

Democratization in Mexico

The Zapatista Uprising and Civil Society

by

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January 1, 1994, will enter the history books as a date that marks a notable paradox in contemporary Mexico. Just when the country was being inaugurated into the “First World” by joining its northern neighbors in an economic association represented by the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), an armed rebellion broke out in the southeastern state of Chiapas. In the wake of a cease-fire following 12 days of fighting, a new social movement emerged that contested the direction of the nation’s future as envisioned by the state and its ruling electoral machine, the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (Institutional Revolutionary Party—PRI). The adherents of the new movement are primarily Mayan peasants, both members and sympathizers of the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (Zapatista National Liberation Army—EZLN), and their national and international supporters.

By focusing on the Zapatista uprising and its emergence as a social movement, we examine the relationship between civil society activity and political democratization. We argue that the social movement set in motion by the Zapatista uprising has been a driving force in Mexico’s democratization, even more significant than opposition parties, which have historically been undermined or drawn into an alliance with the ruling PRI only to push for changes that left the authoritarian nature of the political system virtually intact. In contrast, the social movement generated by the EZLN has encouraged higher levels of political activity and inspired a deepening of the democratic debate. The key difference is that political parties have focused their efforts on reforming political society from within while the EZLN has interpellated civil society to push for democratization from the bottom up.

The Zapatista uprising placed Mexico’s political system at a crossroads, and a merely procedural democracy is not likely to address the concerns of an

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invigorated civil society. As one of us had anticipated elsewhere (Otero, 1996a), one possible outcome in 2000 was that the PRI would continue to harden its policies of social control; yet this direction was hardly compatible with the image Mexico had been promoting as a member of NAFTA. It was argued instead that the historically most likely scenario for the electoral process of 2000 was a liberal-democratic outcome in which the Partido Acción Nacional (National Action party—PAN) would win the presidential elections. This would come about as the result of combining the continuation of a market-led economic model with an electoral democratization from below (Otero, 1996a: 239-242). On July 2, 2000, this prediction turned out to be accurate: a clear majority of Mexicans elected Vicente Fox of the PAN, thus ousting the PRI after 71 years of continuous rule. In this article we argue that continued citizen activity and popular mobilization have been able to redirect Mexico's political transition toward a more inclusive democracy in which the government must respond to a broad range of societal interests. In the first section we describe some of the post-1994 reforms that accelerated Mexico's process of democratization. In the second section we outline the range of ways in which civil society responded to the uprising. The third section addresses the state's response to the uprising and the repressive practices used to disable the Zapatista movement. The fourth describes the EZLN's efforts to mobilize the groups and individuals that rose in support of its demands and the strategy it employed to build new ties of solidarity. The concluding section discusses the Zapatista movement's contribution to Mexico's democratization in the context of the challenges that remain.

DEMOCRATIZATION AND THE ZAPATISTA UPRISING

The EZLN's declaration of war represented a break from traditional strategies associated with guerrilla movements in Latin America. After the uprising, the EZLN advocated bottom-up democratization rather than the seizing of state power and nonviolence rather than guerrilla warfare. It emphasized the potential of "civil society" (in EZLN usage, the subordinate individuals and organizations independent of the state's corporatist structures) for bringing about democratic change. The Zapatistas' vision sharply contrasted with the PRI's policy of a managed transition to electoral democracy including radical free-market reforms that had a negative impact on peasant life (Collier, 1994; Barry, 1995; Harvey, 1998; Otero, 1999). Rather than making war to take power and impose its vision from above, the EZLN sought to open

political spaces in which new actors in civil society could press for democracy and social justice from below. This view was consistent with that of the new Latin American left, which conceptualized power as a practice situated both within and beyond the state and exercised through what Gramsci referred to as “hegemony,” the dissemination of beliefs and values that systematically favored the ruling class (Dagnino, 1998). In expressing this view the EZLN established a cultural strategy that called into question the PRI’s hegemony by reinterpreting national symbols and discourses in favor of an alternative transformative project.

Throughout the PRI’s 71-year rule, presidential candidates were hand-picked by the incumbent president and ensured victory by use of electoral fraud when necessary. The presidency dominated the judicial and legislative branches, while civil society was co-opted by mass organizations controlled by the state (Hellman, 1983; Camp, 1995; Cornelius, 1996; Davis, 1994). Opposition parties were rather insignificant until 1978, when there were only four legally recognized political parties. Of these, two had proposed the same presidential candidate as the PRI in various previous elections; they were seen as minor appendages of the ruling party. Only the right-of-center PAN represented a serious opposition (Loeza, 1997), and in 1976 it had undergone an internal crisis that prevented it from naming a presidential candidate. This had led the state to initiate an electoral reform to prevent a crisis of legitimacy, allowing for the legal registration of several other political parties. The most relevant of these newly legalized parties was the Partido Comunista Mexicano (Mexican Communist party—PCM). After a series of fusions with other parties, the PCM’s heirs eventually formed the Partido de la Revolución Democrática (Party of the Democratic Revolution—PRD) by joining a nationalist faction of the PRI and other leftist political parties in 1989 (Bruhn, 1996; Woldenberg, 1997).

Before the 1994 uprising, the party system had not been able to provide incentives for a major reform of the state. It was only when the EZLN appeared as an external challenge to the system of political representation that political parties were prompted to cooperate among themselves and effect some meaningful changes (Prud’homme, 1998). Immediately after the uprising, the interior minister and former governor of Chiapas, Patrocinio González, was forced to resign, and electoral reforms were announced that permitted international and civic observers to monitor the August 1994 presidential elections. Moreover, by 1996 the Instituto Federal Electoral (Federal Electoral Institute—IFE) was transformed into an independent body run by nonpartisan citizens rather than the government. In addition, the government

appointed a peace commissioner, Manuel Camacho Solís, to initiate negotiations with the EZLN within a month of the 1994 uprising. This represented one of the quickest transitions from guerrilla uprising to peace process in Latin American history (Harvey, 1996; 1998). During the 1997 mid-term elections, the opposition gained control of the Lower House of Congress for the first time in history, and Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, a member of the left-of-center PRD, became Mexico City's first elected mayor. In 1999, the PRI held primary elections to choose its presidential candidate, breaking with the tradition by which the outgoing president chose his successor. Although critics have questioned the true competitiveness of the primary election, it represented a considerable contribution to Mexico's protracted process of democratization.

Until July 2000, though, significant obstacles remained on the path to democracy. Mexico continued to be described as a semidemocratic political system, since electoral fraud was still practiced (Semo, 1999). Moreover, the political system had not passed the test of alternation of power, the PRI having monopolized executive office for over 70 years. Democracy had also been threatened by the state's dismal record on respecting human rights and the rule of law. Security forces had routinely employed authoritarian practices, including threats, torture, intimidation, and repression against opposition movements (Human Rights Watch, 1997). The state's link to the massacre of 45 indigenous people in Acteal, Chiapas, on December 22, 1997, was emblematic of the repressive conditions that challenged the basic requisites of liberal democracy: respect for civil and political rights, competitive elections, and a significant degree of political participation (Linz and Stepan, 1996).

The 1994 uprising and ensuing social movement sparked a wave of commentary from Mexican intellectuals. Roger Bartra, a sociologist, remarked: "The war in Chiapas has provoked the strongest political and cultural shakeup that the Mexican system has suffered in the last quarter century" (quoted in Méndez Asencio and Cano Gimeno, 1994: 11). He argued that even though the violence used by the rebels ought to be considered antidemocratic, it had produced the unexpected result of reviving Mexico's prospects for democracy: "We are faced with the paradox that the EZLN has opened a road toward democracy" (1994: 1). Antonio García de León, a historian, wrote: "The EZLN's contribution to the transition, or the constellation of small transitions, toward democracy is now an undeniable historic fact" (1995: 17). Finally, Mexico's celebrated cultural critic and analyst of social movements, Carlos Monsiváis, similarly agreed that the EZLN had brought an impulse to the democratic project (1995). If the EZLN has had an impact on Mexico's democratization, it can be seen in this awakening of civil society.

THE CIVIL-SOCIETY RESPONSE TO THE ZAPATISTA UPRISING

The Zapatista uprising inspired a flourishing of organization and support at the national and international levels. Civil society responded in many forms: protesting for the government to stop the war; organizing human rights security lines to encircle the dialogue site when peace talks were in session; bringing supplies to jungle communities surrounded by federal army units; establishing “peace camps” and observing human rights conditions in communities threatened by the military presence; organizing health, education, and alternative production projects; forming nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to monitor respect for human rights; building civilian-based Zapatista support groups; and participating in forums and encounters convoked by the EZLN to discuss democracy and indigenous rights (EZLN, 1996). A great deal of mobilization has taken place outside traditional political channels, motivated by the EZLN’s call for democracy.

The first movement by civil society was a spontaneous reaction as thousands of protestors rallied against the government for ordering the Mexican air force to strafe and rocket the retreating rebels and for its summary execution of rebels captured by federal soldiers (verified in human rights reports). President Carlos Salinas found himself in the midst of a crisis as the Mexican stock exchange dropped 6.32 percent—the largest fall since 1987 (La Botz, 1995: 8). He initially denounced the Zapatista insurgents as “professionals of violence” and “transgressors of the law,” yet by January 12, because of sustained protest, he had ordered the resignation of his interior minister and called for a cease-fire and negotiations.

EZLN communiqués made it clear that the rebels opposed not only the lack of democracy but also the neoliberal free-market reforms that had opened Mexico’s economy and people to the forces of global capitalism. Speaking to reporters in San Cristóbal’s plaza on January 1, Subcomandante Marcos said: “Today is the beginning of NAFTA, which is nothing more than a death sentence for the indigenous ethnicities of Mexico, which are perfectly dispensable in the modernization program of Salinas de Gortari” (Autonomea, 1994: 68). A graffito left in San Cristóbal after the uprising read “We don’t want free trade. We want Freedom!” (Méndez Asencio and Cano Gimeno, 1994: 22). One analyst noted, “Chiapas is the first armed battle against the Global Market and simultaneously . . . for Democracy” (Cooper, 1994: 2).

The uprising undid the PRI’s work to restore the public’s confidence after fraudulent elections in 1988 had brought Carlos Salinas to power. The

Salinas administration promised to bring Mexico into the First World and undertook profound reforms to lay the groundwork for NAFTA, reversing decades of statist and nationalistic policies in just a few years (Otero, 1996b). The privatization of 252 state-run companies, including national banks and Telmex (Mexican Telephone Company), netted about U.S.\$23 billion in state reserves and massively reduced government subsidies to hundreds of money-losing firms (Oppenheimer, 1996: 9). One journalist wrote: "Salinas has worked hard to convert Mexico's socialist, nationalist economy into a capitalist, pro-American economy open to international trade" (Thomas, 1993: 10). *Forbes* magazine remarked: "You can't any longer think of Mexico as the Third World" (cited in Oppenheimer, 1996: 8).

The signing of NAFTA was meant to provide the PRI with renewed support for the 1994 elections. After the uprising, however, a harsh reinterpretation of Mexico's socioeconomic reality began. One Mexican writer remarked: "Just when we were telling the world and ourselves that we were looking like the U.S., we turn out to be Guatemala." Heberto Castillo, a left-nationalist politician, declared: "Those who applauded our growing economy . . . olympically ignored that while the rich got richer, the nation got even poorer" (quoted in Cooper, 1994: 2).

On the local level, the Zapatista uprising represented the culmination of more than 20 years of independent peasant struggle, the manifestation of a long history of regional indigenous resistance, and an open demonstration of a guerrilla struggle that had operated in Chiapas since the early 1970s (Montemayor, 1997). One of the fundamental issues for EZLN fighters was the government's modification of Article 27 of the Federal Constitution, which had ended land reform (Cornelius and Myhre, 1998; Otero, 1999), meaning that new petitions and outstanding claims would no longer be administered (Barry, 1995; Harvey, 1996; 1998). The threat to land and the prospect of importing cheaper corn from the United States through NAFTA posed a serious threat to Mayan farmers' traditional way of life and their capacity to maintain subsistence production (Collier, 1994; Otero, Scott, and Gilbreth, 1997).

The uprising was carried out by actors whose collective identity was constructed around the Mayans' historical experience of racism and socioeconomic subordination. Even after the end of Spanish colonial rule in the early nineteenth century, indigenous people continued to suffer exploitation through slavery and debt peonage. Into the twentieth century, Mayans continued to serve as maids, farm hands, and laborers for the local ladino (non-indigenous) population of Chiapas. The slogan of the uprising was "Enough Is Enough." When asked why she had joined the EZLN, Comandante Hortencia, a Tzotzil woman, declared: "I became a Zapatista to struggle for

my people, so that one day there will be justice and peace in Mexico” (interview, San Andrés Larráinzar, March 1996). Zapatista members expressed the strong conviction that their historical condition would change only through their own efforts.

For some of the ladinos in Chiapas, the uprising embodied their fear of the “*indiada*,” the rebellion of the “savage Indians” who would come to rob, rape, and pillage (de Vos, 1997). San Cristóbal, Ocosingo, Altamirano, and Las Margaritas are ladino-controlled towns in the midst of rural communities of Mayan subsistence farmers. Throughout history, a discourse has persisted that views the ladino population as naturally superior to the Indians. One government representative, a ladino woman from San Cristóbal, told an international delegation: “Before the uprising, there was a harmonious relationship between the indigenous people and the Ladinos. They worked in our homes, and we treated them as we would our children” (interview, San Cristóbal de Las Casas, November 1996). Comandante Susana, a highland Tzotzil-speaker and EZLN spokesperson, said: “When we go into big cities they see us as nothing more than *indios* . . . they curse us for being indigenous people as if we were animals . . . we are not seen as equal to the mestizo women” (interview, San Andrés Larráinzar, March 1996).

The uprising also raised the issue of socioeconomic disparities, particularly with regard to land distribution. In much of the conflict zone (the eastern municipalities of Ocosingo, Altamirano, and Las Margaritas), Mayan peasants had taken over and occupied land after 1994, seeking to improve their living conditions. A land reform movement had been in motion since the 1970s, but the uprising further politicized Mayan farmers and increased their militancy. In many cases, landlords abandoned their property during the uprising, fearing for their personal security. A great deal of this land remained unoccupied for several years, having been stripped of its livestock and work implements. In other cases, land was taken over, or “recovered,” and new communities were formed. A representative from the New Population Moisés-Gandhi, Ocosingo, explained why community members came to occupy the land (interview, Ocosingo, October 1996):

This property belonged to our grandparents, who spoke Tzeltal but could not communicate in Spanish. Because of this, they were cheated out of their land. Their fields of corn were converted into a large cattle ranch, and our grandfathers were made to work as peons. Eventually they were forced to a small piece of land in the hills to work as their own. When our fathers were born, there was not enough land. And many families were forced to seek work as peons on other fincas. We had to live in other communities. Therefore we did not steal this land; when the owners left after the uprising, we recovered it as our own.

The Zapatista uprising and subsequent land takeovers inflamed ethnic relations. Ladinos expressed resistance to the idea of indigenous people's declaring their right to be equal members of Mexican society. A cattle rancher who had abandoned his land deep in Zapatista territory said: "The Indians do not want to work because they are lazy. Zapata was right when he said, 'Land for those who work it,' but he forgot to add 'for those who want to work it' and 'for those who know how to work it productively' " (interview, Comitán, December 1996). This disregard for a culture rooted in subsistence farming was a reflection of the attitude that the Zapatistas wished to transform.

The uprising initiated a new emphasis on indigenous cultural empowerment. As the image of the rebel indigenous figure swept across Mexico, San Cristóbal's Tzotzil artisans reacted by sewing ski masks on their folk dolls and carving small wooden rifles to place in their hands. The new Zapatista dolls were an instant commercial success. Indigenous vendors proudly explained which EZLN commander was represented by each doll as they fashioned them to replicate the photos on the front pages of local newspapers showing Zapatista women and men negotiating with government officials. Seeing fellow indigenous people in their traditional clothing being shown respect was a source of pride and amazement for many Mayans who learned about the Zapatista uprising only after it took place. The impact of this new empowerment contributed to the growth of the movement after 1994 as communities in the highlands and the northern zone began to support the Zapatista project openly.

The impact of the uprising transformed Chiapas's social and political landscape. Indigenous people achieved a space for developing their demands and making themselves heard despite resistance by the local ladino population. Yet, the conflict also exacerbated tensions in indigenous communities, with members unsure of where they stood as government (PRI) or Zapatista supporters. The government's response to the uprising failed to contribute significantly to the overall process of conflict resolution but succeeded in reducing the EZLN's capacity to interact with national and international civil society to seek peaceful means for social transformation.

THE STATE RESPONSE TO THE ZAPATISTA UPRISING

Soon after the uprising, the Mexican government appeared to advocate peace by establishing a cease-fire and agreeing to negotiate with the EZLN. The government appointed a peace commissioner, and just three months after the uprising EZLN representatives and government officials were meeting

face-to-face in San Cristóbal. The first round of negotiations broke down in June 1994 as national elections approached, but the process was reestablished in spring 1995 in response to a military action by Ernesto Zedillo's government aimed at arresting the EZLN leadership. The 1995-1996 negotiations in San Andrés Larráinzar established a framework for discussion and a process for achieving signed accords.

The restart of negotiations took place as part of an agreement that required the government to limit the number of troops in the eastern lowlands as a measure of security for civilian communities threatened by their presence. Despite the agreement, soldiers continued to pour into regions with known support for the EZLN as the peace talks continued through 1996. The policy of pursuing peace on one hand and using repression on the other was interpreted by human rights organizations as a form of low-intensity warfare, with parallels to counterinsurgency strategies used during the wars in Vietnam and Central America (López Astráin, 1996; Centro de Derechos Humanos Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas, 1996; *La Jornada*, March 2, 1997). In low-intensity warfare, the army uses public relations to favor civilians who align themselves with the government, rewarding them with material aid, health services, or work on road projects, while communities in resistance face harassment and intimidation. Attacks by the public security police and federal army on "autonomous communities" (so declared by EZLN forces) demonstrate that in Chiapas low-intensity tactics have been combined with direct coercive practices by the state.

The February 1995 military offensive in eastern Chiapas resulted in the establishment of dozens of new camps. The bases served to reestablish the state's presence in the region and reduced the degree to which these isolated communities could carry out peaceful oppositional activities. Numerous trips into this zone between 1995 and 1998 provided us with firsthand experience of the extent to which daily life had been transformed by the presence of soldiers. There were regular ground and air patrols. It was common for locals and outsiders alike to be questioned at military roadblocks or startled by military fly-bys and circling helicopters or to become the subject of surveillance. Under these conditions, freedom of political expression was substantially reduced. Federal soldiers and paramilitaries sometimes considered even local opposition activity subversive.

Parish workers testified to the military presence's negative impact on daily life. The cost of living increased because of a rise in demand for basic products such as soap, sugar, salt, and oil. Local price inflation was accompanied by declining food production, as farmers no longer felt safe working on their distant cultivated lands. In addition, soldiers reportedly abused alcohol and drugs and had established a network of prostitution. In communities

suffering extreme poverty, there were reports of indigenous girls being forced into prostitution to provide food for their families.

The government offered short-term material support to civilians but would not reduce the presence of its troops. Aid was in some cases distributed by local PRI authorities who made it clear that the assistance was for families who supported the government. These policies and the presence of soldiers slowed the Zapatistas' momentum, polarized communities with divided loyalties, and eventually erupted into violence as government supporters, emboldened by local PRI authorities, were encouraged to form paramilitary groups to attack EZLN sympathizers, particularly in regions outside the eastern-lowland conflict zone (Centro de Derechos Humanos Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas, 1996). In some cases, the violence was government-supported, while in others it was officially tolerated and allowed to persist through institutionalized impunity (Human Rights Watch, 1997). The Portuguese Nobel laureate José Saramago criticized Zedillo's assertion that "there was no war in Chiapas": "There are wars that are wars and there are 'no-wars' that are the same as wars" (quoted in Güemes, 1999). Mary Robinson, the head of the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights, was critical of the level of violations and impunity in Chiapas during her 1999 visit (*La Jornada*, November 27 and 28, 1999).

Paramilitary violence first appeared in the Chol-speaking municipalities of Tila, Salto de Agua, Yajalón, Sabanilla, and Chilón (the northern zone) in 1995. In the beginning it was not evident whether the localized violence was part of the broader pattern of conflict, but subsequent popular mobilizations demonstrated that support for the EZLN's demands had indeed spread to the northern zone. The 1996 construction of a fifth EZLN "New Aguascalientes" site in Roberto Barrios, Palenque, involved hundreds of Chol-speaking activists from the northern zone. They expressed their grievances and demonstrated their support for the EZLN on banners hung at the site that denounced the government's lack of will to resolve the violence in Tila. Sympathy for the EZLN was also demonstrated by the indigenous activists who took over the municipal hall in Sabanilla and by the thousands who participated in a march for peace when the opposition politician Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas visited Tila in 1996. Consequently, the violence against popular mobilization in the northern zone was interpreted as a direct countermeasure to the growing regional support for the EZLN (Centro de Derechos Humanos "Miguel Agustín Pro Juárez," 1998).

During a human rights mission in 1996 to investigate the relationship between the growing violence and the government's militarization of the region, testimony was provided linking PRI politicians and members of the public security police in the northern zone to the clandestine supply of

weapons and training to civilians who would violently oppose the EZLN (CONPAZ, 1996). The most notorious example was the transformation of a rural development organization, Paz y Justicia, into a front for paramilitary violence supported by the PRI state government. Paz y Justicia's violent actions resulted in the displacement of thousands of non-PRI-supporting families from their homes and a string of confrontations and assassinations by both sides in the conflict. At one point it was impossible for human rights observers to enter the northern zone after two shooting incidents by Paz y Justicia militiamen, targeting a human rights observer mission and a material-aid caravan (Centro de Derechos Humanos Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas, 1996).

By 1997, the same pattern of violence began to appear in Chiapas's central highlands as a rash of local skirmishes between government and EZLN supporters resulted in several deaths and the displacement of hundreds of families. The situation culminated in the massacre of 45 indigenous women, children, and men while they were praying in a small chapel in the hamlet of Acteal, Chenalhó, on December 22, 1997. The subsequent investigation exposed direct links between the paramilitary militia responsible for the killing and the municipal PRI government and state public security forces (Centro de Derechos Humanos Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas, 1998).

The government had agreed not to increase its troops in the conflict zone as part of the 1995 Law for Peace and Reconciliation under which the peace process was regulated. In addition, Article 129 of the Mexican Constitution prohibited soldiers from patrolling outside their bases in times of peace. Yet, the military justified its roadblocks, patrols, and new encampments as part of a mission to combat drug trafficking and control the flow of arms. Moreover, the military claimed that its growing presence, following outbreaks of violence in the highlands and northern zone, was required to maintain security, even though opposition groups complained that the military presence repressed their right to political expression and their capacity to seek political change through peaceful means. Given these conditions, it would be easy to infer that political activity throughout Chiapas had been constrained. On the contrary, however, a remarkable groundswell of civil society mobilization has taken place in response to the uprising, and this activity has contributed significantly to Mexico's difficult process of democratization.

THE ZAPATISTA APPEAL TO CIVIL SOCIETY

From the moment that the Zapatistas' first communiqué was faxed to the national press, the indigenous rebels entered history, becoming cultural icons

in Mexico. Subcomandante Marcos's writings in the name of the Comité Clandestino Revolucionario Indígena-Comandancia General (Clandestine Revolutionary Indigenous Committee-General Command—CCRI-CG) were published worldwide, along with personal letters, poetry, and short stories. Marcos took full advantage of the media coverage, giving dozens of interviews that contributed to his transformation from masked rebel to freedom fighter. Reproductions of his image were embossed on calendars, ashtrays, key chains, T-shirts, stickers, lighters, and pens sold throughout Mexico. Marcos was called the “poet rebel” in *Vanity Fair*, and CBS's *60 Minutes* sent a crew to interview him in English for U.S. audiences. Even Mexico's conservative Nobel Prize-winning writer Octavio Paz, who initially came out against the EZLN, later referred to one of Marcos's communiqués as “eloquent” and said that it had truly moved him (1994). The European press widely covered the EZLN's initial actions, and high-profile Latin American intellectuals and European public figures, including the Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano and the former first lady of France, Danielle Mitterrand, took an active role in defending the Zapatista cause.

The uprising was seen as a bold statement by an oppressed minority against an encroaching global capitalism that threatened the small Mayan farmer and, by extension, any subordinate group unable to shoulder the weight of global competition. It also set in motion a technological novelty. For the first time observers around the world could follow the development of the movement from their computer screens as EZLN communiqués and subsequent debates and discussions went whirling through cyberspace (<http://www.ezln.org>). Reflections from various disciplinary perspectives on cultural politics on the Internet were also inspired by the Zapatista struggle (Ribeiro, 1998; Slater, 1998; Yúdice, 1998).

Many people felt that Marcos's communiqués revealed the truth about the disgraceful conditions under which a large portion of the population lived at a time when national and international leaders were promoting Mexico's new partnership in NAFTA. The communiqués resonated with other popular movements, attracting a network of supporters inspired by the Zapatistas' ideals of democracy, justice, and freedom. In 1995, Marcos was on the list of nominees for the Premio Chiapas in recognition of his contribution to the promotion of culture in the state. His literary pieces included a popular series of conversations with a beetle named Durito and narratives describing the teachings of Antonio the elder, a Tzeltal Indian portrayed as a wise man who had taught Marcos how to live in the jungle and understand the Mayan people. His political writings were popular and praised by political analysts (Montemayor, 1997: 56). The following communiqué was issued on January

18, 1994, in response to President Salinas's initial offer to "pardon" Zapatista rebels who accepted the cease-fire (SIPRO, 1994):

For what must we ask pardon? For what will they "pardon" us? For not dying of hunger? For not accepting our misery in silence? For not humbly accepting the huge historic burden of disdain and abandonment? For having risen up in arms when we found all other paths closed? For not heeding Chiapas's penal code, the most absurd and repressive in history? For having shown the country and the whole world that human dignity still exists and is in the hearts of the most impoverished inhabitants? For what must we ask pardon, and who can grant it?

These communiqués, representing the CCRI-CG, were published in national newspapers, translated and posted on the Internet, and debated in electronic mail, helping to build an international network to support the Zapatistas' right to use peaceful means to attain their political goals. When the army unleashed an offensive in Zapatista-held territory in February 1995, international solidarity groups and human rights activists from around the globe protested at Mexican consulates and embassies. NGOs and human rights organizations sent representatives to Chiapas to accompany the return of hundreds of families displaced by the military's violence. Citizen lobbies of national parliaments and congresses in Canada, the United States, Denmark, Italy, Spain, and Germany resulted in formal petitions encouraging the Mexican government to comply with the 1996 San Andrés Accords on Indigenous Rights and Culture (*La Jornada*, March 4, 1997).

After just 12 days of fighting, the EZLN sought to advance its agenda in various arenas, from negotiations with the government to the establishment of a relationship with the public. In this way, the Zapatista movement was able to challenge both state power and what it perceived to be the sociocultural embeddedness of power in everyday life. Its use of counterdiscursive framing to reinterpret national symbols furthered support for its alternative transformative project. It sought to build a movement based on a shared understanding of the obstacles it confronted (an authoritarian regime and an increasingly unaccountable market) and a collective will to seek alternatives. In Gramsci's (1971) terms, the EZLN changed its strategy from a "war of movements" challenging state power through the force of arms to a "war of positions" contesting the moral and intellectual leadership of Mexico's ruling class.

The first negotiation session took place in the San Cristóbal Cathedral in March 1994. The presence of the media placed the movement in the national spotlight. Radio transmissions brought the indigenous voices of Zapatista representatives into villages across Chiapas. The EZLN took advantage of

the media attention to present its discourse of inclusion as Comandante David introduced himself to government negotiators as “David, Tzotzil, one-hundred percent Chiapanecan, one-hundred percent Mexican” (Monsiváis, 1995: 470). The point was further emphasized when Zapatista delegates unrolled and displayed the Mexican flag. The government commissioner, Manuel Camacho Solís, felt obliged to join them by holding up a corner. The Zapatistas conveyed to the public that their fight was not against the nation but for a new form of nationhood in which Mexico’s diverse cultures would be recognized equally (Monsiváis, 1995).

The Zapatistas have made political use of culture to communicate with civil society. For example, they have restored the symbolism of Aguascalientes, the city where the original followers of Emiliano Zapata and other revolutionaries convened in 1914 for a constitutional assembly (“La Convención”) to define the future of the Mexican revolution (Gilly, 1971; Womack, 1969). The first new Aguascalientes was constructed in Guadalupe Tepeyac in 1994. Following failed peace talks in June, the EZLN issued a Second Declaration from the Lacandón Jungle, calling on civil society to participate in a national democratic convention, based on the 1914 assembly, to take place just weeks before the August 1994 presidential elections. The construction of Aguascalientes was a large-scale collective undertaking, involving the labor of hundreds of local indigenous Zapatista supporters who carved an amphitheater and lodgings from the jungle to host more than 6,000 participants from throughout Mexico. The meeting served to establish new citizen networks and resulted in the creation of a permanent forum for discussion of a democratic transition.

The convention represented a significant advance for the EZLN. In less than a year the Zapatistas had progressed from being “professionals of violence” and “transgressors of the law” to a new social movement capable of calling upon some of the nation’s most important progressive intellectuals and grassroots leaders. The fact that the government saw the symbolism of Aguascalientes as a threat was made clear when, after the February 9, 1995, government offensive, the soldiers demolished it. This aggression forced the abandonment of Guadalupe Tepeyac and the displacement of thousands of indigenous families (Pérez Enríquez, 1998). A large military base was established there, closing the local population’s access to the best medical structure in the region.

The cultural significance attached by the EZLN to its Aguascalientes site was made evident during restarted peace talks in San Andrés Larráinzar. As discussions took place about the possible withdrawal of federal troops, the government let it be understood that the removal of troops from Guadalupe Tepeyac was not negotiable. Comandante Tacho responded by declaring that

the government could keep its Aguascalientes because the EZLN had plans to build many more. Several months later, shortly before the second anniversary of the uprising, national and international civil society was invited to attend celebrations on January 1, 1996, at one of four New Aguascalientes sites—three in eastern jungle communities and one in the highlands, just a 40-minute drive from San Cristóbal. A fifth Aguascalientes was inaugurated in Roberto Barrios, near Palenque, in May 1996.

The building of the New Aguascalientes symbolized a rebirth for the EZLN. Under heavy security, hundreds of Zapatista supporters worked around the clock constructing the new sites. At Oventic in the central highlands, convoys of federal soldiers, including 40 wheel-based armored tanks, passed through the perimeter of the site in an attempt at intimidation. In the jungle, airplanes and helicopters menaced workers, taking photos and pointing guns. The Zapatistas nevertheless persisted in their task, and the four New Aguascalientes were inaugurated on New Year's Day 1996 with cultural festivities organized by an artistic caravan from Mexico City under the rallying cry, "We are not making a call to take up arms, instead we are going to sing to the ones who have dared to shout, Enough is Enough!" At the highland Aguascalientes site in Oventic, Comandante Moisés stated: "The government has threatened us while building this site, but we, the indigenous people of Chiapas, do not have to ask permission to use our land any way we want to. The construction of this site proves that if the government takes away a part of us, it will come back and multiply" (interview, January 1996).

Zapatista negotiators also used the peace talks at San Andrés Larráinzar in 1995 as a forum to assert their cultural identity as Mayan people. EZLN communiqués referred to the town as "San Andrés Sacamch'en de los Pobres" in recognition of sacred caves in the region and rejection of the colonial legacy inherent in the municipality's official name (the Larráinzar family had controlled most of the land in the region). Such displays of cultural pride proved popular in the region, where there had not been a significant presence of ladinos since the 1970s. The emphasis on indigenous identity was also highlighted by Marcos's notable absence from the peace talks. The EZLN negotiating team was made up of nine Mayan representatives from different regions of the highlands and eastern lowlands. Several EZLN delegates wore traditional highland ceremonial clothing, consisting of large hats with ribbons, cotton tunics, wool capes, woven belts, and leather sandals. The ski masks covering their individual identities were meant to highlight the collectivist nature of the struggle.

In addition to the peace talks, the EZLN pushed forward its agenda through organizing national and international meetings with civil society. In January 1996, it convoked the National Indigenous Forum, in which

representatives from 35 indigenous ethnic groups from across Mexico took part. These encounters followed the EZLN principle of “rule by obeying,” calling for Zapatista delegates to derive their position at the negotiating table democratically from the concerns expressed by representatives of civil society. The document produced by the National Indigenous Forum provided the basis for the San Andrés Accords on Indigenous Rights and Culture, signed by the government and the EZLN in February 1996.

The National Indigenous Forum was in many ways a watershed moment for Mexico’s indigenous cultures. The historian Jan de Vos described it as follows (interview, San Cristóbal de Las Casas, January 1996):

This is the first national forum of its type for indigenous people in Mexico. It has been an important way to demonstrate to the government that the indigenous people in Chiapas are not just making local demands. Their demands are being echoed here by a large number of indigenous cultures and organizations from across the country. . . . The forum will demonstrate the national character of indigenous demands.

The second forum, on the reform of the Mexican state, was convoked by the EZLN six months later, in July 1996. It again took place in San Cristóbal, this time bringing together intellectuals from across Mexico to discuss the themes of political democracy, social democracy, national sovereignty and democracy, citizen participation, human rights, justice reform, and communication media. Manuel López Obrador, leader of the opposition PRD, met with Marcos to discuss the possibility of a strategic alliance for the 1997 national congressional elections. The forum was meant to provide the basis for the signing of a second accord between the EZLN and government. Instead, the peace process broke down a month later because of the EZLN’s frustration with the lack of progress on the implementation of the San Andrés Accords. On September 2, 1996, the negotiations were suspended, and a wave of repression aimed at human rights activists in Chiapas followed.

Since the breakdown of the peace process, political debate has revolved around the implementation of the San Andrés Accords, particularly on the issue of autonomy. When President Zedillo rejected a proposal put forth by a multiparty commission of legislators (Comisión para la Concordia y la Pacificación—COCOPA) to translate the accord into law, indigenous communities saw this as government betrayal and initiated a movement to enact the accord in practice by establishing new autonomous municipalities and parallel governments throughout Chiapas. It is no coincidence that one of Vicente Fox’s first acts as president was to appoint Luis H. Álvarez, a former governor of Chihuahua and former PAN senator, to head a negotiating team

to reestablish talks with the EZLN. As a senator, Alvarez had been part of the commission that turned the San Andrés Accords into a legislative proposal. (The newly elected governor of Chiapas in 2000, Pablo Salazar Mendiguchía, elected with the backing of a coalition of seven opposition parties, had also been a COCOPA member.) Fox also ordered the withdrawal of most troops from Chiapas, with the sole exception of those that might have been there before the uprising. From all evidence, then, it seems that the conditions are now in place for a peaceful solution to the EZLN uprising with justice and dignity. Accomplishing this would be an additional boost to Fox's legitimacy as a democrat.

CONCLUSIONS

An examination of the Zapatista movement and democracy in Mexico raises a number of questions: Is Mexico's transition to democracy responding to the concerns raised by the Zapatista movement? What has been the movement's contribution to the transition, and how can it continue to influence the process? What priorities should be established for advancing Mexico's democratization beyond the electoral sphere? Before reflecting on these questions, we examine some recent theorizing on democracy that helps highlight the issues raised by the Zapatista uprising.

Ellen Meiksins Wood (1995) argues that confining democracy to the realm of politics allows market forces to operate without democratic accountability in fundamental spheres of life, calling into question the degree to which democracy in its original conception as "power by the people" can be achieved under capitalism. Alain Touraine makes a similar argument: "To some extent, the market economy is democracy's antithesis, as the market attempts to prevent political institutions from intervening in its activity, whereas democratic politics attempts to promote intervention so as to protect the weak from the domination of the strong" (1997: 189). John Dryzek (1996) also conceives of capitalism as an obstacle to democracy, but he argues for civil society's potential to advance democracy. For him the prospects for democracy under global capitalism "are better in civil society than in the formal institutions of government, across rather than within national boundaries, and in realms of life not always recognized as political" (1996: 3-4). Finally, Takis Fotopoulos (1997) proposes a new model of inclusive democracy that expands democratic practices beyond the formal domain of politics to include the sphere of everyday life and social control over the market. The common thread among these theories of democracy is that each

judges the political realm, if confined to political society or the state, incapable of offering citizens sufficient access to democratic power over critical decisions that affect their everyday lives.

The Zapatista uprising contributed to an expansion of democracy in the domain of political society but also beyond it—into civil society and the cultural sphere. In addition, it has sought to expand democratization to the economic realm in order to address the social costs of neoliberal market reforms. Perhaps the most notable paradox has been that the EZLN became the first guerrilla organization to propose resolving its grievances through peaceful means. After the uprising, it sought to encourage civil society to change the correlation of forces between the state and civil society and to defeat the ruling PRI. While the PRI won the elections in 1994, the uprising inspired civil society to call into question the PRI's monopoly on power, which, in turn, accelerated the pace of political reform. The significant results it produced included the establishment of international and civic electoral observation, a reformed and independent IFE, a Lower House of Congress controlled by the opposition, and elections for Mexico City mayor. For the first time, in 2000 the PRI held primary elections to select its candidate for the presidential elections. Finally, PAN's Vicente Fox's electoral triumph in 2000 set the stage for a major overhaul of Mexico's political system.

Because of the Zapatista movement, new spaces for political participation have been opened within civil society. Through popular consultations with civic groups ranging from indigenous supporters to members of international civil society and through direct encounters with civil-society organizations, the EZLN has encouraged democratic discussion and debate. Networks of NGOs began to emerge in Mexico in the 1980s, but the Zapatista uprising inspired a tremendous proliferation of NGOs that spread both to stop the war in Chiapas and to struggle for a host of issues under the broad agenda of democratization. Some NGOs restricted their activity and linkages to the realm of civil society and were able to retain their autonomy, while others became "political associations" or established links with the state, following the path previously taken by political parties. Acción Cívica (Civic Association), for instance, received funds from the state, and the resulting commitments diminished its autonomy. Ilán Semo (1999) has pointed out that as members of NGOs join political parties, compromises are made in terms of their organizations' identity and ability to operate autonomously. For this reason, the Zapatista movement, perceiving the PRI political regime as exclusionary and authoritarian, focused on the realm of civil society.

In the sociocultural sphere, the Zapatista movement challenged racist practices in Mexico by establishing a new awareness of indigenous rights. This is perhaps one of the most direct contributions that the EZLN has made

to democratization. As Monsiváis noted: "Mexican racism has been exposed for the first time at a national level. . . . Since the 1994 Chiapas revolt . . . more books on the Indian question have been published than in the rest of the century" (1999). Indeed, the San Andrés Accords outline a significant program of reform that, if implemented, would go a long way toward redressing the historical grievances of Mexico's indigenous population. The debate around autonomy and Mexico as a pluricultural nation has included several alternative proposals for decentralization and strengthening local democracy (Díaz Polanco, 1997; Hernández Navarro and Vera Herrera, 1998; Harvey and Halverson, 2000).

The Zapatista movement has sought to expand democratization in the economic sphere by taking issue with neoliberalism (the trend toward free markets and globalized trade) as an economic model. The exacerbation of socioeconomic disparities following free-market reforms provoked the EZLN to question the relationship between economic marginalization and political exclusion and the extent to which this hampers democracy. The Zapatista movement has criticized the diminishing ability of the nation-state to shape the domestic economy as it becomes increasingly integrated into global capitalism. It has joined the concerns of a transnational movement advocating a reconceptualization of how market forces can be made accountable to principles of social justice to address the harsher effects of neoliberal globalism.

As an external challenge to the political system, the Zapatista movement has accelerated Mexico's democratization. It has called into question the PRI's 71-year monopoly of power and strengthened civil society's capacity to articulate its grievances. In this way, it has contributed to redressing the historical imbalance of an overbearing state in state-society relations. The sad irony, however, is that the gains achieved by the Zapatista movement have eluded its immediate constituency, namely, the indigenous support-base communities in Chiapas. In fact, some could argue that this constituency is considerably worse off in terms of physical and economic security (Gilly, 1999). One may hope that this tragedy will be reversed under the new administration.

In the long run, many questions about Mexico's transition to democracy will need to be addressed. One thing that is clear about Vicente Fox's administration is that it will continue on the path of neoliberalism (Otero, 2000). The question is to what extent it will be responsive to pressure from below to address some of neoliberalism's worse social consequences. Can the social movement supporting the Zapatistas' demands achieve its vision of social transformation through a democratization of the Mexican state with pressure from below? Even if democracy deepens to include the concerns of Mexico's majority, how will an empowered civil society ultimately confront the

extension of the neoliberal economic model? More centrally for Mexico's long-term political development, can the state be transformed enough to incorporate the demand for autonomy and the control of land resources that the emboldened indigenous movement is demanding (Rojas and Pérez, 2001; Congreso Nacional Indígena, 2001)? Today's conflicting agendas with regard to Mexico's path to democracy will be the basis for future debates. The strong networks and alliances developed by the Zapatistas among Mexico's indigenous ethnic groups and more broadly within Mexican civil society, as well as dialogue and the cross-border citizen alliances that they have created, will prove central to their resolution.

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