p. 180.

<sup>101</sup> Interview with a longtime Zapatista organizer in an autonomous municipality in the highlands of Chiapas, June, 1999.

**Brief Concluding Reflections on Globalization and Democracy**

The Zapatista rebellion offers an interesting perspective on globalization and its implications for democracy. The movement is focused on the concept of autonomy, but at the same time is very much engaged with global structures, ranging from the Zapatista critique of neoliberalism to their embrace of a transnational human rights movement. In examining the political, economic, and cultural dimensions of globalization, I suggest that globalization can be best understood as an overlapping set of contested processes. The Zapatista movement, then, is a struggle for democracy within the context of those ongoing processes. It proposes autonomy not in the sense of carving out a space to be untouched by globalization, but rather understood as the right to construct a set of interactions with the forces of globalization. To be autonomous, those modes of interaction would not be imposed from above (e.g. by transnational capital and its state allies), but rather developed in participatory fashion from the grassroots.

The Zapatistas have concentrated on the mobilization of civil society, but in doing so they are also making demands of the state in terms of individual and collective rights. By using the rebellion as a wake-up call and an invitation to broad democratic participation, they are insisting on a substantive democracy. However, its exact content would be negotiated through the struggles of all sectors of the national society, not defined by a vanguard.

This open-ended formulation of the autonomy project leaves a frustrating ambiguity as to how democratization is to be achieved in the national political system. The national and state electoral processes of 2000 illustrate some of the contradictions of an authoritarian "transition to democracy." Partial liberalization of the electoral aspects of the political system does not bring democracy, particularly if the mechanisms of fraud and repression remain in place as a hidden veto, and if socioeconomic structures exclude effective participation. The Zapatista rebellion, together with other civil society movements in Mexico, have interacted with a changing global context in ways that have unsettled the regime and opened new political space. Whether that space will be effectively claimed and organized from above, or from below, is the challenge for democratization in Mexico.