

**The Provocative Cocktail: Origins of the Zapatista Revolt\***

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### **ABSTRACT**

Examining the history of indigenous social struggles in Chiapas, Mexico prior to the founding of the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) in 1983, this research seeks to determine the adequacy of several theories of agrarian revolt in explaining the origins of the 1994 Zapatista uprising. I find that while the Chiapas case confirms Wolf's emphasis on the "tactically mobile peasantry" and Wickham-Crowley's attention to pre-existing social networks while contradicting Paige's expectation that migrant or tenant labor would be the main base of support for revolt, that all of the theories examined offer inadequate accounts of the role of ideology and the process of its development among indigenous peasants in the gestation of the revolt. More specifically I find that the rise of the EZLN can only be understood as the product of the previous mass radicalization of the indigenous communities and the emergence of a politically sophisticated layer of indigenous leadership, what Gramsci would call "organic intellectuals," with a wealth of experience in struggle, that would transform the EZLN from an isolated guerilla foco into a politically potent instrument for the empowerment of the indigenous communities themselves.

### **The Provocative Cocktail: Origins of the Zapatista Revolt**

On November 17, 1983 a small group composed of indigenous campesinos and urban ladinos established an encampment in the heart of the Lacandon Jungle in Mexico's southernmost state of Chiapas, and declared the creation of the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN). In this paper I will investigate the origins of the Zapatista rebellion in the dialectical interplay of the objective social and economic forces that shaped and transformed the lives of the indigenous communities of Eastern Chiapas, and the development of their subjective consciousness of their own capacity to act to transform those objective conditions in the form of three distinct currents of revolutionary theory and practice: the liberation theology of the Diocese of San Cristobal, the Maoism of the cadres of two organizations – Política Popular and Unión del Pueblo – that established themselves in Eastern Chiapas in the mid and late 70s; and finally the modified Guevarist ideology of the Forces of National Liberation (FLN) that would found the EZLN. I will focus here on the period leading up to the founding of guerilla nucleus.

The rise of the EZLN can only be understood as the product of the previous mass radicalization of the indigenous communities and the emergence of a politically sophisticated layer of indigenous leadership with a wealth of experience in struggle. Indeed it was this layer of indigenous leadership, what Gramsci would call "organic intellectuals" and whom Subcomandante Marcos called "the indigenous elite," that would play the pivotal role in transforming the EZLN from an isolated guerilla foco into a politically potent instrument for the empowerment of the indigenous communities themselves.

The paper is organized as follows. First, I will review the several major theories of agrarian revolutionary movements. Then I will discuss the three main currents of radical and/or revolutionary politics that were able to take root in Eastern Chiapas. Finally I will discuss the strengths and limitations of the theories of agrarian revolutionary movements in light of their application to the EZLN

### THEORIES OF AGRARIAN REVOLT AND REVOLUTION

Wolf's (1973) study of peasant participation in six revolutionary conflicts examines the workings of local social structures in order to identify the social location and conditions that specifically characterize those peasants that have served as a base for revolutionary movements. Wolf argues that

(p)oor peasants and landless laborers ... are unlikely to pursue the course of rebellion, *unless* they are able to rely on some external power to challenge the power which constrains them”

and that ultimately

(t)he only component of the peasantry which does have some internal leverage is either landowning ‘middle peasantry’ or a peasantry located in a peripheral area outside the domains of landlord control. (1973: 290-291)

Wolf identifies middle peasants who possess their own land and both poor and middle peasants occupying peripheral lands outside effective control of the authorities as the “tactically mobile peasantry” that has constituted a critical base of support for agrarian revolutionary movements in all six of the cases that he studied. He notes that this is the same

peasantry in whom anthropologists and rural sociologists have tended to see the main bearers of peasant tradition.

But that

It is precisely this culturally conservative stratum which is most instrumental in dynamiting the peasant social order. (1973:292)

Wolf further notes the frequent importance of ethnic and/or linguistic distinctiveness as a source of enhanced solidarity and, in the case of linguistic distinction, as providing “for an autonomous system of communication” (1973:293).

Paige (1975) argues against Wolf that it is precisely agricultural wage laborers who constitute the core rural base of support for revolutionary movements. He builds his case on an impressive quantitative analysis of rural social movements in 135 agricultural export enclaves in 70 developing countries, which he supplements with three in-depth case studies: Peru, Angola, and Vietnam. Paige attempts to measure the frequency and character of social movement events based on reporting in *The New York Times*, the *Times of London*, the *Hispanic American Report*, *Africa Diary* and the *Asian Recorder*. It is only where the dominant class relies on wage labor (typically in the form of sharecropping or migratory labor), but the lack of capitalization leaves them little room to offer concessions, that the conditions favor the emergence of a revolutionary movement genuinely rooted in the countryside.

Where Paige is concerned with the structural preconditions for agrarian revolt and revolution, Scott (1976) is more concerned with understanding the basis of the political consciousness of peasant communities. He argues that the pre-capitalist agrarian order obtained its legitimacy in the eyes of the peasantry from its conformity with two principles: the “norm of reciprocity” and the “right to subsistence.”

Wickham-Crowley (1991) critiques the assumptions of would-be consciousness raisers, and by extension social scientists who take seriously consciousness raising efforts

among peasants by urban intellectuals in their accounts of the success of revolutionary organizing efforts. In opposition to the focus on consciousness raising, Wickham-Crowley argues for the importance of personal networks amongst both guerrillas and their peasant bases of support. Central to his argument is the assertion that embrace of a comprehensive revolutionary ideology frequently follows rather precedes recruitment to the organization espousing it.

### THE ROOTS OF THE EZLN

It is difficult to closely study the social struggles that unfolded in Eastern Chiapas in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century without becoming aware of the central fact of the rapidly emerging and developing historical subjectivity of the Mayan Indian population.

The Indian communities of Eastern Chiapas had not survived and preserved their cultural identities for more than four centuries simply by accident. Rather this was accomplished by means of an evolving indigenous ideology that informed strategies of resistance in the face of Spanish colonial domination. The reigning ideology of the Indians of the Highlands of Chiapas during most of this period was syncretic and religious. While it retained important elements of the pre-conquest Mayan cosmovision, these were selectively interwoven with the teachings of the Catholic Church, in particular the discourse of the early Dominicans on the fundamental dignity of the Indians. As indicated earlier, Wasserstrom (1983) argues that it was ultimately the Indian communities and not the Dominicans that preserved the message and values of Fray Bartolome de Las Casas. The main organizational vehicle for the propagation of this counter-hegemonic ideology was the *cofradías* of the Indian communities which served at

several points as the organizational nuclei for uprisings against the Europeans (in 1712 and 1869 in particular).

Beginning with the process of Protestant evangelization, the Indian communities of Eastern Chiapas came under the influence of a series of distinct ideologies which they seized on and borrowed from in order to develop an increasingly critical consciousness of the larger society and their place within it. The very process of ideological contestation itself became a liberatory project as it revealed the possibility of conscious choices where previously they had been largely at the mercy of impersonal social forces.

*From Protestant Evangelization to Liberation Theology*

By the early 1950s Protestant evangelism was successfully sinking roots in the Highlands of Chiapas. Evangelists trained in indigenous languages by the right-wing Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) based in Arkansas had been working in Latin America since the Institute was founded in the 1920s and in Chiapas their efforts were beginning to bear fruit (De Vos 2002).

The version of Christianity promoted by SIL is puritanical (condemning alcohol and tobacco consumption) and aggressively pro-capitalist and anti-communist. In the case of Highland Chiapas Sara Diamond notes that SIL's

Tzotzil-Spanish dictionary eliminated the Spanish and indigenous words for ideological concepts that threaten the status quo: class, community, conquer, exploitation, bossy, oppression, repression, revolution, revolutionary, rebellion; most of which do exist in the native language (1989:219).

And yet, as we shall see, in an expression of the iron law of unintended consequences, Protestant evangelization in the Highlands and then in the Lacandon Jungle contributed to the ultimate emergence of radical social movements that would

ultimately have an invigorating effect on anti-capitalist sentiment not just in Chiapas but around the world.

The combination of literacy training with missionary work set in motion revolutionary changes in many Indian communities. The population explosion in many communities made it impossible for many young men to ever occupy the religious offices (cargos) that were both enormously expensive and the only recognized source of social prestige (Cancian 1965). The Protestant evangelists offered a way out for both those who were excluded from this system and for those members of the community who were in a position to accumulate a little capital if the redistributive burden of the cargo system were lifted.

The Protestant evangelization among the Indians of Chiapas was quickly recognized as a threat by the Catholic Church. The response was shaped not just by the situation in Chiapas, but also by changes taking place within the Catholic Church worldwide. In the aftermath of the Second World War there was widespread anxiety in the church, particularly in Latin America, about threats from two sources: Protestant evangelization on the one hand and socialist and communist-led movements of the urban and rural poor and working classes on the other. The first response to this double threat was the launching of the Catholic Action movement in Latin America (Smith 1991).

The spirit of Catholic Action animated the initial response of the Diocese of San Cristobal to the Protestant evangelization. Bishop Lucio Torreblanca took the first steps in 1952, when he initiated the training of Indian catechists, including women as well as men (De Vos, 2002). At first the catechists were not particularly well trained, but they took up their responsibilities with zeal and the movement spread quickly to Ocosingo and

Bachajon. In the spirit of Catholic Action the Franciscans began to visit the Indian communities more and more frequently.

On January 25, 1960 Samuel Ruiz was consecrated as the new Bishop of San Cristobal de las Casas. As a new bishop, Ruiz was responsible for making a pastoral visitation of the whole diocese within five years. (Womack pp. 23-31) The Second Vatican Council, the world-wide social upheavals of the 1960s, and the daily involvement in the lives of the Indians would have a radicalizing effect not only on the priests and nuns, but also on the Bishop. In theological terms the Bishop and the priests came to recognize the presence of God in the lives and cultures of the Indian communities. In more concrete terms they came to recognize their agency, their capacity to transform their own conditions and the responsibility of the church to assist them in that struggle. There is a famous moment in 1968 when the Bishop is addressed by an old Tzeltal man in his own tongue:

the Church and the Word of God tells us things to save our souls, but we don't know how to save our bodies. While we work for the salvation of our souls, we suffer from hunger, disease, poverty and death.

It is at this moment that there is a radical reorientation in both the theory and practice of the Diocese. On a theoretical level this takes the form of the development of a new catechism which takes the story of Exodus as the basis for a sacralization of the flight from conditions of slavery in the fincas to the "promised land" in the jungle. On a practical level the Diocese begins to throw itself into political matters at the very moment that new struggles over land are beginning to break out not just in the jungle but across Chiapas.

Between 1968 and 1974 the church sought to simultaneously promote the religious education and organization of the communities and to build up their capacity to fight for improvements in their material conditions. More experienced catechists were raised to the rank of *thuneles* or predeacons and a more muscular organization was built. It was with this latter emphasis that the seeds were planted that would sprout into new independent campesino organizations shortly thereafter.

### *The Indigenous Congress*

Between October 12 and 15, 1974 a remarkable event took place in San Cristobal de Las Casas. The First Indigenous Congress was called by the Governor of Chiapas, Manuel Velasco Suárez. The Governor asked Bishop Ruiz to organize the Congress which was supposed to commemorate the 500<sup>th</sup> birthday of Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas. In the course of preparations for it the Congress became something quite different than the Governor had intended.

Ruiz accepted the request that the diocese organize the Congress on the condition that it should be a congress for and by the Indian communities themselves. The process of organizing the Indigenous Congress, the training of translators that enabled the Congress to be conducted in five languages (Tezeltal, Tzotzil, Chol, Tojolabal and Spanish), and the process of coming to agreement across regional and ethnic lines had an electric effect on the participants. It simultaneously raised their consciousness of their collective plight and the possibility of coordinated collective action, but it also began to put into place the organizational infrastructure that would quickly evolve into several powerful campesino organizations. The catechists and translators involved in the preparations for the Congress

and the organizational methods used to draw their communities into the discussion of the social and political questions that confronted them would all be deployed again in the months following the Congress (Legorretta Díaz 1998 and García de Leon 1995).

### *Union del Pueblo*

Two Maoist organization with roots in the student movement of 1968, Union del Pueblo and Política Popular would play an important role in organizing several campesino organizations in Eastern Chiapas that would eventually unite and constitute the main social base upon which the EZLN would be built (Legoretta Diaz 1998).

The smaller of these two groups, Union del Pueblo (UP), was asked by the Diocese to assist in the preparations for the Indigenous Congress in 1974. The request reflected an understanding within the diocese that the process that had begun with the training of catechists was reaching certain limits. The clergy and the catechists had encouraged the Indian communities to examine their conditions and argued for the importance of taking action to correct them, but really had very little idea how to go further. Trained in religious matters, the clergy and the catechists lacked experience and training in political matters. Fearing government cooptation, the diocese turned to the revolutionary left.

It was the cadres of UP, including Jaime Soto, and René Gómez and Martha Orantes, working with the clergy and catechists, who promoted the use of popular assemblies, reelecting their understanding of the Maoist theory of the mass line, to carry out discussion and analysis of the themes of the Congress which in turn ensured that the

Congress was regarded widely in the communities as a legitimate expression of their collective will.

It was also UP advisors who trained the young multi-lingual members of some of the communities as translators to facilitate the Congress. This activity in particular served to initiate a process of cadre formation among the translators, many of whom would go on to be leading figures in the ejidal unions that would soon emerge.

The Echeverria administration had called for the creation of unions of ejidos as another element in its populist politics. These were intended of course to serve as vehicles for reintegrating discontented campesinos back into the apparatus of the PRI, but the call created an opening that was seized on by the cadres of UP to build the first such union in the Lacandon Jungle, *Quiptic Ta Lecubtesel* (Tseltal for “Our force for progress”). Organizing day long courses of political education in any ejido that would have him, Jaime Soto (now living in the community of Emiliano Zapata), laid the foundations for the formal launching of *Quiptic* on December 12, 1975 by delegates representing 18 ejidos. Only a few months later another 25 ejidos from the neighboring canyons would join *Quiptic*.

Not surprisingly the village based leadership of *Quiptic* included many of the catechists who had been trained by the diocese, but who had also now been trained as political organizers by UP.

Shortly after the establishment of *Quiptic* a similar organizing process was undertaken in the neighboring municipality of Las Margaritas, again at the initiative of members of UP. The result was the creation of the *Unión de Ejidos Lucha Campesina* with participation by 14 communities. Whereas the communities constituting *Quiptic*

were largely Tzeltal, those making up *Lucha Campesina* were mainly Tojolabal and mestizo.

### *Política Popular*

In 1976, a second Maoist organization, Política Popular (PP), was invited by the diocese to send cadres to work in the communities of Eastern Chiapas. Also a product of the 1968 student movement, PP was founded by a group of professors and students at UNAM drawn mainly from the Economic Department. By 1976 PP was particularly strong in Monterey where they were building mass organizations of the urban poor. At the very moment that they began to work in Chiapas PP was undergoing a split into two factions, known as Línea de Masas and Línea Proletaria. It was the latter faction that first developed relations with UP and then with the diocese.

PP was larger and generally regarded as more politically sophisticated than UP (even by the members of UP!) with whom they shared a similar orientation towards the construction of democratic mass organizations and conception of the application of “the mass line.” Indeed the members of UP were apparently eager to work with the cadres of PP and assisted in their introduction into the communities. Within only a few months the organizations had all but fused, with the members of UP joining PP’s Ideological Leadership Organization (OID).

The addition of the PP cadres enabled an acceleration of the process of organizing taking place. *Quiptic* grew to 75 ejidos and 20 ranches and *Lucha Campesina* grew to 22 communities. A third ejidal union, the *Unión de Ejidos Tierra y Liberta* consisting of 31 Chol communities, and three more ejidal unions were also established, drawing in

another 44 more communities were also established. The culmination of this process was the merger of the various ejidal unions in 1979 under the umbrella of the *Unión de Uniones*.

The Maoists of UP and PP had a profound impact on the communities of the Lacandon Jungle and beyond. This impact was not limited simply to their impressive organizational accomplishments. They trained leaders in at least 200 Indian communities as political thinkers and organizers, many of whom would go on to play important roles in the development of the EZLN. While the Maoists had much in common with the political orientation of the diocese they also constituted an important alternative pole within the communities that undercut the monopoly of influence on the political orientation that the church had previously held. The Maoists also promoted a more radical vision of democracy than was consistent with the still hierarchical organization of the church. This would also prove to be a source of conflict.

The growth of the ejidal unions and the concomitant growth in the influence of the Maoists precipitated a breakdown in the working relationship between the diocese and the Maoist advisors living in the communities. While many villages would only see a priest once or twice a year, the Maoists immersed themselves in the daily lives of the communities in which they lived. Their visible commitment to the poor coupled with their often explicit atheism undermined the authority of the church hierarchy.

The problem came to a head in 1978 when the advisors associated with UP with the deepest roots in the communities participated in an exchange of experiences with PP by moving to Monterey to participate in their work among the urban poor. In their absence the newly arrived PP brigadistas began to articulate a critique of the ways in

which the training of leaders in the communities was supposedly reinforcing inequalities and authoritarianism within the communities. Their answer to this problem was an ideological campaign they named “the struggle to the death against social-democracy” in which they challenged the authority exercised in the communities by the catechists and *thuneles*. Not surprisingly this campaign backfired on the PP brigadistas since, authoritarian or not, the catechists and *thuneles* enjoyed considerable prestige in their communities whereas the brigadistas were recent arrivals. The diocese responded with a blunt exercise of political power and ordered the physical expulsion of the advisors working in the communities that belonged to *Quiptic*. The actual balance of power revealed itself when the villages complied with the order and the Maoists were compelled to walk out of the jungle and prohibited from even visiting communities along the way.

The expulsion of the advisors was limited to one zone (albeit the most important one) and did not bring an end to the active participation of the Maoists as advisors to *Quiptic* or the other ejidal unions. But it sent a clear message to the Maoists about where power actually lay and it marked the end of the formal collaboration between the diocese and the Maoists.

Curiously the “struggle against social-democracy” was then turned inwards as the PP brigadistas became critical of what they regarded as the authoritarian relationship between the OID and the mass organization of the ejidal unions. The response to this self-criticism within the PP was to dissolve the OID! From this point forward the Maoists ceased to function as a unified and disciplined organization. While they continued to participate as advisors in the life of the ejidal unions they now operated as individuals who shared a general perspective or line (it is at this point that the PP brigadistas start

generally referring to themselves as Linea Proletaria to indicate the change in their organizational character).

The effective leadership vacuum in the Unión de Uniones created an opportunity for the diocese to reassert its leading role within the mass movement that the Maoists had built. The vehicle for this was *Slop* (Tzeltal for root), a clandestine organization composed of Indian catechists and thuneles inspired by the recent revolutionary victories and advances in Central America in which elements of the church were playing an important role. Established in 1980 with the intention of developing the capacity of the communities for armed self-defense, *Slop* came to constitute an alternative leadership core to the Maoists. The split over the credit union was experienced as a financial disaster by Quiptic and Tierra y Libertad which had invested substantial sums of money in the project (and which they would not recover for another year). Since many of the members of *Slop* were already leaders within the Unión de Uniones, it was a relatively simple matter to expel the Maoist advisors in the wake of the credit union fiasco. And this is precisely what happened in the summer of 1983.

### *The Path of the Guerilla*

The departure of the Maoists and the ascent of *Slop* coincided with the appearance of the Forces of National Liberation (FLN). Inspired by the revolutionary movements in Central America and faced with a rising tide of repression under the new governor of Chiapas, General Absalón Castellanos Domínguez, (also a major landlord with claims on lands in the jungle occupied by Indian communities), *Slop* set out to prepare the communities to arm and defend themselves. Just as the diocese had invited the Maoists to

build up the political organization of the communities in the 1970s it now turned to another revolutionary left-wing organization to assist in its new project, the FLN, a predominantly urban-based guerrilla organization established in 1969.

The FLN had its roots in an earlier formation, the Mexican Insurgent Army (EIM), the first guerrilla group to seek to establish itself in Chiapas. (Tello Díaz 2000) The activities of the EIM would not be particularly noteworthy except that the group contained four individuals – Dr. Alfredo Zarate and the three Yañez brothers, Margil, Cesar German and Fernando – all from the city of Monterey, who would along with five others, establish their own organization, the Forces of National Liberation (FLN) on August 6, 1969.

The FLN distinguished itself from many of the other guerilla groups to appear in Mexico at that time by their avoidance of kidnappings, bank robberies and similar sorts of criminal actions which frequently resulted either in shootouts or capture by the authorities. Perhaps it was the lessons of their experiences in the EIM, but the new group took a decidedly more deliberate approach. They sought to patiently build a clandestine infrastructure, establishing cells across the country, setting up safe houses and secure communications, and slowly acquiring weapons on the black market, which often meant buying them from the police with dues collected from the organization's members. Indeed the organization was able to keep its existence secret for almost two years.

In an interview, Fernando Yañez described the group's orientation

We had nothing more than our own will and our ideals with which to do things, and the plan of not forcing anything. One had to have a consciousness that others would take up the guns, that they would go down this long road with the conviction, not to take up the gun and make a fetish of guns and money (Delgado 1995).

## The Second Journey to the Jungle

In 1972 the FLN felt that they had built up a sufficient clandestine support structure and trained enough to make a second attempt to establish themselves in the Lacandon Jungle. Their plans were cut short when on February 14, 1974 the Mexican Army, having captured two FLN members in Monterey, raided the FLN's new headquarters in Nepantla, south of Mexico City. The resulting shootout cost the lives of five FLN members including Dr. Zarate, who used the nom de guerre of Marcos.

Documents captured in Nepantla led the Mexican Army to the FLN's camp in Chiapas near El Diamante and in April the camp was surrounded by a column of soldiers. In the ensuing battle an unknown number of the guerrillas were killed including Cesar German Yañez. It would be almost ten more years before the FLN attempted to once again establish a guerrilla base in Lacandon Jungle. In the course of those ten years much would change. The members of the FLN themselves would become more seasoned and mature. And the indigenous communities that they hoped would become their base of support would also undergo an intense process of political mobilization and radicalization.

The Guevarist conception of the guerrilla foco had yielded disastrous results in Mexico. With a couple exceptions, the guerrilla groups formed in the 1960s and 70s were completely isolated from the people whose struggles they were seeking to represent. They were, for the most part, easily if bloodily repressed. The FLN did not escape this repression, but it did manage to survive it. (Tello Diaz 2000). In 1978 the Mexican government extended an offer of amnesty to most of the by then largely scattered and demoralized guerrilla forces still underground. The amnesty offer successfully coaxed

many into abandoning armed struggle for other forms of political struggle. By 1980 it seemed that the Mexican left's flirtation with guerrilla warfare was over. Only a handful of the most hardened combatants, with no apparent base of popular support, remained underground.

It was at precisely this moment, however, that the tiny Forces of National Liberation (FLN) were regathering their strength for a third attempt to establish themselves in the Lacandon Jungle. This time the results would be very different.

### *The Politicized Indigenous Elite*

Before the FLN could attempt to establish its army in the heart of the Lacandon Jungle it had to recruit a core of indigenous activists. In 1979 apparently they were able to recruit a member of the clergy who became a point of access to the network of catechists that would soon be constituted as *Slop* (Legorreta Diaz 1998). Marcos describes these recruits from the highlands as members of a "politicized indigenous elite." He is careful to distinguish them from "a very isolated group, that is the indigenous people of the Selva" who were to become the EZLN's primary bases of support. He describes the "politicized indigenous elite" as having "a great organizational capacity" and

"a very rich experience of political struggle. They were in practically all the political organizations of the left that there were then and they were familiar with all the prisons in the country. They realized that to solve their problems with land, with living conditions, and political rights there was no other way out than violence (Le Bot 1997:132).

The eight indigenous members of the founding nucleus of the EZLN were part of this already "politicized indigenous elite" that would over the coming years continue to supply the new organization with key cadres.

Before the EZLN was formally founded several FLN members began working in the community of Tierra y Libertad with a small NGO called DESMI (the Spanish initials for Indigenous Mexican Economic and Social Development), presumably establishing contact through their indigenous members with family in that community. (Tello Diaz 2000).

It was from this base and from similar contacts in surrounding communities that the FLN would set out and establish their first encampment on Chuncerro Mountain on November 17, 1983. It is worth noting here that the mestizo members of the FLN were only dimly aware of the rich history of struggle that preceded them and all of its implications when they entered the jungle. They were still operating primarily according to the internal logic of their own organization. The confrontation between that logic and the logic of the communities that would become the base of the EZLN would constitute what Marcos characterized as "the first defeat" of the EZLN (Le Bot 1997).

The formal founding of the EZLN marks the end of one period and the beginning of another in the political development of the communities of Eastern Chiapas in general and of the Lacandon Jungle in particular. The process of that development is another story, but one that would be unimaginable except on the foundation of the processes that preceded it.

## CONCLUSION

So, to what degree do the conditions and experiences that prepared the ground for the founding and growth of the EZLN confirm or refute various theories of the causes of peasant revolt? And to what degree do they suggest new areas of study. The experience of Eastern Chiapas would seem to confirm Wolf's thesis on the importance of the "tactically mobile peasantry." There can be little doubt that the main base of support for the EZLN, and for the social movements and organizations that preceded it, were small-holding peasants operating in a frontier zone where the central authority of the state was comparatively weak.

Similarly this case would seem to contradict Paige's expectation that migrant or tenant labor would constitute the main base of support for the EZLN. Such labor is to be found in Chiapas, and some landless wage laborers rallied to the Zapatista cause, but mainly in the hopes of obtaining lands (which some in fact did in the wave of land occupation that followed the 1994 uprising thereby transforming themselves into Wolf's tactically mobile peasants).

The case of Eastern Chiapas also presents some important challenges to Paige's methodology. The events described in detail here received little or no international press coverage when they occurred. Indeed coverage by the Mexican press was largely limited to the left-wing daily *La Jornada* and even smaller circulation organs of various groups. In other words they might not even have registered as social movement events. Had his method been applied to the Mexican national press rather than the international press, the results would have been little better. Indeed they would probably have reflected disproportionately the land battles fought out in the Highlands (and therefore more accessible to journalists) that often did involve wage workers but that proved largely

peripheral to the processes that would give rise to the EZLN. In other words a reliance on newspaper reporting on rural social movement events in Eastern Chiapas during this period might have confirmed Paige's central thesis but only by effectively missing the gestation of the EZLN.

Wickham-Crowley's emphasis on the importance of pre-existing social networks would find some confirmation in the experience of the FLN which clearly relied heavily on kinship networks to establish its presence in the Lacandon Jungle. His low opinion of the importance of consciousness raising efforts, however, would seem to be strongly contradicted by the pivotal role of precisely that sort of activity in the development of the ejidal unions that would constitute the eventual base of the EZLN.

Scott's account of the causes of peasant revolt, while, like Wolf's, consistent with the central role played by small-holding peasants seems overly schematic to explain the complex processes of ideological development that occurred in Eastern Chiapas. Certainly the simple facts can be made to fit the theory as one doesn't have to go far to find either threats to the right of subsistence or violations of whatever principles of reciprocity the Indians of Eastern Chiapas had with either the big landlords or the state. Even though it is mediated by culture, in Scott's account, peasant consciousness is ultimately structurally determined. Scott is critical of the notion of false consciousness which has been so heavily abused to explain the conservatism of peasants. Much of this criticism is certainly justified. In particular Scott notes the dangers of inferring peasant consciousness from peasant behavior without a closer examination of the ways that behavior may be rationally explicable. But by in effect denying the possibility of an outlook truly at odds with the individual or collective interests of the peasant, Scott

denies any real autonomy to the realm of ideology and therefore the possibility of political *choice* on the part of peasants.

This is frankly a limitation of all of the major theories peasant revolt considered here. If there is one thing that the experience of Eastern Chiapas demonstrates it is that while certain objective or structural conditions may be necessary for the development of a revolutionary peasantry, they certainly aren't sufficient. Nor are they adequate to explain the particular course of ideological development that a particular peasant population is likely to follow.

A genuinely dialectical understanding of the processes of ideological development of Indian peasantry of Eastern Chiapas must first recognize it as a process of emergent historical subjectivity, which is to say a struggle for freedom from the logic of structural necessities. The ideological choices made by the peasants of Eastern Chiapas weren't structurally unconstrained of course. But each act of choice opened up new vistas that revealed different dimensions of their condition and possibilities for their transformation. The choice to join the guerrillas was one step among many in that (still ongoing) process.

Legorreta Díaz argues that

In effect, the Forces of National Liberation did not find a fragmented and disorganized people reduced to paupers by extreme poverty. They found, rather, a cohesive, organized region with a certain political experience and hopes to obtain improved conditions of life that had been dignified by their process of organizing; and further the legacy of a real dynamic of participation and appropriation of the bases, that is to say, where there had developed the participation by the communities in the solution of their own social problems (1998: 189).

It is the development of this collective self-consciousness and capacity for self-activity and not simply the matrix of structured social relations in which it occurred that I

believe is most important here, for it is precisely that process that holds out the possibility of the supersession of the existing social reality. It is precisely because it is constitutive of an expanding realm of human freedom that it is so difficult to propose illuminating generalizations about this process.

What the emergence of the EZLN in Eastern Chiapas suggests perhaps then is that history is not, a la Weber, like a locomotive barreling down a set of tracks, its course set by a switchman or two along the way. Rather it is like a paved road that gives way to a dirt road before it becomes a footpath into the jungle. It is easier to stay on the path that already exists, but once the machete is drawn and the process of cutting a new path begins its course is chosen not predicted.

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