Language and history: a critical look at the Zapatistas of Chiapas

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Language and history: a critical look at the Zapatistas of Chiapas

by

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Signatures have been redacted for privacy
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ABSTRACT

This thesis endeavors to explain the Ejercicio Zapatista para Liberación Nacional’s (EZLN’s) by paying attention to the historical and linguistic traditions that they embody. This is done by approaching the Zapatista uprising in the terms of their rebellion, by paying attention to the historical and linguistic forces have given shape to how the world has viewed it. In order to accomplish this I view the EZLN’s writings through the hermeneutic method of interpretation. Secondly, the availability of information communication technologies (ICTs) allowed the Zapatista uprising to be viewed by non-state actors within and without Mexico. Furthermore the language used by the EZLN allowed other groups to respond in a positive manner to its cause. This circumvented the ability of the Mexican government to respond to the EZLN and gave the rebellion support from inside Mexico and from the global community. This has served to create a new sort of “imagined community,” akin to that theorized by Benedict Anderson.
CHAPTER 1: GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The Zapatista uprising of 1994 in Chiapas, Mexico received widespread attention and support from the international community because the language in which their message was communicated allowed both national and international actors to find common cause with the guerillas emerging from the Lancondon Jungle. In this thesis I propose to address the question, “What allowed the Zapatistas to gain the attention and support of numerous domestic and transnational actors?” Some accounts argue that the anti-globalization stance of the Zapatistas permitted them to gain the support of activist NGOs such as Amnesty International and the Jesuit Refugee Service.\(^1\) Other accounts argue that the Zapatista uprising was merely an example of “social netwar” in which disparate groups with various goals were able to coalesce around one event in order to promote their causes in a region afflicted by poverty, environmental degradation, racism and other blights.\(^2\) While many of these interpretations address central questions of what the Zapatistas accomplished they overlook an important feature of the movement. The language which the Zapatistas used in conveying their message through the medium of Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) such as the Internet, fax machines, and electronic mail, allowed activist groups from within the Mexican state to empathize with the Zapatistas. Importantly, the language which the Zapatistas used was, on the one hand, explicitly directed at the Mexican pueblo and thus allowed them to be seen as more than a fringe group of radicals. On the other hand, many of the Zapatistas writings were in a language which reached beyond the confines of la Patria, or Mexico, and could be understood and appreciated by international actors.

In order to answer the question, “What allowed the EZLN to gain national and international support?” I apply the hermeneutic method of interpretation to the case of the Zapatista movement. The hermeneutic method entails a close reading of the literature written by and about the Zapatistas. A study of this sort will analyze texts relating to the Zapatistas in order to engender “…the establishment of that which the words in a passage say, at the determination of the sensus litteralis,” and at the same time to move “beyond this toward that which is meant in the passage, which the words themselves refer to only as signs: this is the

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\(^1\) Ronfelt, David F, John Arquilla, Graham E. Fuller and Melissa Fuller. The Zapatista “Social Netwar” 1998 RAND Corporation; www.rand.org/publications/MR/MR994; p.54

\(^2\) Ronfelt et al. (1998). p. 2
interpretation of the sensus spiritualis, the allegorical interpretation. In using this method I show that the historical language used in many of the Ejército Zapatista para Liberación Nacional’s (EZLN) writings demonstrates that it is first and foremost constituted in order to recapture what it means to be Mexican. In this way the EZLN has sought to engender wide appeal within Mexican society. Second, the language the EZLN uses to communicate its message to the world is chosen so that actors from divergent historical and cultural settings could empathize with the EZLN’s struggle. The language of the EZLN’s writings allows a variety of actors to make value judgments on what is communicated by the Zapatistas in a way that promotes solidarity with the cause of the EZLN. In this way, what is said and written by the EZLN is aesthetically pleasing to a variety of actors. Thus, due to the “aesthetic” nature of their language and through the use of modern communication technologies, the EZLN has been able to disseminate its message globally and in a way that has promoted solidarity with disparate groups.

The historic and aesthetic nature of the EZLN writings has permitted it to restrict the options that the Mexican government has been able to employ in its response to the uprising because the EZLN has gained popular support within and without Mexico which has given the Zapatista movement visibility. Furthermore, the use of ICT by the EZLN and its supporters has created new centers of power and activist identities within global civil society. Thus, the EZLN is paradoxically rooted in history, but at the same time serves as an archetypal example of an ever evolving and changing global civil society in which disparate non-state actors, such as the EZLN, Greenpeace, Amnesty International, and Al Qaeda are able to partake in political action and affect the global political agenda.

I will proceed by first giving an overview of the literature that addresses the Zapatista question. In the second section of this thesis I outline the hermeneutic method by referring to some of its theorists and demonstrating its usefulness as a method of study through examples. In the third section I examine the empirics of this case, which will investigate not only the 1994 Zapatistas, but also the 1910 Mexican Revolution as a way to provide a historical context for what the Zapatistas wrote. Furthermore, I examine the Revolutionary hero,

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Emiliano Zapata, who serves as the namesake for the EZLN and what he had written in his revolutionary document, the Plan de Ayala. After establishing the historical importance of the 1910 Revolution and Zapata I analyze the writings of the Zapatistas and return to literature which has sought to describe the Zapatistas in order to compare and contrast what has been said by and about the movement. I conclude by arguing that the Zapatistas used language in a way to appeal to the Mexican *pueblo*, but whether intentionally or not, the Zapatista writings found an audience outside of Chiapas, and Mexico. This was accomplished through the use of ICT and the result of which was the creation of new activist networks, identities and centers of power.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

When the Ejército Zapatista para Liberación Nacional (Zapatista Nacional Liberation Army, EZLN) first came on the scene in 1994, there was a flood of observers and reporters to a small backwater region of Mexico. Interpretations range from a focus on the anti-globalization and anti-neoliberal claims of the EZLN to a focus on indigenous rights or to the possibility that the EZLN is inadvertently waging a transnational “social netwar.” In waging a “social netwar,” the EZLN “called on Mexican civil society—not other armed guerilla groups, but peaceful activists—to join with it in a nationwide struggle for social, economic, and political change, without necessarily taking up arms.” However, at the same time others argue that the EZLN is concerned more with casting their struggle in national terms in order to reach beyond the particularistic interests of the indigenous and peasant communities of Chiapas.

Many accounts of the EZLN focus on the indigenous nature of its uprising. A March 14th headline from Time magazine declared “Score One for the Indians” after EZLN negotiations with the Mexican Government won limited concessions for the uprising. It has not only been popular print media that sees the EZLN as a harbinger of indigenous rights meshed with anti-globalization rhetoric. In the introduction to “The Zapatista Reader,” Tom Hayden similarly argues that “the cynicism of the media does not seem to allow it to credit the achievements of the Zapatistas thus far in rescuing the ‘Indian question’ from oblivion….the rebellion is part of a widespread pattern of confrontations and questioning of global institutions…” Along with the ‘Indian question,’ a frequent line of argument that prevails in much that is written about the Zapatistas deals with the anti-globalization aspects of their movement. For example, Ana Esther Ceceña and Andrés Barreda argue that what is taking place in Chiapas is nothing less than a reaction to the global restructuring of capital: “In Chiapas…what is at stake is the rearranging of the material bases of US hegemony in the

4 Ronfelt et al. (1998) p.2
6 Serrill, Michael S.; “Score One for the Indians,” Time 14 March, 1994; http://www.time.com/time/archive/preview/0,10987,980314,00.html?internalidad=related
world. But also involved is the capacity of the population to rebel against the capitalist
depredation of human beings and to open the way for liberating alternatives.”

The EZLN is seen first and foremost as an indigenous movement which is fighting to
preserve its culture from the onslaught of globalization. While little academic literature has
pertained to the EZLN solely as an example of an indigenous or an anti-globalization
movement a substantial amount of what has been written on their cause for popular
consumption has taken this line of argument. Notable commentators on the EZLN and the
movement it created include not only Hayden, but also Noam Chomsky, Colombian novelist
and nobel laureate Gabriel García Márquez and the Spanish novelist Manuel Vásquez
Montalbán.9

While Indigenous rights, or “the Indian Question” as Hayden referred to it, are an
important part of the Zapatista program some, such as George Collier10 and June Nash11 have
argued that it is a misrepresentation to cast the Zapatista uprising as one undertaken in order
to resolve this “question.” Many of these writings come from the cultural anthropological
discipline and are undertaken by academics that have spent considerable time in Chiapas and
working with indigenous and peasant communities throughout Latin America.

In their work Zapatista! Reinventing Revolution, George Collier and Elizabeth
Quartiello question the legitimacy of the claim that the Zapatista uprising is the result of
purely indigenous and racist grievances.12 Like Collier and Quartiello, June Nash13
postulates that something larger than an Indianist movement has occured in Chiapas even
though it is difficult for anyone to acknowledge that the EZLN is not made up of
predominately indigenous participants in a region that has a longstanding tradition of Indian
led revolts. However, they argue that the indigenous community in Chiapas is not united
around one identity, nor did all indigenous communities support the EZLN. Rather the

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9 See, The Zapatista Reader
10 George A. Collier with Elizabeth Lowery Quaratiello; BASTA! Land and the Zapatista Rebellion in Chiapas, Institute for Food and Development Policy, 1994
12 Collier (1994)
13 Nash (1995)
policies of the government have caused certain sectors of the indigenous and peasant community to coalesce to support the government while others have been marginalized.

Due to government cooptation of certain sectors of indigenous communities through development programs, the state, and primarily the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), has tempered the identity of those within the privileged indigenous communities. At the same time, however, this created a gap between those of the highland communities, which tended to gain from government policies, and those in eastern Chiapas who were increasingly marginalized and more diverse than the Indian communities of the Highlands. Furthermore, the lack of infrastructure left Chiapaneco communities “isolated and parochial.”\(^\text{14}\) Thus, in certain areas of Chiapas,

Indianist programs...reinforced the identity of indigenous people as Indians rather than as part of the class of poor rural workers and peasants. Such identity is part of what has led traditionalists in highland communities like Zinacantán and Chamula, which are closely allied with the PRI, to eschew the Zapatistas. In eastern Chiapas, by contrast, the Zapatistas draw upon the perception of shared interests held by peasants and Indians.\(^\text{15}\)

For Collier, the EZLN uprising is only partially an indigenous uprising. It is first and foremost a response to government restructuring programs, such as the redrafting of the Agrarian Reform Law in 1992. This threatened many communities with further privation because it sought to end agricultural subsidies for seed, fertilizers and other necessities. Finally, both authors argue that the Zapatista uprising has sought to create a national context in its proclamations and writings. While the EZLN has sought a new form of federalism with territorial autonomy for indigenous communities, “their perspective has remained tied to the national context.”\(^\text{16}\)

However unintentionally it may have been, the EZLN’s perspective took on an increasingly global tone. Much of this was due to the use of ICT, such as the internet, email and facsimile machines that allowed the EZLN and its supporters to disseminate its message globally. James Rosenau writes that information telecommunications technologies are “neutral, in the sense that their tilt is provided by people. It is people and their collectivities

\(^{14}\) Collier (1994) p. 36
\(^{15}\) Collier (1994) p. 36
\(^{16}\) Nash (1995) p. 35
that infuse values into information." It seems as though the EZLN has "tilted" the power of telecommunications technologies in their favor. However, it needed the help of exogenous actors to accomplish this.

ICT provides an actor with the ability to affect the political agenda. J.P. Singh argues that ICT can provide three types of power, the first type is instrumental power. Instrumental power can lead to changes in the demographics of political constituencies that define interests within a society. This is accomplished because ICT can bring together constituencies which had been separated because of a lack of communication due to poor infrastructure, or geographic distance. Therefore, once new constituencies are linked together through ICT they can share information about common problems and define their interests in similar terms, thus affecting the size of political constituencies within a state. Secondly, an actor can also affect the ability of a political authority to institute policy and enforce its application by linking itself to different groups through the use of ICT, and this is called structural power. Finally, ICT can create new actors through networks of communication and information sharing, this is known as meta-power. However, as Rosenau argues, the way in which ICT use creates power is dependent upon the actors, and more importantly the message which the actors seek to convey through their use.

The RAND Corporation sponsored a study of the EZLN in which the authors argued that, due to its use of ICT and the propensity of the groups which found common cause with the EZLN to "network," the uprising is an example of a "social netwar." They argue that this has become an increasingly popular form of social action in an increasingly digitalized world. Furthermore, they argue that as the EZLN became increasingly networked with other groups the focus of its movement changed from one which was a Maoist form of guerilla warfare to one of indigenous rights.


19 Ronfelt et al. (1998) p. 4

20 Ronfelt et al. (1998)
While each of the accounts of the EZLN uprising provide insight into why and what the movement is, many do not pay enough attention to the language in which the movement was displayed to the world. While most studies have paid attention to the historical forces that have given shape to the EZLN, such as the legacy of the 1917 Constitution, the increased implementation of neo-liberal economic policies and the policies of coopatation, few have looked specifically at the language which the EZLN has used in communicating its message. By looking at the language used by the EZLN one can understand in greater depth the actual connection which this movement has to the historical legacy of Emiliano Zapata the 1910-1917 Revolution. This sheds light on an explanation as to why the EZLN was able to communicate effectively with the Mexican pueblo, as demonstrated during numerous gathering which it has held throughout Mexico, such as the Aguascalientes Democratic National Convention. Secondly, the language used by the EZLN has been able to strike a chord with many international audiences, both indigenous and not, and owing to the international support that the EZLN has engendered it has been able to limit the options available to the Mexican government to quell the uprising. Furthermore, the language and the use of ICT has created new centers of power within the global activist community by giving it a common cause around which to rally at the end of the twentieth century.
CHAPTER 3: HERMENEUTICS AS A METHODOLOGY

Words in a text exist as signs that are meant to relate an aspect of reality to the reader. More often than not the words that are written signify a concrete object or concept. For example, when we read, “The fox outran the hounds,” we are able to imagine the animal we have defined as a fox—the subject which committed the action of out-running the direct objects of the sentence, the hounds. An interpretation of this sort is one which attains the sensus litteralis of the statement “The fox out ran the hounds.”

However, if we read “she is a fox,” the meaning of what is written is not clear. Is the author stating that the she is a fox, like the one that outran the hounds? Or, is the author attributing the anthropomorphic qualities of a fox, sly, quick, to a woman? Or is the author using the word fox as a modifier in its colloquial sense, meaning that the subject of the sentence, that to which we refer as fox, meets some construct of a beautiful woman? In the sentence, “she is a fox,” the words represent the sensus spiritualis, the meaning of fox is not immediately perceptible through the literal definition of fox. Therefore, hermeneutics strives not only to interpret the words of a text, but also to go further to determine whether those words signify something else, something allegorical. This is done by attempting to place a text in a specific historical/cultural/linguistic context which will aid the investigator in the ascertainment of the allegorical meaning.

In order to achieve a close reading of the texts relating to the Zapatistas it is necessary that I translate any text from the original Spanish to English. To assure an accurate interpretation I will consult others, including native speakers as to the colloquial nature of passages. Second, I will consult other texts on the Zapatista movement, from government officials, academics, news sources and international sympathizers and antagonists of the Zapatistas.

A hermeneutic study of the Zapatistas strives to interpret the conditions which the Zapatistas themselves say gave rise to their movement, as well as the conditions which others, such as the Mexican government, outside observers, academics and others state as the factors which gave rise to the Ejército Zapatista para Liberación Nacional (Zapatista National Army for Liberation, EZLN) and its followers. Thus, an understanding of the EZLN would entail a study of the political and economic forces which helped to form modern Mexico, and
especially the Chiapas region. However, a hermeneutic study will go further than outlining the material factors that engendered this movement. It will be forced to look at the cultural, linguistic and historical forces which gave form to the politico-economic reality of the Zapatistas. It will strive to interpret and explain the Zapatistas of Chiapas in a way that makes explicit the scholar's prejudices as well as those of his society, his political beliefs, and his moral values.

A hermeneutic study will seek not only to interpret and explain a political event, action, work, or phenomenon from the standpoint of an objective observer, but also to give a meaning to that political event, action, work or phenomenon in a way that bridges the gaps created through divergent historical, cultural, and philosophical traditions. In this way a hermeneutic study of the Zapatistas is quintessentially an examined work. It not only examines the writings of the EZLN, but those factors that have influenced what its authors have written, what others write, and most importantly what the scholar writes.

The ability that we have to share knowledge and experience with others through linguistic signs and symbols is what separates us from other species, yet, too often that which we say and write is unexamined. What we communicate is taken at face value. It is assumed that the intentions of the speaker or author are evident through the lexical symbols/signs that are uttered and written, without taking into account the historical and individual contexts within which the act of communication and its subsequent interpretation are experienced. Yet, the historical context within which a text is produced constrains the possible meaning conveyed though that text. Likewise, the context within which a text is read provides the parameters for what can be ascribed as a meaning to that text. In this way human communication is a contextual event. In the words of Paul Ricouer:

All discourse is produced as an event; as such, it is the counterpart of language understood as code or system. Discourse qua event has a fleeting existence: it appears and disappears. But at the same time—and herein lies the paradox—it can be identified and reidentified as the same. This "sameness" is what we call in a broad sense, its meaning. All discourse, we shall say, is realized as event but understood as meaning.21

There are situations which give a specific meaning to our words and actions. For example, if we are standing at a bar and a friend points to a woman across the room and says, “she is a fox,” we can understand that he is asserting that this woman, in this bar, right now is good looking. The understanding of what criterion constitutes a “good looking” woman is shared between the interlocutors. Furthermore, our understanding of the term fox as a good looking woman in this instance is dependent on our previous experience with that term in its colloquial usage as such. This is the “sameness”, or the meaning that can be identified or reidentified in different contexts.

When we interpret and explain discourse without paying attention to the context in which it was created, we fail to recognize the meaning which allows it to be understood. We endeavor to determine the meaning of a text in its historical context while trying to reproduce the same meaning in a way that makes sense in the present without grotesquely distorting the original intentions of the author.

The interpretation and explanation of political and social reality with an eye turned towards the possible prediction of future social and political phenomena have often eluded social scientists because little attention was given to the context within which the objects of study exist. For example, the decision of the United States to enter the French-Indochina conflict of the 1950s cannot be understood apart from the historical setting of the Cold War. While contextual omissions of this scale are rare, we shall see that social scientists too often seek to separate social and political phenomena from the linguistic and cultural context through and within which they are actualized in order to provide for a clean, coherent and conceptually unified field of study, which is “value” free. As John Gerring writes,

Ideally, every distinct thing (referent) in a semantic field has a distinct name, and every name a distinct referent: a one-to-one correspondence between words and things. Of course, correspondences are rarely so perfect. However, all social science conceptualizations strive for this ideal, which, as Sartori points out, maximizes the efficiency and clarity of language in describing the world around us.\(^{22}\)

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The ideal of a “conceptually unified” and coherent field of definitions sprang to the fore under the aegis of Karl Popper’s principle of falsification.\textsuperscript{23} For Popper, scientific knowledge was gained through the falsification of previously held truths. Popper’s notion of falsification fundamentally entails that one look at scientific knowledge with an eye to demonstrate its inadequacy in explaining phenomenon.

For social scientists, this approach to scholarship is appealing, and many scholars embarked upon the path of scientific theory. Within the social sciences this movement was known as the behavioral movement, and it sought to understand socio-political phenomena as biological or chemical phenomena were understood in the physical sciences.

Sociopolitical phenomena...were assumed to be part of the natural world with natural causes whose discovery was impeded only by the absence of suitable data, methods and tools. Nothing was, in principle, unknowable if the search for patterned behavior was undertaken in systematic fashion....This so-called behavioral revolution in political science was a self-conscious effort to break with previous tradition and quite explicitly assumed an ahistorical posture.\textsuperscript{24}

The rationale for this “decontextualization” is that subjective categories, such as language, culture, and even history, prohibit the “objective” interpretation, explanation and prediction of social and political reality. The subjective categories of language and culture are too messy; the results provided by their study are often not falsifiable, nor do they coincide with the aims of the behavioral method in general. Much of this concern arose from the belief/fear that subjective categories induce scholarship with a normative posture which would prohibit the objective understanding and explanation that was sought. Yet without incorporating these subjective categories into the arena of study in the social sciences, we are not able to interpret and understand social and political phenomena fully and we run the risk of misinterpreting that which we study. For a scholar a misrepresentation of what we study should be worse than an incomplete interpretation and representation.


3.1 Hermeneutics and “The Tortoise and the Hare”

The realization that the social sciences have often met with fleeting success in its attempts to interpret, explain and predict is not breaking news, yet this does not mean that our efforts as social scientists are in vain. Rather, the recognition of our general inability to predict and interpret political acts sheds light on the nature of human beings in society as culturally, historically and linguistically influenced and perpetually mutable actors. The things we say and write are reflections of an ever changing social and political reality, and may offer an insight into the meaning of that reality in a way that can not be realized under the behavioral rubric. Furthermore, we base the communication of our knowledge on historical learning. However, we are caught in a Catch-22 of sorts because we cannot understand history if we do not understand where we are now.

When we interpret a text we seek to derive a meaning from it in order to apply its lessons to present day circumstances. Paul Ricoeur writes that “the central problem of hermeneutics is that of interpretation. Not interpretation in any sense of the word, but interpretation determined in two ways: the first concerning its field of application, the second its epistemological specificity...”\(^{25}\) The act of interpretation is undertaken to learn from something written, spoken or done in the past in order to determine the field of experiences in which we can apply the lessons that are gained to present and future situations. Furthermore, we seek to apply those lessons to an ever expanding field of experience, often endeavoring for the “general” lesson which can serve as a guide to our decision-making processes.

The act of interpretation involves two subjects, the reader and the text which is being read. The two subjects do not exist autonomously of each other, rather they are responding to one another. The reader approaches the text with a variety of past experiences from which she has learned, yet the text may pose questions for the lessons held by the reader, or may reinforce what the reader already knows. In this way the text and the reader/interpreter create an intersubjective context. It is this intersubjective context that serves as a forum in which dialogue between the historical/cultural/linguistic context of the text and that of the reader takes place. Yet, the validity of that intersubjective context depends on the

\(^{25}\) Ricouer (1998) p. 194
reader/interpreter’s awareness of the historical/cultural/linguistic context of both the text itself, the interpreter herself and the differences therein.

We can imagine a classroom in which a group of school children have read the story of the tortoise and the hare. Let us assume that these are very young students, perhaps just learning to read and to develop their cognitive abilities, as such their capacity to reason abstractly is limited. When asked, “What does this story teach us?” some students may respond that, “Hares are lazy and cocky, but also fast” or that “Tortoises are smarter than hares,” or even “Tortoises work harder than hares.” Each child has her own interpretation of the story, but if asked to apply that lesson to the world at large, what would the results be?

Second, we have what Ricouer calls the “problem of epistemological specificity.” If we return to our grade school students we would note that their interpretations of the story may be valid in the sense that the interpretation each student has arrived at makes “sense” to her. However, this does not make the interpretation universally valid. Could even the most ingenious student find a way to apply the lesson, “Tortoises aren’t as lazy or cocky as hares; they are smarter than hares; and they work harder than hares” to their life? Any application of this lesson would only be applicable in specific contexts, say in betting on a tortoise/hare race or in deciding which animal would be the best choice as a family pet. In this way the meaning of the lesson intended by the author is lost, but not because a new standard of meaning has evolved around the story of the tortoise and the hare. Rather, because the students were young, and their intellect was insufficiently developed, the students were unaware of the context within which the story should be read and interpreted.

This example serves to demonstrate that the problem of textual interpretation arises from the “autonomy” of both the text and the reader.

There is a problem of interpretation because there are texts, written texts, the autonomy of which creates specific difficulties. By “autonomy” I understand the independence of the text with respect to the intention of the author, the situation of the work and the original reader.26

We can recognize the autonomy of the text and the reader because they exist independently of each other. Furthermore, the text is independent of its author, and while her intentions may be present within the text they are not explicit. Returning to the grade school example

26 Ricoeur (1998) p. 194
we can see the “autonomous” character of both the text and the reader in the various interpretations that may be offered. Yet, these interpretations do not coincide with the interpretation commonly given to the parable, and that intended by the author, namely that “perseverance pays off, and slow and steady is better than quick and erratic.”

Owing to its “autonomous” existence, “textual” communication is more opaque for those seeking to interpret it than “locutionary” communication in which we communicate through vocal signs, symbols and physical gestures. When we communicate through speech we are communicating to someone about something which, as interlocutors we can point to and which is real and perceived for both agents. During “locutionary” communication, any questions of meaning can be resolved through further dialogue among the interlocutors, or through the vocal intonations and physical gestures that are a part of “locutionary” communication. Those involved in this form of communication are confronted not only with the reality that they are discussing, but they are also involved in the simultaneous action of speaking and listening. In this way those engaging in “locutionary” communication create their own intersubjective context. This intersubjective context is the external and autonomous reality confronting each communicator, and the internal reality that they create through the act of speaking.

Once a text is written and distributed, the meaning assigned to that text by its reader is often not the one originally intended by the author, but rather, is imparted by and through the reader onto the text. Thus we can say that the interpretation of a text always includes subjective connotations, “such as the implication of the reader in the processes of understanding and the reciprocity between the interpretation of the text and self-interpretation.”

27 However, this does not mean that the interpretation and explanation of texts is necessarily an individual and relativistic pursuit.

How would one offer an “objective” explanation of political phenomena if (s)he is only able to interpret “texts” through her own subjective situation? And how does one refrain from embarking on a solely individual and relativistic pursuit when interpreting a text? This is the problem which hermeneutics strives to overcome, yet the hermeneutic

method also recognizes that the objectivity proffered by "rational" and "scientific" approaches is a mirage.

...[H]ermeneuticists contend that because the specific configuration of language, social practice, and self-interpretation is partly constitutive of social reality, yet also changes over time and differs from culture to culture, a necessary condition of predictive precision and stability—that is, "conceptual unity..."—cannot be met in the social sciences.\(^{28}\)

There is a tension between the twin aims of social science, interpretation and explanation. On the one hand, the social sciences strive to "observe" empirical phenomena and to learn from those objects of study. Yet, there is a struggle to explain the variety of phenomena encountered in reality in sterile and value free language. However, the phenomena studied are often not sterile or value free. These are revolutions, poverty, human rights, and war, to name only a few. Can these phenomena really be interpreted and explained in clean, value neutral language?

The act of interpreting a political or social event or text is often overshadowed by the search for an explanation of that phenomenon because the language employed by social scientists is more conducive to offering a "neutral" explanation as opposed to a "value-free" interpretation. However, a fruitful explanation is often elusive as well. This is because, in failing to accurately interpret a political/social act or text it is difficult to gain a comprehensive and insightful understanding of its importance.

Without taking into account the historical, social, cultural and linguistic context that gives shape to political phenomena we are distanced from the phenomena that we seek to study. In his discussion of the political theorist Charles Taylor, Keith Topper argues that:

[A]n understanding of the specific meaningful context within which an action or practice occurs is a \textit{precondition} for formulating any accurate account or appropriate evaluative standards. Without such an understanding, one runs the risk of imputing meanings, intentions, practices, and standards of judgment on an agent or culture without first ascertaining whether those meanings, intentions, and so forth could exist or whether the standards of assessment are indeed appropriate.\(^{29}\)

\(^{28}\) Topper, Keith, pp. 512 "In Defense of Disunity: Pragmatism, Hermeneutics and the Social Sciences," \\
\textit{Political Theory}, Vol. 28 No. 4 (August 2000), pp. 509-539  \\
\(^{29}\) Topper (2000) p. 519
In a sense we are “alienated” from the text. Our personal values and standards influence our ability to approach a text and our occupation of a certain position in the timeline of society is not the same as that which influenced the author of a text. We are separated by history, because the way in which we perceive reality is circumscribed by our values and as time moves on those values evolve. Therefore, the values of yesterday are not the same as those of today, nor are the values of one culture the same as another. In order to get closer to the phenomena we are studying, what is alien must become familiar and to do this we need to make a concerted effort to close the gaps created by history, culture and language.

Hans-Goerg Gadamer argues that hermeneutic interpretation attempts to synthesize a dual experience of alienation: that of the aesthetic consciousness and that of the historical consciousness. When we speak of the aesthetic consciousness we are referring to the cognitive process by which we judge artistic and literary forms. We are alienated from an artistic or literary work when we attempt to pass judgment on its artistic/literary value in the sense that what we value as aesthetically pleasing is different from what one in a past time or a different culture held as aesthetically valuable.

For example, one can imagine a modern viewer of David Siqueiros’ La Nueva Democracia judging the painting as a dark and foreboding image of the Mexican Revolution. Yet is this a valid judgment? A more appropriate judgment of Siquieros’ work would note that the painting is a representation of the triumph of the pueblo over totalitarianism, the victory of the global potential to overcome authoritarianism? The foregoing example demonstrates the problem of the aesthetic consciousness.

An aesthetic consciousness that does not reflect upon its own biases will judge a work erroneously. As Gadamer states,

The aesthetic consciousness realizes a possibility that...we relate ourselves, either negatively or affirmatively, to the quality of an artistic form. This statement means we are related in such a way that the judgment we make decides in the end regarding the expressive power and validity of what we judge.  

30 A copy of Siqueiros’ La Nueva Democracia is appended on page 23. 
http://www.cnca.gob.mx/palacio/siquei.htm
In the end, when we seek to judge something, be it a painting, a sculpture, a poem or another work, we do not approach it in the same terms as its creator. Furthermore, as those who judge, it is our responsibility to attempt to reconcile our own aesthetic proclivities with those present in the artist through study and reflection.

On the other hand, the historical consciousness refers to our perception of past events and the fact that we view historical events and processes out of the *zeitgeist* of that era. We are unable to interpret the events of the American, French or Mexican Revolutions and the decisions that they influenced in the same way as the participants of those events did, just as our children and our children’s children will be unable to interpret 9/11 and the ensuing decisions in the same way as we were able to. However, as Gadamer remarks,

> the historical consciousness has the task of understanding all the witnesses of a past time out of the spirit of that time, of extricating them from the preoccupations of our own present life, and of knowing, without moral smugness, the past as a human phenomenon. 

Thus, the interpreter of a text must be aware of the “prejudices that constitute our being,” and the historical distance between ourselves as scholars and that which we study. Hindsight is 20/20 and as aliens to 1776, 1789 or 1910 we are unable to view history as a black and white occurrence from our station in the present, and as such we must endeavor to understand the historical processes that were taking place in the past.

Prejudices are not merely unfounded beliefs about the world. They are the notions or beliefs which guide our approach to the world. They are based on our past experiences and the learning that we have gained from our engagement as active participants in that world. Rather than being a condition of “closed-mindedness,” prejudices are merely the result of our experience as participants in that world, and they provide the standpoint from which we view reality.

In this way, bias and history are inextricably linked; and, as such, they constitute the context within which we approach a text, just as they were the context which influenced the author of a specific text. In this way we must be aware of those prejudices and why they are held. As Gadamer argues, prejudices are not inherently fallacious or unjustified, rather

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the historicity of our existence entails that prejudices...constitute the initial directedness of our whole ability to experience. Prejudices are biases of our openness to the world. They are simply conditions whereby we experience something—whereby what we encounter says something to us.\(^3\)

The importance that Gadamer places on prejudice requires that, as scholars, we must be able to recognize that which we prejudice in order to understand how prejudice influences our reading of a text.

We must be able to critique and understand our own biases, but to do this we need, in a sense, to step out of the linguistic box that social science has constructed. This for Gadamer, necessarily entails the fruitful use of imagination. Imagination gives us the ability to question reality and what is presented to us as knowledge.\(^4\) It is through our imagination we are able to synthesize our aesthetic and historical alienation from a text by constructing the meaning of a text. This is because,

language and social practice delimit the possible range of meanings that can be ascribed in a particular situation...[C]ertain shared or “intersubjective” semantic configurations, norms, social practices, and meanings not only constitute specific practices...but also circumscribe the field of intelligible possibilities for individual belief and action.\(^5\)

In this way, we are able to create an intersubjective context within which the act of interpretation occurs.\(^6\) Furthermore, if we heed the constraints placed on communication by language and social practice, the intersubjective context which is created keeps interpretation from being solely individual or relativistic. An important aspect of any intersubjective context is the meaning which is created and that is not explicit. A common example of this discursive phenomenon is the metaphor.

For Paul Ricoeur, the metaphor is symbolic of the central problem of hermeneutics, the battle between interpretation and explanation. According to Ricoeur, the metaphor serves as the minimal representation of text, a word, while the maximal representation of a text is a poem, an essay, a work or even the completed works of any one author. Interpretation of a metaphor is challenging, however, because “semantics shows with the same force that the

\(^3\) Gadamer (1998) p. 189  
\(^4\) Gadamer (1998) p. 191  
\(^5\) Topper (2000) p. 520  
\(^6\) Topper (2000) p. 522
metaphorical meaning of a word is nothing which can be found in the dictionary.” Thus, “metaphorical use must be solely contextual, that is, a meaning which emerges as the unique and fleeting result of a certain contextual action.”37 Yet, this does not mean that a metaphor is an ephemeral tool of linguistic communication. Quite the contrary: “In the metaphorical statement…contextual action creates a new meaning which is indeed an event, since it exists only in this particular context; but at the same time, it can be repeated and hence identified as the same.”38

If we return to our imaginary classroom, we can see the importance of the metaphor for interpretation. What if it were explained to students that the tortoise was not really a tortoise and the hare was not really a hare, but rather the protagonists of the parable were literary tools used to represent people. How would the interpretations offered by the students change? Could the students now interpret the story, not as a treatise on tortoise and hare races, but rather as an example of the benefits of living a life of “perseverance, and slow and steadfastness over cockiness and speed?” By placing the story of the tortoise and the hare in a specific context, that of a literary work which anthropomorphizes the protagonists, the students can recognize the “sameness” of the story that was present in days long past and today.

Thus, by being cognizant of the use of the metaphor which entails that we do not take words on a page at their sensus litteralis, but striving for the sensus spiritualis we are able to construct a meaning for the story of the tortoise and the hare. The meaning we are able to construct through an awareness of the sensus spiritualis is applicable to the world beyond the text and the classroom and it is not limited to a narrow range of social and/or cultural settings.

To recapitulate, the hermeneutic method of study focuses not only on what is represented on the page as written words and action, symbols of language, but also on the context which gives those words/symbols their meaning. In order to do this one must understand not only the language, and the lexical and grammatical meanings therein, but also the historical and cultural context which limits the variety of meanings that can be ascribed to

37 Ricoeur (1998) p. 197
38 Ricoeur (1998) p. 197
those words and action, all the while striving to be cognizant of one’s own prejudices. This methodology is useful for studying the Zapatistas because of the preponderance of literature which has been disseminated world wide pertaining to them.

The increased use of ICT has permitted the dissemination of literature pertaining to the Zapatistas and this necessarily entails that those studying the Zapatista movement are increasingly alienated from that which they study. Therefore a methodology which seeks to bridge the gap created through historical, social, cultural and linguistic differences is helpful in order to conscientiously study the 1994 Chiapas uprising.
CHAPTER 4: THE ZAPATISTAS AND THE PUEBLO

The Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN) occupied the city of San Cristóbal de las Casas Altamirano, and the towns of Chanal, Huistán, Las Margaritas, Oxchuc, and Ocosingo in the early morning hours of 1 January 1994 with the cry “!Ya Basta!”, or in English, “Enough Already!” The EZLN of 1994 consisted of indigenous and peasant men and women who were dressed for war, sort of. Those emerging from the Lacandon Forest wore makeshift army uniforms, rubber boots, ski masks and bandanas. While some members of the EZLN carried Uzi submachine guns, and rifles, others carried wooden rifles. This makeshift guerrilla army sought to represent those who had been increasingly marginalized, exterminated, forced to leave their lands and were threatened with even further privation by the adoption of the North American Free Trade Agreement, and the redrafting of the Agrarian Reform Law in 1992.

Many interpret the Zapatista uprising as an attempt to influence the dominant political and economic system of Mexico. Initially the Mexican government argued that the EZLN was a group of narcotraficantes, or Guatemalan refugees seeking to secure Chiapas as a sovereign entity separate from Mexico proper. Others, including the Zapatistas, argue that the uprising was a last ditch effort to redefine the political system of Mexico and to incorporate the indigenous and marginalized citizens of Mexico into the nation itself. However, as The Economist reported, the interpretation that has been the most prevalent is based on structural causes of poverty, indigenous rights and policy failure:

The government blamed radical Catholic priests and Central American guerrillas for the uprising. Both may indeed have had some involvement... But the roots of the rebellion lie in poverty, racial discrimination and the failures of regional and social policy.

Poverty is most certainly a factor in fermenting the belief that the pueblo had to do something in order to better their situation. At the time of the uprising 11 percent of adults had what the

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39 See Collier (1994)
41 The Economist, “Mexico’s second-class citizens say enough is enough” pp.41-42; January 8, 1994 v330 n7844
government had termed “moderate incomes” of at least $3,450 per year.\footnote{Collier (1994) p. 16} In contrast the national average of adults earning moderate incomes was 24 percent. Furthermore, in Chiapas the amount of households that have running water is less than fifty percent, compared with 67 percent of all households in Mexico\footnote{Collier (1994) p. 16} Thus, the perception that the structural causes underlie the uprising (poverty, racism and policy failure) provides insight into the context within which the EZLN took to arms in 1994, however it does not fully capture the story of what the Zapatista rebellion means for its participants and those affected by it and the world outside of Chiapas. More importantly for this study, the structural causes of the rebellion do not explain why the EZLN uprising was successful in mobilizing disparate forces of support within and without Mexico.

While the EZLN and its supporters were fighting to preserve their ability to survive, which is threatened by the neoliberal economic and political policies of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), the Zapatista rebellion is also a reassertion of indigenous identity with Indian participants who speak numerous languages, including the Mayan dialects of Tzotzil, Tzeltal, Chol and Tojolabal and Zoque.\footnote{Collier (1994) p. 18} However, from the beginning the EZLN message is not limited to only the indigenous people in Mexico but rather, from day one the EZLN has tried to appeal directly to the Mexican pueblo. Pueblo, in this sense refers to the Mexican people writ large; those that coalesce around the televisions to watch the national football team, those that recognize and celebrate the importance of the \textit{cinco de mayo}, and those that view Zapata, Villa and others as among the “pantheon of national heroes.”\footnote{Benjamin, Thomas, \textit{La Revolución: Mexico’s Great Revolution as Memory Myth and History}; 2000 University of Texas Press, Austin, Texas} Thus, as Rajchenberg and Héau-Lambert write in examining the historicism and symbolism of the Zapatista uprising, the movement is fundamentally an attempt to “recover history in a way that signifies both continuity and rupture, or rather the hope of rupture.”\footnote{Enrique Rajchenberg & Catherine Héau-Lambert; pp.29 “History and Symbolism in the Zapatista Movement,” in \textit{Zapatista! Reinventing Revolution in Mexico}, pp. 19-38; edited by John Holloway and Eloína Peláez; Pluto Press, London, U.K., 1998; The historical continuity sought by the Zapatistas is embodied in the story of Mexico from pre-Colombian times through the colonial period and until the Mexican Revolution of 1910. The historical rupture desired is aimed at the prevailing unequal system of dominance in which the ideals of the past,}
movement evolved and gained support by way of the Internet and eventually one could write
that “the message of the Zapatistas has been one of hope….but it is not a hope that springs
from the certainty of the end result, but from confidence in the necessity of the project. Hope
is dignity, the struggle to walk upright in a world which pushes us down.” In this way it
was a movement that sought to speak beyond the borders of Mexico to those who saw the
cause of Chiapas as one that made salient environmental degradation, neoliberal policies, and
human rights. From this particularly Mexican, but global message, the EZLN sought to build
a new kind of society, in which each individual has his own voice, yet a voice which is not
determined, quieted, or ignored by the market, the dominant political or social order, but a
quintessentially human voice. It sought to represent the thousands upon millions of
indigenous and others who have been hidden from public view in Mexico, Latin America and
the world writ large: “The Zapatistas, the millionaires of undelivered promises, the ones who
cover their face, so that their brothers and sisters in other lands can see them. The Zapatistas
the ones of ‘for everybody everything, nothing for us.”

One always comes back to the beginning, and it is here that the EZLN sought to redefine
politics in a way that permitted each Mexican citizen to enter the halls of government so that
everyone was able to approach public officials without concern for party affiliation, religion,
or occupation. In this way they challenged the dominant political culture in Mexico which
was ruled by patronage and demanded an association with the ruling PRI. At the first press
conference held following the uprising, those speaking on behalf of the movement insited
that it grew from indigenous communities, but made demands that were quintessentially
national. The EZLN established its nation-wide goals through symbolism, but
communicated them through a close attention to language.

Subcomandante Marcos is the author of the vast majority of the proclamations,
communiqués and stories that have emerged from Chiapas, and he has paid close attention to

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49 Ronfelt et al. (1998) pp. 2
the language that he has used. For example, in an interview with the Colombian novelist and poet Gabriel García Marquez, Marcos relates his upbringing and the importance that literature and words had played in his education.

We didn’t learn to read in school but by reading newspapers. My mother and father made us read books that rapidly permitted us to approach new things. Some way or another we acquired a consciousness of language not as a way of communicating with each other but as a way of building something.50

Thus, Marcos himself has paid a close attention to not only the language that he has used, but the way in which that language could be used to build a movement that, ultimately would extended beyond the borders of Mexico.

In place of the revolutionary dialogue of Castro and Ché, Mao or Lenin, the Zapatistas “take up the battle in...categories previously dismissed as being irrevocably compromised by their liberal use (‘freedom’, ‘democracy’, ‘justice’, for example). They give new life to categories and symbols that seemed empty or insignificant.”51 In fact, on that first day of the revolution the Zapatistas issued their first proclamation, the Declaración de la Selva Lacandona, in which they justified their rebellion by invoking Article 39 of Mexico’s 1917 Constitucion, not on the revolutionary ideals of Marx, Lenin, Ché and other luminaries of the revolutionary left. They based their call to arms on the same Constitution that was handed down from the revolutionary heroes Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata. Article 39 of the Mexican Constitution states that:

The national sovereignty resides essentially and originally in the pueblo. All public power emanates from the pueblo and is instituted for the benefit of this. The pueblo has, in all time, the inalienable right to alter, or modify the form of its government52

In using the Mexican Constitution of 1917 as justification for their uprising, the Zapatistas were striving to accomplish two related, though distinct, goals. First, they wanted to demonstrate to the Mexican population that they were not working outside of the law and in this way they could refute claims that they are terrorists or drug traffickers. As

Subcommandante Marcos stated, it was important that they were perceived as an organic and legitimate Mexican movement.

We needed to show clearly that we weren’t drug traffickers. We had to do something related to cities, the pretext couldn’t be just about rural conditions so that they couldn’t write us off in the jungle, as they did in the incident in the mountains of Corralchén, that garrison of ours they discovered, when they decided we were [a fringe group], marijuana growers, or Guatemalans.53

Nor were they seeking to supplant the state and society with some drastically different form of political and social organization imposed from above. In its place they strove to realize a political and social organization embodied within the Constitution and based in the traditional values of the pueblo.

The second goal of the Zapatistas results from the global attention which the uprising garnered. They have endeavored to demonstrate to the world beyond Mexico the legitimacy of their cause, to gain visibility and thus to limit the ability of the Mexican state to implement egregious policies and respond violently to the uprising. While on the domestic front the EZLN gave as justification for the uprising the 1917 Constitution, in the international realm it agreed to abide by the Geneva Convention, allowed Red Cross monitors, and invited non-governmental organizations to be present during the conflict in order to observe what was going on and to serve as reporters to the rest of the world. In this way the EZLN could point to the illegitimacy of the Mexican government, its policies and economics, and the EZLN could limit the options the military apparatus had for a response.

In the first Declaración de la Selva Lacandona, the Zapatistas made explicit to the world their existence as a legitimate army fighting not for power, but for the Mexican pueblo and for the ability to identify what that should represent to themselves and the outside world:

We now and always declare that we are subject to what is stipulated in the Laws of War of the Geneva Convention, forming the EZLN as a belligerent force of our battle for liberation. We have the Mexican pueblo on our side, we have la Patria, and the tricolor Flag is love and respected by the INSURGENT combatants, we use the colors red and black in our uniform, symbols of the working Pueblo in the battle for strikes, our flag has the letters <<EZLN>>, Zapatista National Liberation Army, and with it we go always as combatants…54

53 Collier (1994) p. 86
54 Declaración de la Selva Lacandona
The Zapatistas were not only offering justification of their legitimacy as a belligerent force, but at the same time they were pointing to the illegitimacy of the Mexican Regime in relation to the 1917 Constitution, the “ideal” of Mexico and international law. They were also pointing to the legitimacy of the Mexican revolution by respecting the tri-color flag and the patria or the fatherland that is Mexico. They were respecting the borders of that nation and they did not, according to their words and actions seek to carve out an independent state.

The Zapatistas sought to mobilize the pueblo of Mexico not only through their use of revolutionary ideals as these are embodied in the 1917 Constitution, but also through the metaphorical imagery and symbolism that they use in their actions and in their writings. One of the predominant images of the 1910-1917 Revolution was that of Emiliano Zapata, one of the leaders of the revolution against the autocrat Porfirio Díaz. This image was embodied by the EZLN leader Subcommandante Marcos in the earliest moments of the 1994 Chiapas uprising:

Marcos surprised everyone when he appeared on horseback, his chest crossed with cartridge belts. For Mexicans, his appearance provoked not only amazement, but an awakening and recovery of a collective memory....It also immediately evoked another, distant, image: that of Emiliano Zapata on horseback, dressed in the traditional charro style...the archetype of the good revolutionary. Since Marcos’s individual identity was hidden behind his balaclava, what remained was the symbolic identity of an agrarian guerrilla hero....He represented the re-emergence of the emblematic defender of peasants who had died for his ideals.55

Whether or not Marcos sought to emulate Zapata is uncertain. What is clear is that the EZLN takes its name from Zapata himself. Furthermore Marcos himself is seen by the pueblo and observers as Zapata-esque. Therefore, in order to understand the EZLN it is necessary to examine the historical figure ofEmiliano Zapata, his evolutionary programme and his legacy.

CHAPTER 5: THE HISTORICAL ZAPATA AND THE MEXICAN REVOLUTION

The EZLN uprising was not a “new” revolution, rather, it sought to be perceived as a continuation of the 1910-1917 uprising which sought to grant greater power to the pueblo and to take control of the government from an increasingly powerful executive. Furthermore, many sectors involved in the Revolution sought a redistribution of land in order to promote a more equitable distribution of resources within the pueblo. The 1910-1917 Mexican Revolution was not seen as an end point, but rather as continually evolving and moving towards its completion as set forth in the 1917 Constitution. Thus, the EZLN uprising was not so much a new social movement, but rather the resurgence of revolutionary forces that had been silent for seventy-seven years.

The Mexican Revolution of 1910-1917 was begun on the 20th of November, 1910 following the publication and dissemination of the Plan de San Luis Potosí, authored by Francisco I. Madero which called for the ouster of the perennial president and consummate dictator Porfirio Díaz. The Plan inspired revolutionaries to unite in order to fight for not only the ouster of Díaz, but for elections and democracy. On the 25th of May, 1911 Díaz formally resigned and shortly thereafter presidential elections were held in which the author of the revolution, Madero, won with 98 per cent of the vote “in a free and fair presidential election, probably the first in Mexico’s history.” However, Madero was not as revolutionary as many had hoped, and he was quickly confronted by numerous problems. While Madero was seen by contemporaries, and now by historians alike, as “the Apostle of Democracy,” he fell short of completing anything more than the ouster of Díaz and holding a round of elections. Thomas Benjamin writes that “The ‘Apostle of Democracy’ was the son of one of Mexico’s wealthiest families....” thus, when Madero was elected president in 1911 he was unwilling to take the steps necessary to ameliorate many of the grievances of other revolutionaries, such as land reform, because it could have alienated many of his supporters and threatened to throw the country into further turmoil, and Madero was increasingly interested in preserving order. Among the dilemmas which Madero faced was the opposition of Emiliano Zapata.

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56 McLynn, (2000) p 115
57 Benjamin (2000) p. 3
As it would be for the EZLN in 1994, land reform was the defining issue of the rebellion for Zapata and his followers. During the 1910-1917 Revolution, Zapata "represented the agrarian peasantry....who wanted their stolen lands back. Agrarian grievances were overwhelmingly the biggest issue in the Revolution, hardly surprisingly, given that four-fifths of the population lived in the countryside."\(^{58}\) Enrique Rajcenberg and Catherine Héau-Lambert give significant symbolic importance to the figure of Zapata and what his figure represents in relation to land reform. They argue that for the revolutionary iconography of Mexico, Zapata is akin to Father Don Miguel Hidalgo and José María Morelos, both Mexican heroes in the struggle for independence from Spain. In their essay "History and Symbolism in the Zapatista Movement," they state that Zapata was the heir of Hidalgo and Morelos, and thus "represents the liberation of Mexicans from the Spanish, from the owners of the land."\(^{59}\) For the peasantry, Zapata was therefore seen as something of a "second-coming" of the heroes who had thrown off the yoke of colonialism.

It is this belief in the importance of history that leads to the assumption shared by many that the revolutionaries were not fighting in 1910 in order to redraw from scratch what it meant to be Mexican, nor to redefine what Mexico, \textit{la Patria}, is. They saw their cause as that of Mexico, and in this way they did not fight against \textit{la Patria} but for \textit{la Patria} in the same way that Hidalgo and Morelos fought for the liberation of Mexico, \textit{la Patria}, and the \textit{pueblo} from the Spanish Crown. Benjamin writes that: "This was not the French Revolution: Mexican revolutionaries did not seek to abolish history and begin the nation anew. They saw themselves as part of a revolutionary tradition symbolized by the tricolor red, white, and green flag."\(^{60}\) Much like the Zapatistas of 1994, the revolutionary actors of 1910-1911 did not fight to rid their homeland of Mexico, but rather to rid Mexico of something they perceived as antithetical to its existence, and to the identity of Mexicans as they defined it.

Revolutions are the ultimate political act. They seek to overthrow what was once seen as a legitimate authority and install in its place another. As political acts, revolutions are made up of different actors with different goals. While the revolutionary forces of 1910-1917 were united to ensure the ouster of Díaz, once this end was realized the consensus

\(^{58}\) McLynn (2000) pp. 102  
\(^{59}\) Rajcenberg and Héau-Lambert (1998) p. 20  
\(^{60}\) Benjamin (2000) p. 54
ended. Carlos Fuentes writes that the Mexican Revolution was in reality the confluence of two revolutions. The first revolutionary stream was agrarian, in which the pueblos were represented by Villa and Zapata. It is this revolution which is called forth in the popular iconography of the Mexican Revolution. Founded in the pueblos, the agrarian movement was a locally based revolution and its goals were very similar to that of the EZLN. This movement sought to restore to the villages their rights over the lands, the waters and the forests. In place of a strong central government, the Zapatistas and Villistas of 1910-1917 sought a decentralized form of democracy, and its overriding theme was one of communitarian self government. The authors of this movement drew inspiration not from foreign constitutions and philosophy, but were “based in local historical and cultural shared traditions.” Thus, the agrarian aspect of the Mexican Revolution “was seen at the same time as a continuation of the old agrarian values and was, in many aspects, a conservative revolution.” It was the second, modernizing, industrializing and liberal revolution that challenged the conservative culture of the agrarian movement. “The second revolution, much more cloudy in the iconic mentality, was the national movement, centralizing and modernizing and led by Carranza.”

As it was increasingly perceived that Madero was unable to effectively govern because his various generals were often warring with one another and unable to instill order throughout the whole country, he began to lose his influence as the Executive. Furthermore, Madero had lost the support of many of his traditional allies because they viewed his inability to create an orderly environment as a possible harbinger of things to come. Finally, after Madero was ousted from office in February 1913, he was quickly arrested and then murdered by General Victoriano Huerta, whom he had personally named to the post of defender of Mexico City in order to quell an uprising that had broken out and threatened to engulf the city.

Huerta assumed the office of the presidency. Following the ascension of Huerta to the executive Venustiano Carranza allied with holdouts of the Madero government and numerous regional armies in order to rid the country of the heavy-handed military rule

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61 Fuentes, Carlos, pp. 452-453; El Espejo Enterrado, 2001 Taurus, Santillana Ediciones Generales, S.A. de C.V., México, D.F.
imposed by Huerta. Carranza and his supporters formed what was termed the Constitutionalist movement, and by mid 1914 they had bested the federal army. Soon however, the Constitutionalist movement returned the country to civil war. Eventually Carranza and his followers came to power, and all the regional leaders agreed upon a constitution in 1917.

The 1917 Constitution placed more power in the presidency than had been present under Díaz. Zapata and his followers believed that Carranza had “betrayed la Revolución.” Furthermore, Carranza, like his predecessor Madero, was tied to vested interests already within the Mexican state and was loath to enact serious land reform policies. Under Carranza, Zapata and his followers were seen as nothing more than “a horde of bandits,” and Zapata was increasingly marginalized from the decision making process. At the same time, however, Caranza and the other drafters of the constitution did include one rather progressive article in the 1917 Constitution which temporarily mollified some of the more outspoken critics. Article 27 of the Constitution “declared that private property was not an absolute right but one that could be revoked, as the ultimate owner of land, water and subsoil rights was the nation.” Thus, lands that were amassed by a few under Díaz could be reclaimed by the *pueblo*. The allowances for land reform made under Article 27 gave peasants hope for future gains.

Land reforms, however, were often very slow in coming if they came at all. Thus, the federal government was able to hold out the hope of land reform by pointing to those instances when they were realized, and in this way it was possible to ensure the cooperation of rural communities. In years to come, the federal government and the ruling PRI were able to hold out the promise of land reform as a political tool to solidify peasant loyalty. Thus, when the Salinas administration redrafted the agrarian reform law in 1992, the peasant and indigenous communities in Chiapas which were actively supporting the EZLN or which would come to support them following the uprising lost hope that land reform would improve their way of life.

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63 Benjamin (2000) p. 52
64 Benjamin (2000) p. 62
66 Collier (1994) p. 30
The Zapatista movement in Morelos and southern Mexico was not only a movement to rid the nation of the tyranny of Díaz, but it also was “the inevitable ‘second stage’ of all true revolutions, when the bourgeois victors of the first stage (the overthrow of the old regime) confront the lower orders whose aspirations they have unwittingly aroused.”67 It was the ancien régime that the Zapatistas sought to overthrow, but they were not merely aiming at the landowners and gentry of Mexican society. They also sought to take on the centralizing and modernizing forces that had been taking hold of Mexico since the time of Díaz. These forces were embodied in the científicos or technocrats who had gained power during the reign of Díaz, and who were kept in positions of power during the presidency of Madero and subsequently Carranza. Zapata and his followers were fearful that further movement in this direction was going to challenge their ability to live as they had because it took decision making away from the pueblo and moved it to Mexico City and regional capitals. Much like the EZLN in 1994 and its supposed response to globalization and neo-liberal policies, Zapata’s movement was a reaction to forces already in motion that sought to modernize Mexican society and promote the further centralization of authority under the President.

5.1 Aguascalientes and the Plan de Ayala

It is important to step back from the end of the revolution to 1914 in order to better understand Zapata, his program and the impact that it had on the 1917 Constitution. It was in 1914 that the basis for Article 27 was established and when many of the grievances which Zapata had against the Mexican authorities emerged and were left to fester until the EZLN uprising of 1994 once again made them salient. An important, though often overlooked, part of the Mexican Revolution was the Supreme Revolutionary Convention (Soberana Convención Revolucionaria) of 1914-1916 which took place in Aguascalientes. For this study the Aguascalientes Convention provided a model upon which the EZLN has based the calls for its National Democratic Convention. Importantly, the EZLN appropriated the name “Aguascalientes” for their convention.

Zapata and his representatives were not initially invited to the Aguascalientes convention, because they had constantly undermined Madero and many of the other revolutionary leaders. However one of Francisco “Pancho” Villa’s advisers saw the

necessity in having the Zapatistas there. Upon advice from one of his advisers, Villa invited representatives of the Zapatista arm of the revolution to Aguascalientes on October 12 in order to make the convention a truly national gathering. Upon their arrival, the Zapatistas presented the Plan de Ayala to the conventionneers and short of accepting the plan in full, the contingent at Aguascalientes agreed to affirm the Plan de Ayala as a basis for further negotiation ‘in principle.’ Specifically, however, the conventionneers accepted Articles 4, 5, 7, 8, 9 and 12 as the foundation around which a future constitution would be drafted.

According to Heau-Lambert and Rajchenberg: “The Convention stands out as being antecedent to the Constitutional meeting of 1917. Its relevance, in other words, derives not from its own naturalness, but rather from its character as inspiration for the drafters of the Carta Magna.” Thus, what was accepted at Aguascalientes in 1914 was only to be an ideal towards which the drafters of the Constitution of 1917 should strive. In this sense, the Plan de Ayala was something which could be haggled over, accepted piecemeal and whittled away. Perhaps the radical nature of the Plan forced those debating its legitimacy as the basis for the future of Mexico to accept it in a way that was anything but complete. This left the door open for the EZLN to revisit Aguascalientes eighty years later.

The Plan was more than a program of reform. It was also a political document aimed at Madero and his supporters. It also sought to defend the right of the revolutionaries to fight for la Patria, thus legitimizing their cause in terms that were greater than a single issue. In the second paragraph of the Plan, Zapata and his followers give the justification for their revolution by stating that, “constituted in a revolutionary junta in order to sustain and carry out the promises made by the Revolution on the past 20th of November 1910, we solemnly declare before the face of the civilized world which judges us and before la Patria to which we belong and love, the propositions which we have formulated in order to end the tyranny that oppresses us and redeem la Patria from the dictatorships which are imposed on us…” In this statement Zapata was articulating his stance that the Revolution initiated by Madero was legitimate by referring to the Plan de San Luis Potosí, which had called for the 18th of

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68 McLynn (2000) p. 259
69 McLynn, pp. 261
71 Plan de Ayala http://www.worldpolicy.org/globalrights/mexico/1911-zapata.html (translated by myself)
November as the day for the Revolution to begin, but due to logistical problems it was delayed for two days. Thus, Zapata originally did not have any grievances against Madero and his revolutionary platform. At the same time, Zapata was stating that a successful conclusion to the Revolution will result in the end of any form of political tyranny, which was no longer represented by the hated Díaz, but now was in the form of Madero since he had been unable to initiate the critical parts of his revolutionary program, namely the decentralization of power to the pueblo and land reform.

The first article of the Plan de Ayala announces the bankruptcy of the Madero regime: “Taking into consideration that the Mexican pueblo, led by don Francisco I. Madero, went to shed blood in order to regain liberties, and not in order that one man could possess power…” Madero is “open game” for the revolutionary forces because Zapata and his followers believed that Madero had refused to live up to the promises and obligations of the Revolution as they had been put forth in Madero’s Plan de San Luis Potosí.

Zapata sought to make explicit the fact that it was not just Madero and his supporters that took up arms in order to remove Díaz, but it was the whole of the Mexican pueblo. Thus, as Zapata and his followers perceived that even though they had elected Madero democratically, only the particularistic interests of Madero and his most strident supporters were being served. In a sense the Revolution for which they had fought was still incomplete because it had merely changed one tyrant for another. It was now serving one group of privileged interests rather than the interests of la Patria. This contention was made explicit in the fourth and fifth articles of the Plan de Ayala which were accepted by the other participants at the Aguascalientes Convention. The fourth article stated:

The Revolutionary Junta of the State of Morelos is manifested to the Nation, under formal protest, that it makes their own plan de San Luis Potosí, with the additions that are expressed in continuation in order to benefit the oppressed pueblos, and will be in defense of the principles which they defend until victory or death.

We see that Zapata and his followers attempted to salvage the legitimate Revolution by “making their own” the Plan de San Luis Potosí. They also sought to extend the Revolution beyond the superficial elections, which in their view, has only replaced one tyrant with

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72 Plan de Ayala  
73 Plan de Ayala
another. Zapata and his followers did not merely challenge the agenda of Madero, but rather, they challenged Madero and his legitimacy as president because he did not represent the *pueblo mexicano*. This is evident in the fifth article of the Plan de Ayala in which the Revolutionary Junta stated that they would not agree to nor take part in any "transactions nor settlements until they have realized the overthrow of the dictatorial elements of Porfirio Díaz and of Francisco I. Madero, because *la Patria* is tired of false men and traitors that make promises as liberators, and upon arriving at power, they forget them and they themselves constitute tyrants."  

Zapata argued that a pacific transfer of power was illusory. In the opening days of the EZLN uprising the communiqués coming from Chiapas made this same point. As we will see, however, this tone changed as the EZLN gained exposure and concessions from the government. Zapata, however, was direct in his insistence that the cessation of belligerent actions was impossible. This is especially evident in the passages of the Plan that relate to land redistribution.

As an additional part of the plan that we invoke, we announce: that the lands, mountains and waters that the landlords, *científicos*, or *caciques* who under the shadow of venal justice have usurped, the *pueblos* or citizens that hold the titles of these properties, which they have been dispossessed of in bad faith from our oppressors, maintaining at all costs, with arms in hand, the mentioned possession, and the usurpers that consider themselves with rights, they will deduce before the special tribunals that will be established following the triumph of the revolution.  

By calling for the nationalization and redistribution of land Zapata, was seeking to reconfigure the socio-economic situation of Mexico. In the years of Díaz land had been increasingly amassed by only a few, including foreign investors. For example, domestic real estate corporations were given one-third of all lands they surveyed and because of this only 3,000 families owned half of Mexico. An even starker example of the concentration of land under Díaz is evident when we recognize that one-fifth of the country (an area as large as the whole of Japan) was under the control of seventeen individuals. The onus for policies which permitted such consolidation was the work of the *científicos*, or technocrats, who designed policy in order to promote centralization and industrialization in Mexico. Thus,

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74 *Plan de Ayala*
75 *Plan de Ayala*
76 McLynn, pp. 15
from the beginning, the progress encouraged by Diaz, Madero and Carranza was seen by those who lost, predominately Indians, as a threat to their way of life.

Zapata also described the situation of the rural population in the seventh article of his Plan: “In virtue of the immense majority of the Mexican pueblos and citizens they are not the owners of the earth that they walk upon without the power to improve any of their social conditions nor the power to dedicate themselves to industry or to agriculture, for the lands, timber and water are monopolized in a few hands.” If the landlords, científicos, and caciques refused the plan outlined by Zapata and his followers, their lands would be nationalized under the force of arms.

Zapata did not seek to nationalize or redistribute all lands held by the landlords and caciques, but only a third. However, if any landholders opposed the nationalization plan all of their lands and properties would be seized and “will be designated to indemnify the costs of the war and as pensions for the widows and orphans resulting from the fight for the present Plan.” While some scholars view the Plan de Ayala as an overt call to socialism, or communism, McLynn writes:

The Plan has been described hyperbolically as ‘communism by a man who did not know he was a communist’, but in fact it was not even socialism—there was no proposal to expropriate all haciendas as a matter of policy—merely the restoration of lands illegally seized, yoked to a dream of a community of small independent landowners.

Interestingly enough, the nationalization plan that Zapata sought to implement was not an ad hoc policy, but rather was based in historical precedent. Article 9 of the Plan de Ayala outlines the precedent for this policy:

In order to execute the proceedings in respect to the already mentioned goods, the laws of dismortification and nationalization will be applied, according to the conviction, for the norm and employment should serve as norm and example those laws placed into action by the immortal Juárez in relation to the ecclesiastical properties, which punished the despots and conservatives who always have wanted to place us under the ignominious yoke of oppression and backwardness.

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77 Plan de Ayala
78 Plan de Ayala
79 McLynn (2000), pp. 120
80 Plan de Ayala
Perhaps the most striking thing about this article was Zapata’s affirmation, in even the most extreme of his demands, of the need for continuity and historical consciousness in order to carry the Revolution to its completion. The final article of the Plan de Ayala which was accepted by the Convention at Aguascalientes was the twelfth. This sought to implement, upon the triumph of the revolution, a junta of the “principal revolutionary bosses from the different states, will name or designate an interim President of the Republic, who will convoke elections in order to organize the federal powers.”81 Thus, the decision making of the pueblo would not merely be a national vote for a president, but would be a decentralized and representative dialogue. As it was for Zapata, the decentralization of authority is to be a cornerstone of the EZLN’s message.

What we see in the Plan de Ayala is what Fuentes referred to as the second stage of revolutions. Zapata and his followers sought to challenge the primacy of the large landowners (the hacendados), the strongmen (the caciques) and the technocrats (the científicos). It was under the auspices of these forces that first Madero, then Huerta and finally Carranza had used the Revolution to come to power. Villa, Zapata and others may have signed onto the Plan de San Luis Potosí in order to remove Díaz from power, but their demands went much further than this. Thus, when demands for land reform came across Madero’s desk, he believed that it “always conflicted with social order, and in Madero’s book order always came first.” Madero’s desire for order made it possible for him to justify a reversion to the “old ways” in the deep south of Mexico. Thus in the states of Yucután, Chiapas, Tabasco and Oaxaca nothing had changed from the days of Díaz, the plantation owners and their private armies remained firmly in power.82 Thus, Madero and Zapata were at odds and in a way that could not be reconciled.

While Madero saw the ultimate realization of the Revolution as his ascendancy to power following an election which denoted the establishment of democracy. The view of Madero, however, did not seek to rectify past wrongs and thus left many who had fought for the ouster of Díaz wanting more. Zapata, on the other hand believed that the apogee of the Revolution would be the restitution of the lands of the hacendados to those from whom they

81 Plan de Ayala
had been seized. Furthermore, Zapata saw as the ideal form of democracy for *la Patria* one which was decentralized and based in the *pueblos*, thus less concerned with the national election of a president. At the time, Zapata was seen as reactionary, anti-Maderista and anti-Carranzista, he was not popular in Mexico beyond Morelos and the areas which came directly under his control. However, after his assassination in 1919, he became and organic and integral part of the Mexican consciousness.

Throughout his tenure as a guerrilla and revolutionary leader, Zapata had been on the margins of the revolutionary elite. However, his assassination propelled him into the popular iconography of the Mexican Revolution. Thus, in the 1920s Zapata came to be seen as more than just another bandit. Zapata and his followers became a part of official memory as government officials began to attend the commemorations of his assassination and he became known as the "apostle of agrarianism." It was taken to such a point that even supporters of long ousted Díaz came to recognize that there was a "cult of Zapata" among those who fought in the revolution. It was this historical memory which has continued to survive in Mexico that the EZLN has sought to exemplify. However, as will be shown, the EZLN went a step further and sought to couch its movement in terms that would be bridge the gap between themselves and the Mexican *pueblo* on one hand, and the world at large on the other. This was accomplished through a close attention to language and imagery that was familiar to disparate actors in numerous nations and, importantly, through the use of ICT as a way in which to communicate their message. This ensured that the audience that heard the EZLN’s message was not limited to a few sectors of global society, but in reality was open to all who were able to access it through electronic mail, facsimile machines, and the Internet. Thus constructing a new sort of "imagined community" that was not determined by newspaper circulation and the confines of the traditional nation-state.

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83 See Benjamín (2000), pp. 70
84 See Benjamín (2000), pp. 70
85 See Anderson (1983)
CHAPTER 6: THE ZAPATISTAS OF 1994 AND ONWARD

What is interesting about the uprising of 1994 is not that it occurred, but that it is a new type of revolution rooted in historical grievances. The revolution is new in that it uses modern technologies such as the Internet and the facsimile machine in order to get its word out. In 1994 the impact of these technologies had yet to be understood. It is new because of the use of technology and the mobilization of international actors that it spurred. However, the demands that it put forth were first and foremost focused inward for the benefit of the citizens of Chiapas and Mexico writ large and based in the historical consciousness of Mexico. Paradoxically, at the same time the language in which the uprising is cast reaches out to global civil society in a way that was novel. Thus, the EZLN movement has tapped into a national historical consciousness but it has also communicated in a way that is aesthetically pleasing to disparate groups that do not share in the same culture or history as the original authors of the movement.

By paying attention to the historical consciousness of the Mexican pueblo the EZLN has been able to gain the attention of Mexicans. At the same time the EZLN’s writings demonstrate that they are authored in a way which permits others beyond Chiapas, beyond indigenous communities and beyond Mexico to understand and empathize with what has been communicated. In a sense, the aesthetic consciousness of the EZLN transcends the limitations of divergent historical experience and language and seeks out the global pueblo. For example, if we recall the description that Marcos’ offered of the Zapatistas as “the ones who cover their face, so that their brothers and sisters in other lands can see them,”86 we can note an effort on the part of Marcos and the EZLN to find common cause with others far removed from Mexican problems.

The EZLN does not call for a brand new Mexican State, nor does it call for a separate state for the Chiapanecos. Rather, the uprising seeks to re-order Mexican society in a way that is perceived to be more genuine in its application of the 1917 Mexican Constitution and Zapata’s Plan de Ayala. The lessons that can be drawn from the Chiapas rebellion are twofold. First, by paying attention to what was written by the EZLN and Subcommandante Marcos, it is possible to gauge the historicity of the movement. Thus, history and shared

cultural tradition are of prime importance to the EZLN. Second, the alliances which were formed with activist non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as the Red Cross, the Jesuit Refugee Service and the International Indigenous Treaty Council\(^87\) have engendered the use of communication technologies such as the Internet and the fax machine and have allowed for a wider dissemination of information about the EZLN and their movement worldwide. This has limited the ability and the options that the Mexican state has been able to employ in response to the uprising. However, the EZLN uprising is at all times based in the history of *la patria* and the *pueblo* and because of this it is able to be seen as something larger than a fight for indigenous rights.

6.1 The Historicity of the EZLN

The EZLN and their leader, Subcommandante Marcos, have paid much attention to the history of their nation. Perhaps the most notable example of this historical consciousness is found in the use of the term *patria* to refer to the state of Mexico. The term *patria* is often translated into English as my country or nation. However, the meaning of *patria* is much more profound than that. It symbolizes something akin to fatherland. Thus, like Zapata, when the EZLN writes in their first communique “… we have *la Patria*, and the tricolor Flag is love and respected by the INSURGENT combatants…”\(^88\) they are responding to the historical legacy of which they are an inextricable part, in the same way that Zapata and his contemporaries recalled the names of Hidalgo, Morelos and Juárez and sought to speak to *la Patria*. They do this not only by evoking the intellectual construct of *la Patria*, but also by using the concrete symbol of the Mexican flag. However, at the same time there is a tension in this history. This is because the history of which the Zapatistas are a part is often not one in which they have been included as active participants. It is this tension which is most remarkable in what the EZLN wrote in their first *Declaración*:

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\(^87\) Ronfelt et al (1998), pp. 50  
\(^88\) *La Primera Declaración de la Selva Lacandona*
We are the product of 500 years of struggle: first against slavery, in the war of Independence against Spain led by the insurgents, later to avoid being absorbed by the expansionist North America, later to promulgate our Constitution and to remove the French Empire from our land, later the Porfirist dictatorship negated for us the just application of the Reform Laws and the pueblo rebelled forming its own leaders, elevating Villa and Zapata, poor men like us. We have been denied the most elemental preparation so that they [the State, Politicians] can use us as cannon fodder and sack the riches of our lands without concerning themselves that we are dying of hunger and curable illness, without concerning themselves that we have nothing absolutely nothing, not even a roof over our heads, nor land, nor work, nor health, nor nourishment, nor education, without having the right to freely and democratically chose our authorities, without independence from foreigners, without peace nor justice for ourselves or our children.  

Thus, in the first paragraph of communication from Chiapas to the Mexico and the world the EZLN links its fate first to those vanquished by the conquistadores—the indigenous peoples. It also calls forth the images of the revolutionary heroes Zapata and Villa, “poor men like us,” who fought the científicos and landlords of old, the same leaders who fought against the modernizing forces of Díaz, Madero and Carranza. It is Villa and Zapata who are the revolutionary icons most closely associated with the development of the modern Mexican state. Furthermore, just as Zapata described the situation of the Mexican state as one in which the majority of Mexican pueblos and citizens do not have “the power to improve any of their social conditions nor the power to dedicate themselves to industry or to agriculture, for the lands, timber and water are monopolized in a few hands,” the EZLN similarly describes the situation as one in which “we have nothing…not even a roof over our heads, nor land nor work…."

Like Zapata and other revolutionaries, the EZLN sees their struggle as emerging between themselves and those who have traditionally controlled the reins of power in Mexico. Where Zapata and his followers linked their fates to the decisions and actions of Madero, the landlords, strongmen, and científicos, the Zapatistas have linked their fate to the ultimate representative of power in Mexico, the Revolutionary Institutional Party (PRI). Thus, like the Plan de Ayala, the first communiqué coming out of Chiapas was a political

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89 La Primera Declaración de la Selva Lacandona
90 See Fuentes (2001) and Benjamín (2000)
91 Plan de Ayala
document which sought to redress the grievances that the PRI’s stranglehold on political power had created.

We all understand that the days of the eternal party in power, which has detained for its benefit the product of the work of all the Mexicans, cannot continue anymore; that the presidentialism that it supports impedes the liberty and this cannot be permitted, that the culture of fraud is the method with which it is imposed and impedes the democracy, that justice only exists for the corrupt powerful, that we should make those who mandate obedient, that there is no other way. 92

Whereas Zapata’s Plan de Ayala is a political document directed at Madero and his supporters, the Declaración is similarly a political document directed at the PRI. Furthermore, the EZLN not only faults the landlords and strongmen of today, who they see as multinational corporations and the politicians which implement unjust policies, but they perceive their adversaries in the same light that Zapata did—those who have hijacked the state for their own benefit through the fraudulent elections and corruption. For the EZLN Mexican democracy is a myth, in this their perception is akin to that of Freedom House that ranked Mexico as only “Partly Free” in its 1994 country report. 93 In fact, it was not until 2001 that Freedom House gave Mexico a “Free” ranking. Coincidentally, or not, 2001 was the first year that a non-PRI candidate, Vincente Fox of the National Action Party (PAN), won a presidential election. 94

Effectively, the PRI had controlled the office of the president and a majority of representation in the federal and local government for over half a century. Thus, with the PRI solidly entrenched in nearly all branches of government, both federal and local it mediated access to public goods, political power and even society. 95 And like the peasants of Zapata’s time, those who found themselves on the outside were unable to change their situation. Thus, due to the entrenchment of the PRI, its ouster from the seats of power is a

92 Primera Declaración de la Selva Lacandona
94 While the Freedom House rating system is a consistent and somewhat reliable guide to the state of democracy in a particular country it is doubtful that the EZLN would have agreed with the “PARTLY FREE” rating.
95 Collier (1994), pp. 125
necessary condition for the EZLN in those opening days of rebellion. Furthermore, this was a situation which ordinary Mexicans could relate to across the country.\textsuperscript{96}

In the Spring of 1994, the \textit{Segunda Declaración de la Selva Lacandona} was issued. In this \textit{Declaración}, the EZLN sets forth the conditions for the resolution of the crisis and went into further detail describing the path that would lead to the realization of the tripartite aims of the EZLN, “Democracy, Liberty and Justice.” The first article of the \textit{Segunda Declaración} reiterates the acceptance of the Geneva Conventions by the EZLN, and it notes that it has done this in a successful attempt to gain acceptance from the international community as a legal belligerent force. “We have completed without fault the rise of belligerent actions within the conventions of the war established at a global level: this has permitted us the tacit recognition of nationals and foreigners as a belligerent force.”\textsuperscript{97} As word spread from Chiapas to the world at large about what was occurring in the remote Lacandon jungle of southern Mexico, numerous NGOs flocked to the scene, such as the Red Cross and the Jesuit Refugee Service.\textsuperscript{98} The presence of NGOs and independent journalists, in turn, limited the options that the government and military had in responding to the uprising.

The Red Cross visited detainees held by the EZLN at Tuxtla Gutiérrez and was involved in the establishment of free zones. The free zones were “bufferzones that the EZLN wanted to have in order to avoid any direct contact with the Federal Army.”\textsuperscript{99} The Mexican state has had no choice but to view the EZLN as a legitimate belligerent force. By February of 1994 a ceasefire had effectively been imposed and the government had agreed to sit down with EZLN representatives and negotiate under the aegis of Bishop Ruíz and the watchful eye of the Red Cross.

The EZLN uses the \textit{Segunda Declaración} to reiterate its antagonism towards the PRI after the peace talks wavered. However, in contrast to the \textit{Primera Declaración} this is done


\textsuperscript{97} \textit{Segunda declaración de la Selva Lacandona}, \url{http://www.ezln.org/documentos/1994/19940610.es.htm}

\textsuperscript{98} Ronfelt et al. (1998), pp. 50

\url{http://www.icrc.org/Web/Eng/siteeng0.nsf/iwpList74/E6B38F3C261486E1C1256B66005}
in much more direct terms. According to the EZLN, Mexican democracy had been hijacked by the one-party system that dominated Mexico since the times of the revolution, and in order for a complete resolution of hostilities to occur the EZLN calls for:

the death of the State party system. By suicide or firing squad, the death of the actual Mexican political system is a necessary condition, however not sufficient, for the transition to democracy in our country. Chiapas will not have a real solution if it is not a Mexican solution.\(^{100}\)

Like the call put forth by Zapata for the forced removal of Madero, the EZLN was making explicit its demand for a violent end to the PRI and the patronistic system of politics, that withholds goods from those opposed to its policies. Furthermore, the EZLN seeks to institute a new kind of political system in which it strives to ameliorate the consequences of a single party system. “To correct the problem of power in this frame of democracy, liberty and justice obligates a new political culture within the parties. A new class of politicians should be born and, don’t doubt this, a new type of political parties will be born.” The new decentralized political culture and the new class of politicians who would be responsive to the community and not to their handlers in Mexico City are not novel. Rather, the new political culture is to be something of the past that harkenes back to traditional politics before they became corrupted by the PRI, centralization and modernization. This sort of politics is referred to as a “non-politics,” in which disputes are settled by debates and the collective judgment of the pueblo:

We are not proposing a new world, only something much older: an antechamber of the new Mexico. In this sense, this revolution will not conclude in a new class, fraction of class or group in power, but rather in a free and democratic “space” for the political fight. This free and democratic “space” will be born upon the bad smelling corpse of the State party system and presidency. A new political relation will be born. A new politics, whose base will not be confrontation between political organizations, but rather the confrontation of political propositions with the distinct social classes but also the real support of these will depend on the holder of power, not their army.\(^{101}\)

The new political system will be one of decentralization in which the traditional cultural practices will define the political process. All authority will emanate, not from above, but

\(^{100}\) Segunda Declaración de la Selva Lacandona;  
\(^{101}\) Segunda Declaración de la Selva Lacandona
from below, from the *pueblo* who are the holders of power as laid forth in the 1917 Constitution. Interestingly, it seems as though not only is the 1917 Constitution an influential framer of the EZLN’s political message, but also the influence of liberation theology is present in the decentralized form of politics that the EZLN sought to introduce.

While at the beginning the EZLN denied overt connections to radical priests they have been influenced by the work of these missionaries, who have been acting in Chiapas since the 1970s. There are two fundamental teachings of Liberation Theology. The first of these is the “preferential option for the poor.” The “option for the poor,” rests in the idea that there are three meanings of the term poverty. The first meaning conveyed by liberation theologians is the understanding that real poverty is an evil “something that God does not want.” Because poverty is “something that God does not want,” a Christian is called to actively work for the eradication of poverty. This is the second definition of poverty, which is spiritual poverty, “in the sense of a readiness to do God’s will.” Finally, the “preferential option for the poor” demands the recognition that poverty insists upon solidarity with the poor, “along with protest against the conditions under which they suffer.”

We can see the message of the Zapatistas echoed in each of these notions of poverty, although they tend to remove the notion of God. The EZLN provides the imagery and the argument that poverty is a crime for which all are responsible. Secondly, whereas liberation theologians speak of “a readiness to do God’s will,” the EZLN speaks of a readiness to work for humanity and to aid the *pueblo*, perhaps a secular version of God’s will. Finally, the EZLN has expressed solidarity not only among the groups which they directly represent, but also with others who have been marginalized and cast into poverty the world over. They seek to represent those who have no voices, and this is seen dramatically in their message, “everything for everyone and nothing for us.”

Liberation theology is structured around ecumenical comunidades de base, or ecumenical base communities (ECBs). ECBs have no center of power but are designed around the notion that the poor should be permitted to take part in theological discussions.

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103 Gutiérrez (1988), pp.xxxv
and the molding of theology. The rationale for the advent of ECBs is that the Church has increasingly removed itself from the plight of the poor especially in Latin America, and by returning control of theology to the poor a more just and Christian Church will emerge that accurately reflects the reality of Latin America.\textsuperscript{105} The influence that ECBs have had on the EZLN is evident in their practice of decision making. The EZLN practices what they call "command obeying,"\textsuperscript{106} which means that no decision relating to the EZLN and the communities that it represents can be made unless all who are to be affected have had a voice in its approval.

Thus, as Collier and others\textsuperscript{107} note liberation theology has played an important role in the design of peasant and indigenous communities that were present in Chiapas prior to the entrance of the EZLN. One of the most important developments in the rural communities of southern Mexico is the Indigenous Congress of 1974 which was organized by Bishop Samuel Ruiz. This Congress allowed the indigenous communities to “talk about the same bread and butter issues”\textsuperscript{108} that the EZLN voice, and it allowed indigenous communities to recognize two crucial aspects about their situation. First, the Indigenous Congress demonstrated to its participants that they had shared problems and concerns, and secondly, it proved that the indigenous communities could organize and share awareness.\textsuperscript{109} Furthermore, following the government’s recognition of the EZLN and call for a cease fire it was Bishop Ruiz who served as a mediator between the EZLN and the government at peace talks that began on February 21, 1994.

An integral part of the new politics that the EZLN proffered is the call for a democratic national convention, similar to the Aguascalientes Convention of 1914.

\textsuperscript{105} See Gutiérrez, pp. xli; Much of the framework for what came to be known as Liberation Theology took place at the 1968 Medellín Bishops Conference. Gutiérrez’s book provides an insightful description of the decisions and teachings that emanated from that conference. Importantly, however, the volume of his book consulted for this paper was the fifteenth anniversary edition and the introduction provides an important supplement that discusses the developments which Liberation Theology has undergone since 1973.

\textsuperscript{106} Holloway and Pelaéz, pp. 12 (1998)

\textsuperscript{107} See Nash (2000)

\textsuperscript{108} Collier (1998) pp. 63**

\textsuperscript{109} See Collier(1998), pp. 73 and Nash (2000)
We call for the realization of a Democratic Convention, national, sovereign and revolutionary, from which will result the proposals of a transitional government and a new national law, a new Constitution which will guarantee the legal fulfillment of the popular will.\(^{110}\)

In fact, the historical significance of the convention, like that of the EZLN, was evident in its name: “The Zapatistas had cleared a space in the jungle and used the tree trunks to construct an auditorium large enough to hold all the participants, a meeting place they named Aguascalientes, after a convention held in 1914 during the Mexican Revolution.”\(^{111}\) The National Democratic Convention that the EZLN sponsored at a newly christened Aguascalientes sought, like its predecessor in 1914, to be truly national in scope. Representatives from every state were there, along with observers from a multitude of peasant organizations with the goal of achieving a consensus on a democratic program. The convention included indigenous groups, urban working class and poor movements, gay men and lesbians, human rights activists, small business people, and ecologists. The total number of delegates was 6,000, however it was not limited to Mexican delegates and observers alone. Rather, hundreds of people from all over the world were present, including people from “from as far away as China, New Zealand, Australia, France, and South Africa.”\(^{112}\) The Zapatistas have been successful in putting forth their message, assuring their survival and utilizing new technologies thanks to many non-state actors from within and without Mexico itself, but also because of the importance the EZLN and its key author Subcommandante Marcos have shown in communicating their revolution.

Some have called the EZLN the “first postmodern revolution” because they have successfully utilized information communications technologies (ICT) to promote their cause. “The Zapatista rebellion is, indeed, ‘postmodern’ in its combination of an indigenous character with the use of modern computer networks to spread its message.”\(^{113}\) Ronaldo Munck argues that the Zapatista rebellion is the “exemplar” of a “postmodern” social

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\(^{110}\) Segunda Declaración de la Selva Lacandona
\(^{111}\) Holloway and Peláez (1998), pp. 9
movement in the Latin American context. Its politics are democratic. Its method of operating is likewise democratic, and it addresses its adversaries in the same language as those in power, without seeking to take ownership of the traditional seats of power. In this way, a “postmodern” rebellion seeks to create new centers of power.¹¹⁴

The EZLN has accomplished the construction of new centers of power through a use of language that is not only conscious of the historical context of Mexico, but is also aesthetically attractive to others. It is aesthetically understood through the empathy that it has engendered among groups from without Chiapas, beyond indigenous communities, and removed from Mexico. If one is to note the opening lines of the Primera Declaración we see the claim made by the Zapatistas that “We are the product of 500 years of struggle.” This explicitly links the fate of the EZLN and their supporters to the arrival of Columbus, and the anti-quincentenary celebrations that were occurring in North America, Mexico and Latin America in 1994. Thus, the EZLN is able to find common cause with indigenous peoples throughout the American continent, and those who sympathize with them.

However, the EZLN message goes beyond indigenous communities and uses key words that evoke emotional responses from actors as varied as Italian anarchists and human rights activists. One area of their dialogue in which this is clearly evident is in their discussions of neo-liberal economic policies and as the center of an anti-globalization movement. For example, Marcos opens his 1997 essay, “The Fourth World War Has Begun,” by saying:

As a world system, neoliberalism is a new war for the conquest of territory. The ending of the Third World War—meaning the Cold War—in no sense means that the world has gone beyond the bipolar and found stability in the domination of a single victor. Because, while there was certainly a defeat (of the socialist camp), it is hard to say who won. The United States? The European Union? Japan? All three?¹¹⁵

By drawing on the shared experience of those who also oppose neoliberal policies Marcos is able to relate to others beyond Mexico’s borders. Furthermore, Marcos is able to draw on the historical learning of the Cold War by later pointing to the “sands of the Bay of Pigs in Cuba to the Mekong Delta in Vietnam; from the frenzy of the nuclear arms race to the vicious

¹¹⁴ See Munck (2000)
coup d’état in Latin America…” In this way Marcos tries to tap into the vault of emotion that resides below the surface in communities from Paris to London to San Francisco by drawing parallels to what occurred during the Cold War and what is now occurring under NAFTA, the restructuring policies of the IMF and World Bank and the increasing presence of multinational corporations in the developing world.

The aesthetic nature of the EZLN’s language is evident not only in its calls for Liberty, Justice and Democracy, concepts which produce a wide range of emotions among those thinking of them, but also in its anti-globalization rhetoric. They replaced the old anti-capitalist, anti-liberal use of terms like “proletariat,” “core and periphery” with terms such as “marginalized,” or “forgotten.” Because of this they have been able to synthesize the experiences of Italian anarchists, European intellectuals, Environmentalists, and many other combinations of anti-globalizers.

For example, in a letter addressed to General Emiliano Zapata, the “Jefe Máximo del Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional,” Marcos quotes a letter that Zapata himself wrote to the President Woodrow Wilson: “the landlords...have gone appropriating all of the properties that legitimately pertain and from time immemorial have pertained to the indigenous pueblos…” In quoting Zapata, Marcos seeks to relate the struggle of the EZLN to that of Zapata and his contemporaries, and in this he placed the EZLN in the national context of the Mexican Revolution. However, after Marcos writes that “history has not changed,” he states that:

There are now laws that attack the communal property and the ejido, that favor the monopolization of land, that permit the sale of our riches for foreign dollars. And these laws were made by the bad Mexican governments, “neoliberals” we call them, that drive this country, yours and ours, my General, as if it were a hacienda in decadence....

In this letter the most important thing that Marcos accomplishes is the linkage between the EZLN and Zapata. However, talk of the sale of “our riches for foreign dollars” and the “neoliberals” that drive the country is a call that reaches beyond the borders of

116 Marcos, “The Fourth World War has Begun”, pp. 272
118 “Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional,” 10 de abril de 1997
Mexico and Chiapas. The idea of a “hacienda in decadence” returns the dialogue back to a
time in which haciendas were nothing more than large agricultural factories. Those who
supplied the haciendas with labor were seen as a part of the land, inseparable from it yet at
the same time no more valuable than the soil and products which were the “riches.” This call
reaches out to activists across the globe for whom globalization has brought increasing
disenchantment with the status quo. In place of “haciendas in decadence” the anti-
globalizers see multinational corporations as the scourge of the countryside.

We see in the letter to General Zapata that the EZLN clearly links their situation to
the implementation of neo-liberal economic policies in Mexico. Among the neo-liberal
policy decisions that had the greatest salience for the EZLN is the redrafting of the Agrarian
Reform Law in 1992. This was done in order to comply with the structural reforms that were
necessary for Mexico to come into accord with the dictates of NAFTA. In an article entitled
“Salinas Prepares Mexican Agriculture for Free Trade,” written for the Heritage Foundation,
Wesley R. Smith argues that then President Carlos Salinas de Gortari was embarking on a
path that many Mexican politicians have been unable to undertake, the complete privatization
of Mexico’s rural landscape in order to ready the country for the adoption of NAFTA.119
While the Heritage Foundation would clearly not sympathize with the EZLN there are many
actors who would. Activist groups from across the spectrum fight neo-liberal policies
wherever they are in place, yet by calling for such things as Liberty, Justice and Democracy
the EZLN is harkening back to the liberal policies of the “old” world, and they are not just
ranting against neo-liberal economics but rather attempting to create a political space in
which their voice is heard.

6.2 The Zapatistas and the Changing Nature of Activism

The EZLN uprising of 1994 speaks first and foremost to the Mexican pueblo, but as
they have increasingly gained visibility it has become a hallmark of activist groups around
the world to voice their solidarity with the EZLN. This has occurred for two reasons. First,
the publication of EZLN documents and the creation of numerous websites on the Internet
such as the unofficial EZLN website at www.ezln.org, Chiapaslink120 and Acción Zapatista

119 Wesley R. Smith, “Salinas Prepares Mexican Agriculture for Free Trade,” Backgrounder #914, October 1,
1992; http://www.heritage.org/Research/TradeandForeignAid/BG914.cfm
120 http://www.chiapaslink.ukgateway.net and http://studentorgs.utexas.edu/nave/
have allowed disparate constituencies to share in the experience of the EZLN and to communicate with one another. The EZLN and Chiapas thus served as a focal point for activist activity since 1994. Second, without ICT the EZLN would not have garnered the visibility or support that it enjoyed and thus permitted it to circumscribe the resources which the Mexican government had available to counteract the movement. A simple counterfactual exercise would hypothesize that without such publicity the EZLN could have been dealt with by the Mexican military. This is because following the initial uprising 20,000 Mexican troops and the Mexican Air Force began to assault the EZLN positions. However, following international outcry that emerged due to reports of atrocities committed by the military the Mexican government offered a cease fire. Had reports not been released on the Internet and in foreign media the military would have had no reason to pull back.

The connections that the EZLN had to sympathetic NGOs served to circumvent the Mexican government even further. Harry Cleaver writes that “Initially the Mexican state tried to restrict the uprising to the jungles of Chiapas, through both military repression and the limitation of press coverage…Those efforts failed.” The EZLN used their written communiqués, and later personal interviews with independent journalists to inundate the world with their message by way of the fax and e-mail. As the EZLN persisted more detailed accounts of the situation in Chiapas were created by both Mexican and foreign observers. In this way the Zapatistas have been able to evade the attempts of the state to impose isolation and they have been able to touch others with their economic and political message.  

The EZLN has tapped into what Singh calls instrumental and structural power that is proffered by ICT. However it has gone further by creating new actors by way of communication networks that promote the dissemination of information, thus they have acquired meta-power, or the ability to create new identities through the use of ICT. For example, if one is to “google” the EZLN one gets “about 389,000” results.” If this query is expanded to “Zapatista Solidarity” there are “about 113,000” results. By visiting the unofficial EZLN website, www.ezln.org, one can view the list of links or “otro sitios” that

122 Singh, pp. 12 **
123 [www.google.com](http://www.google.com) search EZLN
are recognized by the EZLN. Thirteen links are directly affiliated to groups in different countries, including Japan, the Netherlands, Australia, Russia, and the United States to name only a few. Furthermore, eight of the links listed correspond to various solidarity communities located in cities such as Melbourne, Syracuse, Madrid, Paris and Barcelona. Each of these web pages is linked to others that may or may not be included in the plethora of other pages dedicated to the EZLN. One can only surmise the number of links that can be traveled along the “EZLN highway” connecting different Zapatista inspired or encouraged pueblos throughout cyberspace.\textsuperscript{124}

In her essay, “The Unknown Icon,” Naomi Klein remarks on both the “openness” of the EZLN movement and the preponderance of websites located in cyberspace that are concerned with the Zapatistas. She writes that “the Zapatistas staged an open insurrection, one that anyone could join, as long as they thought of themselves as outsiders. By conservative estimates, there are now 45,000 Zapatista-related websites, based in 26 countries. Marcos’ communiqués are available in at least 14 languages.”\textsuperscript{125}

The influence that the EZLN uprising has had on social activism is not to be underestimated. This is demonstrated by a 1998 report by RAND Corporation, which was commissioned by the Deputy Chief of Staff for Intelligence entitled “The Zapatista ‘Social Netwar’ in Mexico.” In the preface of the study the authors state that

The information revolution is leading to the rise of network forms of organization, whereby small, previously isolated groups can communicate, link up, and conduct coordinated joint actions as never before. This, in turn, is leading to a new mode of conflict—“netwar”—which the protagonists depend on using network forms of organization, doctrine, strategy and technology. Many actors across the spectrum of conflict—from terrorists, guerillas, and criminals who pose security threats to social activists who do not—are developing netwar designs and capabilities.\textsuperscript{126}

The authors of the report term the Zapatista movement as an example of \textit{social netwar}. They distinguish between two types of warfare made possible by the advent of information technology. One is cyberwar which is “a concept that refers to information-oriented military

\textsuperscript{124} The establishment of the EZLN and the Zapatista movement in cyberspace was the work of an American student. The precursor to the ezln.org site was established by an American student as the unofficial home of the EZLN in cyberspace. See RAND (1998), Klein (2001)
\textsuperscript{125} Klein, Naomi, “The Unknown Icon,” in \textit{Ya Basta! Ten Years of the Zapatista Uprising}, AK Press, Oakland CA; 2001 Naomi Klein
\textsuperscript{126} Ronfelt et al.(1998) p. xi
warfare,” and the second is netwar which is based in the societal end of political action. Netwarriors talk about “small scale constituencies,” and non-military modes of conflict. Netwar is becoming increasingly evident because nonstate actors are creating networks and through communication and information sharing they are acquiring political power. These types of conflict are not necessarily over resources, but they are about knowledge. Thus, the battlefields of netwarriors are not the fields and jungles, but they are the TV, print and cyber media. Therefore, the ability of a net-warrior to describe their grievances and elucidate their aims becomes increasingly important.

The control of information is clearly important because information is critical in determining the way in which the political agenda is set. This is exactly the sort of activity that the EZLN has engaged in once it became a part of a transnational network of activists. In fact, it may have even gone further and sought not to merely affect the political agenda by encouraging protest at the 1999 WTO meetings in Seattle, but rather to change that agenda by challenging the epistemological foundations upon which politics is predicated. An actor engaging in netwar seeks to call into question people’s fundamental beliefs about their culture, society and government. The aim is to disorient the public and to change their perception of reality. Thus, it does not seek primarily to destroy the social order, but to disrupt it and create new spaces for dialogue. “The more epistemological the challenge, the more confounding it may be from an organizational standpoint.” For this reason, it is increasingly difficult for a government to “assign a single agency—e.g. military, police, or intelligence—the responsibility for responding.” It is exactly this sort of “warfare” in which the EZLN is engaged.

The RAND report argues that in the beginning the EZLN uprising is similar to other Maoist-inspired insurgencies. However, the EZLN was not equipped to fight such a conflict and at the same time both Mexican and transnational non-governmental organizations entered the fray. While the Mexican government has sought to limit the visibility of the EZLN to the Mexican public and the outside world, the presence of NGOs sympathetic to the

127 Ronfelt et al (1998), pp. 8
129 See Hayden (2000), pp. 5
130 Ronfelt et al (1998), pp. 16
131 Ronfelt et al (1998), pp. 16
Zapatista cause have ensured that their voice would be heard. Thus, the RAND report argues that “no matter how small a territory the EZLN held in Chiapas, it quickly occupied more space in the media than had any other insurgent group in Mexico’s if not the world’s history.”

The NGOs that are present are disparate and represent numerous issue-oriented groups from Human Rights, Indigenous Rights, Trade and Development NGOs, Ecumenical NGOs and what are termed Infrastructure-Building and Network-Facilitating NGOs. The NGOs are both transnational such as Amnesty International, the Jesuit Refugee Service, the International Indigenous Treaty Council (IITC) and the Association for Progressive Communications (APC); and they are subnational representing both Mexican and foreign actors. Some of the subnational groups are Americas Watch, the Mexican Academy of Human Rights, Pastors for Peace, the Catholic Bishops of Chiapas, State Coalition of Indigenous and Campesino Organizations (CEOIC), Food First, Coalition of Nongovernmental Organizations for Peace (CONPAZ).

According to the RAND report the importance of the NGOs present in Chiapas and Mexico at the time of the uprising has allowed the EZLN to change tactics as the combat operations began to quiet down. This allowed the EZLN to redirect its cause from the battlefield to the newspapers, television, radio and the internet. However the NGOs influence had other affects as well, including the possibility that they influenced the dialogue of the EZLN itself. Initially the EZLN cast its movement in a socialist light, and it barely spoke of the importance of indigenous issues. However, following the cease fire Marcos sought to reorient the movement and began to give lip service to indigenous issues. Ronfelt argues that this was done to reassure indigenous rights groups already supporting the EZLN. Thus, the indigenous rights bent of the EZLN’s language is tempered because the EZLN has been determined to maintain the national framework that they had already established, all the while maintaining a socialist leaning. Yet, the socialist rhetoric to which the RAND refers is, as has been demonstrated, not necessarily socialism but is predicated upon the goals of Zapata and the 1917 Constitution. Thus, to paraphrase McLynn it is “communism by

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133 Ronfelt et al (1998), pp. 45
someone who didn’t know they were communist."\textsuperscript{135} Furthermore, the RAND perspective leaves one wondering whether by maintaining their “nationalist framework” the EZLN had left behind Marxism.

It is crucial for the EZLN to maintain the national perspective and imagery in its writings. Without appeal to the Mexican pueblo it would be all too easy for the Mexican citizenry to ignore the cause as just another in a long line of Latin American insurgencies. Furthermore, the EZLN has appealed to the international community, by accepting the Geneva Conventions and encouraging outside observers to take note of what is going on in Chiapas. This is done primarily through the publication and distribution of communiqués through the World Wide Web, e-mail and the use of fax machines.

The effect that the use of the media has had on the movement is immense because ICT has enabled the EZLN and sympathetic NGOs to maintain a “virtual presence” through the use of mailing lists, signing electronic petitions, and participating in Fax and letter writing campaigns.\textsuperscript{136} This “virtual space” that has been created by the Zapatistas resembles the new “political space” that is called for in the Segunda Declaración de la Selva Lacandona. However this is more than just a political space in which the EZLN could promote Indigenous rights, or land reform. Rather it serves as a forum in which many disparate groups can “link-up” and share their experiences of a common phenomenon. While it is difficult to describe this as the construction of a new identity, this is not as remote from what actually happened as one may think.

\textsuperscript{135} McLynn (2000), pp. 120
\textsuperscript{136} Ronfelt et al (1998), pp. 56
CHAPTER 7: Conclusion
Benedict Anderson’s Imagined Communities Revisited

In his seminal work *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson argues that the advent of print-capitalism “made it possible for rapidly growing numbers of people to think about themselves, and to relate themselves to others, in profoundly new ways.”137 Among the new ideas which emanated from the advent of print-capitalism is a confidence held by the readers of newspapers that others are sharing their daily experience. Anderson refers to this as “community in anonymity which is the hallmark of modern nations.”138 This is a paradoxical situation in which one reads the newspaper, knowing that others are reading the same newspaper and without the reassuring need to perceive such an action taking place. Thus, one can be confident that others, throughout the vast land through which a particular newspaper circulates, are sharing the same intellectual, sensational, and even perhaps emotional experiences of others by merely reading a paper. For Anderson, this ability to share in the same experiences as others, regardless of physical proximity, was essential for the establishment of nationalism. Could we not expand from the novel or the newspaper to what is now available to readers on the Internet?

The EZLN has sought to redress the grievances of hundreds of thousands of Mexicans who have been increasingly marginalized from the political system in Mexico. The state has been captured by the Revolutionary Institutionalist Party (PRI) and it’s coterie of neo-liberal economic advisers who have sought to restrict the government’s policy of land redistribution to peasant and indigenous communities. Much of the land that these communities have sought to have redistributed had been acquired and monopolized under the policies of Porfirio Díaz and subsequent regimes following the Mexican Revolution in order to centralize and modernize the Mexican social, political and economic systems.

The fight against the modernizing forces of the early twentieth century was led by Francisco “Pancho” Villa and most importantly the “apostle of agrarianism,” Emiliano Zapata. Zapata called for agrarian reform in order to redistribute land acquired under Díaz to

138 Anderson (1983), pp. 36
the citizens of the Mexican pueblo. Zapata’s rhetoric was constantly cast in the language of the pueblo and la Patria and this promoted a sense of historical continuity within the Mexican revolution.

The EZLN is a continuation of the revolution that Zapata led, and the language which permeates the communiqués and literature about the movement constantly refers to the historical legacy of Zapata and the history of la Patria. By paying heed to the historical context of la Patria and the pueblo the EZLN has been able to form alliances with various peasant and indigenous organizations in the Mexican state. These organizations have been able to actively disseminate the words of the EZLN and Marcos through the use of ICT at a time when the Mexican government has sought to limit their visibility within Mexico and among the global community. This has circumscribed the possible tactics that the state had to deal with the EZLN and allowed them to cultivate linkages among the global activist community.

The associations that the EZLN has with global NGOs and solidarity groups constitutes a “network” of activity which has aided in the construction of a new identity based around the anti-globalization movement and opposition to neo-liberal economic policies. The thesis of Anderson, argues that print capitalism helped to spur the creation of nationalist identities in, among others, post-colonial nations. The nexus for this creation is the ability that newspapers, novels and literature in general, created for citizens to “imagine” themselves as a part of a community that is larger than their household, neighborhood and even city.

The language that the EZLN has used tapped into the “imagined community” that is Mexico. It did this by harkening back to the notion of the pueblo as the source from which political power emanates within Mexico. This is accomplished through the use of the image of Zapata, the reverence shown for the “tricolor flag,” and the use of the 1917 Constitution as a justification for its call to arms. Furthermore, the EZLN is able to cull the support of international actors through its opposition to neoliberal policies and globalization in general, though the anti-neoliberal bent is embodied in a particularly Mexican act—the redrafting of Article 27. The preponderance of websites and articles which have arisen around the EZLN
cause demonstrate the “existence” of a “virtual (imagined) community” that voices its solidarity with the EZLN cause.

The EZLN has transcended the boundaries of Mexico and seeped into the cultural dialogue of not only Latin America but perhaps most importantly the Northern industrialized societies. Chiapas has been visited by representatives of the Basque terrorist organization ETA, Nobel Prize winning author Gabriél García Marquéz. However, their beliefs, rhetoric and cause of the EZLN have infiltrated what Carlos Fuentes calls “La Tercera Hispanidad,”¹³⁹ the United States. In his history, El Espejo Enterrado (The Buried Mirror) Fuentes argues that there are three communities descended from the Iberian experience, Spain, Latin American and the United States (la hispanidad norteamericana).

The cause of the EZLN did not go unnoticed by this third Hispanic community which is represented by the Hispanic communities in Los Angeles, Chicago, New York and many other cities across the nation. However, la hispanidad norteamerica is not only represented by the visible Hispanic communities, but also by a cultural connection which has permeated American society. Following the uprising of the EZLN in 1994 the rock group Rage Against the Machine eulogized the EZLN in its song “People of the Sun”:

Yeah people come up
Yeah, we better turn tha bass up on this one
Check it, since 1516 minds attacked and overseen
Now crawl amidst the ruins of this empty dream
Wit their borders and boots on top of us
Pullin’ knobs on the floor of their toxic metropolis
But how you gonna get what you need ta get?
Tha gut eaters, blood drenched get offensive like Tet
Tha fifth sun sets get back reclaim
Tha spirit of Cuauhtemoc alive an untamed
Now face tha funk now blastin’ out ya speaker, on th a one Maya, Mexica
That vulture came ta try and steal ya name¹⁴⁰

The EZLN has been able to synthesize the historical and aesthetic experiences of communities far and wide. Their use of language has served as a bridge to bring together Italian Anarchists, Chiapan Mayans, and college students in San Francisco because it speaks

¹³⁹ Roughly translated this means the third Hispanic community.
¹⁴⁰ Rage Against the Machina, Evil Empire, “People of the Sun,” Epic Records, 16 April 1996
to the same senses of alienation that each feel in a world in which their voices are believed to be unheard in comparison to some time before.

While the EZLN uprising has been quintessentially Mexican it demonstrates a phenomenon that has come to mark the international scene and may plague the abilities of political scientists to understand: transnational “imagined communities.” If we do not pay attention to both the historical context within which policies are made, such as the redrafting of the 1992 Agrarian Reform Law, movements like the EZLN will present a surprise to those who seek to make sense of both comparative and international politics. Whereas before print capitalism served to unite literate elites within what was eventually called the nation, the Internet, e-mail and chat groups serve to unite increasingly literate masses in a number of different nations allowing them to share historical and cultural experiences. Thus, the global context in which political phenomenon take place provide ample soil for what are quintessentially national movements to gain international support.
David Alfaro Siqueiros’

*La Nueva Democracia, 1944*

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