

**SOLIDARITY WITHOUT OWNERS: AN ETHNOGRAPHY
OF CANADA-COLOMBIA RELATIONS 'FROM BELOW'**

by

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ABSTRACT

Globalization ‘from below’ implies the convergence of contentious globalizing forces from a diverse multitude that challenges the logic of global neoliberal capitalism in a variety of ways. Scholars and activists understand these phenomena using varied analytical tools. This study starts from globalization from below as rhizomatic and rooted in the resonance of resistance beyond multiple borders, emphasizing the horizontal construction of solidarity as the basis for ‘weaving’ alternative relations of people autonomous from the state and capital. How is solidarity realized as an everyday experience? Through ethnographic description of the activities and transformations of members of the La Chiva Collective (Canada) and the Tejido de Comunicación (Cauca, Colombia), this study examines solidarity as a local and transnational experience and a political possibility that prefigures alternative relations of peoples across borders. Solidarity ‘without owners’ is a living concept, an incipient everyday political practice rooted in mutual aid, accompaniment, affinity, and affection.

Keywords: Political activists -- Canada; Political activists -- Colombia -- Cauca; Canada-Latin America foreign relations; social movements; indigenous movements; globalization; transnationalism; solidarity

DEDICATION

To my grandmother and guardian angel, Sarah Hughes, who accompanies me at every moment. I love you so much.

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1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Contexts

On November 21, 2008, Canadian and Colombian government officials signed a Free Trade Agreement between the two countries during the APEC Summit in Lima, Peru. That same day, a mobilization of some 60,000 Colombians converged on the Plaza Bolívar in Bogotá to declare the popular agenda of the *Minga de resistencia social y comunitaria*,¹ the first point of which was the outright rejection of the ‘free trade’ model, seen by the Minga’s participants as a fundamental threat to life. A *minga* is a cultural practice of Andean indigenous peoples whereby communities engage in projects for collective benefit, ranging from crop cultivation and harvesting to political mobilization. The key component of a *minga* is that it is a collective process that cannot be controlled or owned; it is an autonomous and horizontally articulated project. In contrast, the Canada-Colombia Free Trade Agreement (CCFTA), negotiated privately with the aim of increasing corporate access to public resources across borders, seeks to enshrine the rights of transnational capital in a neoliberal supra-national constitutional order emanating from the top-down. That these two very different events occurred in tandem is representative of the multiple paths of ‘globalization,’ paths leading often in divergent directions but nonetheless coursing decisively towards distinct political possibilities and visions of the future. One prominent discussion on globalization emphasizes a dichotomy of ‘above’ and ‘below.’ On the one hand, globalization is a complex set of transnational relations coming ‘from above’ and at the service of a transnational economic elite (Hardt and Negri 2000; Robinson 2004; Sklair 2001). On the

¹ For the sake of space and readability, from this point on I will refer to the *Minga de resistencia social y comunitaria* (Minga of Social and Communitarian Resistance) that emerged in Colombia in 2008 simply as ‘the Minga.’

other hand, other globalizing processes emanate ‘from below’ (Bandy and Smith 2005; Brecher et al. 2000; Della Porta et al. 2006; Hardt and Negri 2005) to both contest such subordination and construct alternatives. In addition, however, there are myriad paths descending or ascending somewhere in between, spaces that at times and in different ways can reproduce aspects of both (Barker 2007; INCITE! et al. 2007; Kamat 2003; Weber 2006). While approaches rooted in dichotomies might fail to capture the complexity of these processes, ‘the above,’ ‘the below,’ and ‘the in between’ at least provide a starting point from which to discuss the diverse projects affecting the lives of people around the world.

This study of transnational solidarity activism provides an ethnographic description and critical analysis of globalization ‘from below’ through the close examination of the political activities and lived experiences of solidarity between past and present members of two small groups, the *La Chiva* Collective, a group of people engaged in Colombia solidarity work from Canada, and the Communication and External Relations *Tejido* (or ‘Weaving’) for Truth and Life (*Tejido de Comunicación y Relaciones Externas para la Verdad y la Vida*)² of the Association of Indigenous Councils of Northern Cauca (*Asociación de Cabildos Indígenas del Norte del Cauca*) (ACIN) in Southwest Colombia. More than a study of two organizations, it emphasizes the activities of individual members of each group, their histories and experiences of political action and solidarity, all of which come together to provide a glimpse of what it is like to ‘weave’ solidarity against globalization ‘from above.’ Some interrelated questions have guided this project. How is solidarity realized as an everyday practice? How does that experience challenge the logic of globalization from above? Finally, on what basis

² From this point onward I will refer to the *Tejido de Comunicación y Relaciones Externas para la Verdad y la Vida* of the *Asociación de Cabildos Indígenas del Norte del Cauca* (ACIN) simply as ‘the Tejido.’

does the practice of solidarity suggest alternative forms of relations among seemingly disparate peoples?

These questions are presented here only as guiding analytical lines. Ultimately, this ethnography engages them not in totalizing or generalizing terms; it describes and interprets but does not prescribe any particular model of solidarity activism. Rather, it considers solidarity in terms of a political and personal experience beyond borders, as a fragmented but incipient possibility rooted in reciprocal social and political relations. Solidarity is seen as both a concept and a political practice that is constantly in flux but nonetheless points towards a future that is much different than the present. I now provide a brief introduction to the 'sites' of this ethnography, though I am confident that readers will become sufficiently familiar with them in the chapters that follow.

In late August of 2006, a group of students, this author among them, formed a 'Colombia solidarity group' at the University of Alberta in western Canada to raise awareness in the campus community about violence and conflict in Colombia. The name '*La Chiva*' was taken from the colourful buses (*chivas*) that traverse the Colombian countryside, carrying not only people but also food and even animals. Like the buses, La Chiva intended to be everywhere, using colourful tactics to support social movements and communities in Colombia through solidarity work in Canada. One of the first acts of the group was to create a massive banner that was displayed at different places and times at the University of Alberta campus; the banner depicted a long gun, the barrel of which was in the shape of a Coca-Cola bottle, with the slogan, "Coke Kills: Colombian trade unionists are being killed for trying to fight for better conditions."

So began La Chiva's first solidarity campaign. Like the slogan, the campaign was neither pithy nor precise; but it was 'radical'³ and deliberately provocative. The group identified the Coca-Cola Company as a link between their campus and conflict in Colombia, and together with a coalition of other campus groups and activists, began working towards ending the company's 'exclusivity contract' with the university and the Students' Union (SU). Soon, the campaign was linked into a broader international effort supported by the Colombian Coca-Cola workers' union, SINALTRAINAL, and the 'Campaign to Stop Killer Coke.' As the issue sparked controversy on campus, members of La Chiva became aware of other Colombia solidarity efforts in Canada. In January 2007, they organized speaking events at the university and invited to Alberta two former members of the defunct Canada-Colombia Solidarity Campaign (CCSC). The events emphasized the complexity of conflict in Colombia but saw that situation not as Colombia's alone: countries like the United States and Canada had played important roles in feeding the flames of conflict as they pursued economic interests for transnational corporations. The encounter with the CCSC brought La Chiva closer to broader Canada-Colombia solidarity efforts by offering an understanding of the landscape of solidarity groups and organizations among which the group was unconsciously situated. By extension, the encounter also sowed the seeds of a future relationship between members of La Chiva and the indigenous movement in northern Cauca, Colombia. In the first half of 2008, several members of La Chiva travelled to Colombia. Their trips ranged from several weeks to six months in duration and were informally organized. La Chiva could be found in communities affected by the encroaching Canadian extractive industry and, more than anywhere else, among the indigenous movement in Cauca. They could also be found in numerous articles and translated

³ Here, and throughout this study, I use the term 'radical' with reference to the following definition from the 2009 Oxford English Dictionary: "relating to or forming the root, basis, or foundation of something."

communiqués published on alternative media websites. The experiences and relationships established during 2008 formed the basis for what would become a collective process of transnational solidarity. Affinity and affection became the foundations of autonomous and horizontal relationships, and solidarity was seen not as altruism or charity for distant others but a political practice complemented by a sense of kinship that transcended distance and difference. La Chiva has since undergone significant transformations: it is not a typical organization but a forum for the construction of collective analyses of global problems and a space for autonomous processes of ‘collective creation’ and mutual aid at the grassroots level. In charting these collective and individual processes of transformation, it is necessary to take into account the ‘transnational resonance’ (Khasnabish 2008) of solidarity these Canada-based activists have shared mostly through their relations with the other broadly constructed ‘site’ of this study.

The Tejido was founded in the context of the 2004 Indigenous and Popular Mandate (*Mandato Indígena y Popular*), declared in Cali, Colombia, which called for efforts to bridge the divides of social movements in the country so as to articulate unifying, though not unitary, popular agendas ‘from below.’ Of the indigenous organization that most forcefully took on this task was the ACIN, which after its 2005 Congress in Caldono included as one of its central nodes of action a *tejido*⁴ (a ‘weaving’ or ‘network’) that focused on 1) communication as a pedagogical tool to horizontally accompany the community-based indigenous resistance process in northern Cauca, and 2) external relations to draw national and international attention to the situation in Colombia in general and Cauca in particular, as well as to ‘weave’ together the struggles of diverse peoples and processes facing similar problems. The

⁴ The use of the word *tejido* in Indigenous Cauca will more thoroughly described and explained in Chapter 5. Here, in broad terms, it might be considered a *red* or ‘network.’

fundamental purpose of the Tejido, as in the long version of its name, is to defend ‘truth’ and ‘life.’

The Tejido brings together diverse communication tools, such as radio, Internet, print and video projects, which are seen as ‘appropriated’ (Almendra 2009b) forms of communication and complementary to other, more traditional forms, such as oral history, the assembly and other community processes like the minga. The Tejido represents the amalgamation of these efforts into a unifying communication strategy. For the Tejido, communication is not simply information transmitted through alternative media; it is an integral part of indigenous and popular processes of resistance in Colombia (Murillo 2008). The Tejido seeks to foster and nurture a process rooted in notions similar (though not identical) to Paolo Freire’s (1970) ‘conscientization’ as well as direct democracy and direct action: “to inform, reflect, decide, and act” (Almendra 2009a). The results of the process are evident in the numerous popular consultations and mobilizations carried out in Colombia’s southwest in recent years. Perhaps the most illustrative and noted example is that of the Minga mentioned above, which in the style of Bolivia’s social and popular movements during the Cochabamba mobilizations against the privatization of water in 2000 (Dangl 2007; Olivera and Lewis 2004) moved beyond a march and put forward a five-point popular agenda. I outline the content and context of that agenda more thoroughly in chapter 6, but the general thrust of the Minga was to collectively construct an alternative community process that confronted neoliberalism in Colombia and beyond: to move “from a country of owners without people to a country of people without owners” (Ó Tuathail and Rozental 2009; Poole 2009; Tejido de Comunicación 2009; Valencia 2009). Like the community-based work projects after which it is named and modelled, the Minga challenged the barriers of sect, ideology, class, race, culture, gender, age, and any number of categories that frequently

divide social and popular movements. Furthermore, it set out to be collective and thus controlled by no one, prefiguring a country *sin dueños*, or ‘without owners.’ The Minga hit a nerve in Colombia. For some, it was a breath of fresh air in a conflict that decades ago had lost its purpose and failed to produce positive outcomes for much of the population. For others, however, the Minga represented a threat to the country’s well-established ‘war system’ (Richani 2002) that was both a lucrative business, providing billions of dollars in foreign military ‘aid’ to armies of states and private contractors and a pretext for quashing possibilities of more radical social and political change in the country and region. The role of the Tejido in pushing forward the Minga both nationally and internationally is evidenced by the extent to which its work and members have been both celebrated and attacked.

The third site of this study is more abstract: the transnational space between these groups, where solidarity and accompaniment transcend space through communicative processes and trans-border practices of resistance. Travelling back and forth between Canada and Colombia, this study emphasizes the relations among members of La Chiva and the Tejido that have fostered numerous examples of political action and solidarity across multiple borders. Such alternative processes of transnational integration and cooperation might constitute a form of globalization ‘from below’ that is at once rooted in reciprocal relations and mutual solidarity; autonomous from the prevailing logic of more established solidarity forms; and prefigurative in that it features dynamics and tactics that reflect the kinds of imaginaries envisioned by these people. Solidarity is thus reconfigured autonomous from and in direct confrontation with the hegemonic logic of global neoliberal capitalism. An ethnographic study of these cases reveals both political possibilities and complex challenges. I present not a model for solidarity groups nor a comprehensive or totalizing

analysis of these particular cases; rather, I see the ‘weaving’ of autonomous transnational solidarity as, at best, fragments of possibilities.

1.2 About this study

I came into this project with a political science background attained during my undergraduate studies. When I began graduate work, I knew that I wanted to research something close to me, and that I wanted my academic work to contribute in some way to the Canada-Colombia solidarity work I have participated in since 2005. Much of that work, I found, tended toward certain principles and practices – autonomy, voluntary association, collective construction, mutual aid and direct democracy –, variations of which have been noted frequently in studies of globalization’s ‘movement of movements’ (Day 2005; Mertes 2004; Notes from Nowhere Collective 2003; Sitrin 2006). Even with the limited training provided by undergraduate study, I felt constrained by political science approaches that, to me, sought broad generalizations, totalizing prescriptions, and a ‘scientific’ approach to understanding complex social and political worlds. In consequence, my motivation is not to collect data, analyze variables and produce findings that would lead to a prescription for what the people featured in this study ought to do; rather, I hope to contribute to knowledge (academic and otherwise) by carrying out a research project about and from the ‘community’ I am a part of and rooted in the reality we, as political beings and intellectuals, affect and share some responsibility for.

In many ways, I found the late Colombian sociologist Orlando Fals Borda’s (1991) accounts of Participatory Action Research (PAR) as an inspiring epistemological and methodological approach that seemed to envision research as unapologetically rooted in emancipatory praxis and from the ground-up as a humble contribution to subaltern struggles

against an unjust system. However, I also found that utilizing PAR for an MA thesis research project – ever constrained by time, funding and other roadblocks – would be unfeasible for this project. Then I stumbled upon ethnography. In *Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology*, anthropologist David Graeber (2004) attempts to tie together the ways in which ethnography and anarchism speak together. He argues that ethnography can complement an incipient ‘anarchist anthropology’ in that it is concerned with “actually-existing” phenomena and provides something of a model of how “non-vanguardist revolutionary intellectual practice might work” (ibid., 11). Graeber puts it best:

When one carries out an ethnography, one observes what people do, and then tries to tease out the hidden symbolic, moral, or pragmatic logics that underlie their actions; one tries to get at the way people’s habits and actions makes sense in ways that they are not themselves completely aware of. One obvious role for a radical intellectual is to do precisely that: to look at those who are creating viable alternatives, try to figure out what might be the larger implications of what they are (already) doing, and then offer those ideas back, not as prescriptions, but as contributions, possibilities – as gifts (ibid., 11-12).

While I admit, as Graeber does, that an ‘anarchist anthropology’ does not actually exist now, at least in a North American context, there are ‘fragments’ of an approach that tends to address concerns for research that is both empirically rich (descriptive of what people are actually doing) and consciously rooted in a non-vanguardist concern for praxis (politically relevant and horizontal). I now turn to providing some epistemological considerations and reflections on the data collection and analysis process of this study.

1.2.1 On ethnography

As James Clifford, George E. Marcus and their colleagues (1986) classically put it, ethnography is the poetic and political practice of “writing culture.” In order to do that, however, the ethnographer is required to get within a culture, making immersion and

participant observation two foundations of an ethnographic approach.⁵ Ethnographic description documents and communicates real world depictions of social worlds by building ‘thick descriptions’ from within a culture, generating what Emerson (1983, 21) calls “theory-informed representations.” The objective of ethnography, however, is not necessarily to place social worlds at the service of theory or to force theory onto accounts of people’s lives and experiences. Rather, theory is seen as an aid in interpreting the complexity of social life. Theory is deployed in the aid of description and interpretation and not the other way around (Graeber 2009, 509).⁶ Keeping in mind these broad considerations about the use of ethnography and its orientation in terms of praxis, I began to design an ethnographic research project that brings together what I consider to be three compatible approaches to research: political, participatory and multi-sited ethnography.

Ethnographers have focused their attention on an inexhaustible list of activities and subjects. Political worlds are no exception. As Javier Auyero and Lauren Joseph (2007) point out, there is much about political and social worlds that cannot be quantified or explained by models, charts, regressions and correlations typical of approaches in political science and political sociology alike. The deployment of ethnographic tools leads to an alternative array of questions for the study of political phenomena. For instance, a description of the landscape of political actors and their implied relations to one another tells us little about the *experience* of politics, how political actors *understand* their actions and, in turn, broader political implications. The ethnographic study of politics emphasizes the day-to-day of politics as a

⁵ As Robert Park, a founder of the “Chicago School” of ethnographic field research and critic of what he called “armchair sociology,” famously told his students: “go get the seat of your pants dirty in real research”(McKinney 1966, 71).

⁶ Graeber adds, quite rightly, that “if the aim of an ethnographic description is to try to give the reader the means to imaginatively pass inside a moral and social universe then it seems exploitative, insulting almost, to suggest that other people live their lives or pursue their projects in order to allow some scholar to score a point in some arcane theoretical debate” (2009, 509).

practice and unquantifiable lived experience. It is perhaps this hesitancy to speak across disciplinary lines that has created a distance between the methodological toolboxes of political scientists and ethnographers, but there have been significant efforts to bridge that divide (Ashforth 2005; Auyero 2001; Baiocchi 2005; Graeber 2009; Scott 1985).

The divide remains wide, however. Political scientist Allaine Cerwonka's correspondence with her dissertation supervisor Liisa Malkki, discussed in their book *Improvising Theory* (2007), gets to the heart of how difficult it is to carry out ethnographic fieldwork while confronting the "positivistic ideal of objectivity" often prevalent in some academic disciplines (Cerwonka and Malkki 2007, 25). The ethnographic field is, for many political scientists, loaded with mines. Rather than arriving in the field with hypotheses and variables in tow, the political ethnographer's challenge is to "think" theory "through" ethnographic material in such a way that "[avoids] imposing prefabricated, theoretical models on the rich complexity of everyday life" (ibid., 19). Required is thus a process of improvising theory that is, for the researcher, at once replete with uncertainty and dynamism. In carrying out my fieldwork for this project, while I had scoured theoretical perspectives on the political processes and phenomena I expected to encounter in the field, I quickly became conscious of the need to place much of those ideas and conceptual tools to the side. For example, social movement theory seemed to break down as I encountered a multitude of often conflicting perspectives on the organizational form and purpose of activist groups often even among activists belonging to the same group. It became apparent to me that a nuanced and rich account of transnational solidarity activism would require the improvisation of theory built from the bottom-up and incorporating relevant fragments of these literatures put at the service of description and interpretation. At least in the context of

this study, an ethnography of politics is not a political science approach to ethnography but rather a re-configuration of the study of politics through an ethnographic lens.

While it remains a highly contested question in the social sciences that the objectivist distance that positions the researcher as somewhere outside ongoing social interaction hinders our ability to understand social practice, critical approaches maintain that the quest for objectivity is essentially a futile one. Like policymakers, journalists and others, researchers have positions, principles and paradigms, all of which rest on a variety of inherited assumptions. Among critical research practitioners, there has been a conscious effort to wrestle with the relationship of researcher and researched, especially in research that is both politically engaged and collaborative in nature (see Amster et al. 2009; see also Shukaitis et al. 2007). ‘Participatory ethnography’⁷ encourages participation in political action and collaboration at every stage of the research process, blurring the lines between the researcher and the researched by offering a space for more politically engaged ethnographic practice. Rather than ‘parachuting’ into sites, long-term relationships with ‘subjects’ are also encouraged, allowing the researcher to experience activist organizing and networking more intimately through participation.⁸ In terms of its outcomes, Jeffrey Juris (2007, 165) suggests, “rather than generating sweeping strategic and/or political directives, collaboratively produced ethnographic knowledge aims to facilitate on-going activist (self-) reflection regarding movement goals, tactics, strategies and organizational forms.” It offers activists a descriptive, collectively constructed account of their activities.

⁷ Others (cf. Baiocchi 2005 and Juris 2007) refer to participatory ethnography somewhat interchangeably with ‘militant ethnography.’ I believe that there is little, if any, difference between the two approaches but prefer the term ‘participatory’ in that the word ‘militant’ may be misinterpreted: in a context like Colombia, for example, *militante* typically refers to a member of the guerrilla.

⁸ Furthermore, the intensity of emotions often experienced in these circumstances allows the ethnographer to “use her body as a concrete research tool” (Juris 2007, 166).

Participatory ethnography might also open the way for perhaps richer interpretations and analyses because of its emphasis on insiders' knowledge of research sites. In a sense, what participatory ethnography calls for is a form of *participatory* observation. In the case of this study, there are several reasons why participation is both a methodological preference and practical imperative. First, in the highly contested space of transnational activism, it would be virtually impossible for an outsider to become 'embedded' in such a way as to understand processes as the practitioners do themselves. Through participation in political action, the researcher not only gains the trust and confidence of activists (access) but also can understand the day-to-day of their experiences by experiencing them herself (awareness). In addition, participatory ethnography implies the deployment of auto-ethnographic tools to encourage more in-depth and focussed lines of inquiry from the research design process to interview settings to the (re-) interpretation of meanings and logics behind political action. During fieldwork, the reflexive processes involved in carrying out ethnographic tasks and auto-ethnography provided me the opportunity to compare my experiences with those of others engaged in those same processes, having those same experiences. Finally, in carrying out months of research in a place like the indigenous territories of northern Cauca, very much the heart of Colombia's on-going war, it was obligatory for me to walk with the people I was 'studying' both to maintain their confidence and for my own personal safety and protection.⁹ Thus my participation in the activist work described throughout this study was not only an epistemological preference but also a condition of my being able to carry it out in the first place and in the way that I did.

⁹ For further discussion of the conditions of my on-going collaboration with the Tejido de Comunicación in Cauca, see the section on 'accompaniment' in chapter 5.

As contentious political action takes on increasingly amorphous transnational forms, scholars require new approaches to research these phenomena. George E. Marcus (1995, 96) notes that multi-sited ethnography is embedded in the world-system, “moving out from the single sites and local situations of conventional ethnographic research designs to examine the circulation of cultural meanings, objects, and identities in diffuse time-space.” This shifting of sites is useful in understanding social worlds that are increasingly influenced by the emergence of a networked world system rooted in communication and trans-border flows of identities and new forms of political action. Marcus contends that multi-sited ethnography is also useful for noting the relationships within seemingly disparate sites as constituting part of a whole, allowing for an analysis that highlights the internal dynamics of organizations and among individuals as well as what those organizations and individuals outwardly project. Moreover, in multi-sited ethnography, there is inevitably a comparative dimension that seeks to integrate accounts of “real-world sites of investigation” that are mobile and situated in often distant contexts; the result is an object of study that implies “juxtapositions of phenomena that have appeared to be (or conceptually have been kept) ‘worlds apart’” (Marcus 1995, 102). As Ulf Hannerz (2003) has observed, multi-sited ethnography deals not only with the issue of “being there” but of “being there... and there... and there.” By seeing the diffuse ‘theres’ as constituting a collective space in their own right, it is possible to understand political action in a transnational, networked context. This ethnography considers the experiences of key informants as well as their organizations, not simply organizations as static, all-encompassing entities. In broad terms, the sites of this study are the people engaged in Canada-Colombia solidarity efforts at the grassroots level as well as the transnational space that connects them.

1.2.2 Data collection and analysis

In the *Interpretation of Cultures*, Clifford Geertz (1973) contends that ethnography is more a process than a methodological doctrine. In terms of this study, the spaces of ethnography inevitably shift, which required frequent improvisation and adjustment. In carrying out this project, ‘data’ collection and analysis occurred simultaneously, through the collection of textual data produced by and about these organizations; the carrying out of ethnographic tasks, interviews and informal conversations in the field; and the frequent revision and reinterpretation of that data during the writing process itself. Follow up interviews were also an important component of this research, which I believe has led to richer interpretations and analyses of the ideas presented in the chapters that follow than I would have been able to analyze on my own.

‘Data’ came from a number of places. When I helped form what was then a small, university-based Colombia solidarity group in 2006, I found myself compiling and systematizing what would later become a massive amount of information – notebooks, meeting minutes, *communiqués*, handbills, photographs, and email threads – that a few years later, would form the basis for this study. When I went to Colombia from January to June 2008, my first long-term stay in the country, my intent was to research and write as a journalist as well as to meet the people and experience the processes I had been working in solidarity with from Canada since the end of my first trip in 2005. Again, I amassed a large amount of documentation: recorded interviews and presentations, journals, and notebooks from meetings. Before heading into ‘the field,’ I began collecting documents from La Chiva and the Tejido dating as far back as the autumn of 2006. These documents include meeting minutes, list-serve discussions, and correspondences with other organizations. I also began systematizing publicly available documents such as public statements and *communiqués*,

letters to the editor, press releases, blog and website postings, as well as articles and editorials written and/or translated by members of these groups. Other data included images and audio from presentations, documentary films produced by the Tejido, and photos of the actions, activities and places where these activists work. Complementing these sources are my notes from countless meetings, presentations and actions as well as ongoing email exchanges with past and present members of both groups. These data are complemented by a more formal fieldwork period conducted between August and December 2009 in Canada and Colombia, which included a series of interviews with key informants and collaboration with the Tejido in Cauca from September to December 2009.

Informal interviews with participants were carried out in person between August and December 2009 in Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton, Toronto, Ottawa, Bogotá, Cali, and Ibagué and in various townships in Colombia's northern Cauca region. Other interviews were either carried out through email or phone. Key informants included not only the actors involved in the specific moments depicted here but also members of NGOs and labour organizations who participated in parallel campaigns and/or events and people with an intimate knowledge of solidarity activism and other relevant areas and issues.¹⁰ In the end, not all of these testimonies have been included directly here; but those discussions were useful in other ways. In many cases, these discussions complemented or dismissed the assumptions in my lines of inquiry and where I felt this project was going or might emphasize. Especially during the process of writing up, my previous and on-going discussions with key informants greatly influenced my interpretation of key passages. Thus the project seems less of my own making; I acknowledge it as the product of on-going collaboration.

¹⁰ I include a detailed list of formal, recorded interviews in Appendix B.

Like any ethnography, this study includes a mixture of both participant/participatory observation as well as textual data. It perhaps goes without saying that I could not ‘observe’ participants in email exchanges. But I did participate in many of the events described herein and used textual data to ‘recreate’ these events on paper as best I could. During fieldwork in Colombia, I kept a journal and constant notes as I participated with the Tejido in their activities around the Minga in October of 2009 as well as their day-to-day communication work during the period in which I worked as a collaborator ‘on-the-ground.’ Much of those experiences I have not included directly in this study, as they would have greatly expanded the scope of its scope and would require much more context than I can go into here.

I began handling these data by creating codes derived from the literature on solidarity activism and social movement theory that would help me to organize the data and make links between concepts and what I was seeing. This effort later proved to be fairly problematic, as I felt many of these concepts to be an imposition. This was apparent in my earliest interviews with members of La Chiva, who often responded with blank stares to my questions about framing and resource mobilization, for example. In the spirit of Geertz’ view of ethnography as inimical to methodological doctrine, my analysis process is rather loosely inspired by the grounded theory approach to qualitative research developed first by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss (1967) and later by Kathy Charmaz (2003; 2006). Practicing grounded theory meant that I made a conscious attempt to place to the side the theoretical presumptions I had accumulated during by preparations for fieldwork and instead observe what people were saying and only later seeing what theory might say about that, if anything. Consequently, the central themes of this study may not correspond neatly with any one particular body of theoretical work. Grounded theory is that way, a bottom-up approach to theorizing. My approach tended towards long, informal conversations about activities

rather than the concepts and themes provided by theory. Later, I generated themes hermeneutically based on my day-to-day journal writing and note-taking. This proved fruitful but also overwhelming, as I ended up with so much material and so many possible themes to emphasize that this study might have been much longer than it is already. Thus what I present here is quite limited but hopefully less full of digressions than it might have been.

Due to the contentious nature of some of the events this study describes, I have in most cases deployed the use of pseudonyms to protect the identities of the people I describe. In some cases, key informants explicitly requested this. In cases where they did not, I may have chosen to mask their identities so as to ensure no negative impact of the publication of this thesis on their safety. To manage textual data and hours of transcribed interviews, I used TAMS Analyzer, an open source, ethnographic data management and analysis tool. As I mention above, the process of ‘coding’ proved problematic in terms of drawing links between issues; however, the program did allow me to organize the data in a way that greatly facilitated the retrieval of key passages and group together important themes that would later be interpreted and analyzed during the writing process.

If anything, this study is about processes – collective and individual – of political action and transformation beyond borders, the state and solely organizational forms, autonomous and from below. Through ethnography approach, I tease out the logics behind the day-to-day experiences of transnational solidarity and, I hope, offer back an analysis that places those experiences in the context of their larger political implications in globalizing processes and theoretical bodies of work. While this MA Thesis must contribute to academia in some way, I consider it to be a much greater measure of success if it can complement more ‘on-the-ground’ understandings of the collective projects from which its ‘data’ is derived.

1.3 A roadmap

While this introduction has provided a brief overview of the subjects of this ethnography, it is my intention that what is lost here will be made up for in the chapters that follow. In Chapter 2, I provide a conceptual outline for the thesis, identifying points of intersection in scholarly discussions of globalization ‘from below’ and ‘transnational solidarity activism.’ Key conceptual tools are explained so as to provide a basis for their deployment in the ethnography that follows as well as to be used as theoretical reference points. The remaining chapters are the ethnography proper. Their organization is mainly chronological, though descriptions shift at times to provide adequate context. A chronological approach allows a more seamless understanding of the transformations of solidarity as a political experience, the groups engaging it, and their relations with one another over time. It also allows for a more decipherable account of their contexts and histories while simultaneously honing in on the lived experiences of the activists themselves, providing a feel for the day-to-day of solidarity as a form of social relations replete with challenges, and possibilities.

Chapter 3 begins in Canada with La Chiva members’ histories, the group’s formation, and its 2006-2007 campaign against the Coca-Cola Company’s exclusivity contract at the University of Alberta campus. We observe a small, isolated group of university students engaged in the day-to-day of rights solidarity activism and forced to address radical perspectives imported from Colombia situated within a complex environment of ‘activism’ on a campus in Canada’s conservative heartland. In Chapter 4, the context expands to the broader Canada-Colombia ‘solidarity movement’ in Canada, and La Chiva’s position therein. When some of the group’s underlying and problematic dynamics become difficult to ignore, the group is transformed. The chapter discusses those changes

and offers as a brief but necessary interlude, offering part of an explanation for how the formal organization fell apart by the end of 2007 as the group shifted towards something akin to an affinity group: decentralized and rooted in kinship and shared political desires.

In Chapter 5, I describe the formation of a basis for transnational solidarity, as members of La Chiva travel to Colombia in 2008 to work with the *Tejido de Comunicación* and the indigenous movement in northern Cauca. Observed are the ways in which members of La Chiva encounter solidarity as a reciprocal relationship, negotiated and solidified in the practice of politics but also rooted in friendship and commitment. Also described are the conditions of solidarity and accompaniment as foundations for horizontal and autonomous relations among people. The chapter also looks at how processes of political analysis and debate are communicated in Cauca through ‘weaving the word,’ the construction of spaces for political reflection, decision and action and the Tejido’s basis of communication as resistance.

Chapter 6 describes the application and resonance of transnational connections, how lessons from Cauca are applied as La Chiva returns to Canada and deals with events in Cauca that are both inspiring and traumatic. The group’s transformations are partly based on deep linkages with the indigenous movement in Cauca and the events surrounding the Minga mobilizations of 2008, but they also involve the emergence of a form of accompaniment practiced through the use of information technologies, translation, and people-to-people connections that transcend distance. In chapter 6, we see not only lessons learned in Cauca applied to a Canadian context but also collective processes of analysis and communication. The chapter places some emphasis on La Chiva’s participation in a broad-based campaign against the Canada-Colombia Free Trade Agreement, as the group turns to emphasize Canadian society and speak *from* the experience of Colombia rather than *for*

Colombian movements. In the final chapter, I loosely tie together the threads of the preceding discussion as constituting rhizomatic fragments of a minga. ‘Solidarity without owners’ appears as a political possibility that prefigures autonomous and alternative spaces in which globalization ‘from below’ becomes an everyday practice confronting the logic of neoliberalism not in the future but now.

2: GLOBALIZATION AND SOLIDARITY

There are three broad and overlapping areas of scholarly work in which this research project might be situated: globalization, transnational activism and solidarity. Considering the connection between La Chiva and the Tejido in relation to this literature requires outlining some key aspects of the conceptual terrains so as to provide some theoretical orientation for the chapters that follow. Before turning to the ethnography proper, I briefly survey the conceptual landscape relevant to this research, which will be referred to throughout and picked up again in the concluding chapter.

2.1 Globalization ‘from above’ and ‘from below’

‘Globalization’ refers to an inexhaustible array of processes and practices both new and old. Critical scholarly discussions (see Wallerstein 2004)¹ have charted globalization’s historical roots in the world system, highlighting how it is not confined to the economic realm. However, at least in the mainstream, prevailing notions of globalization tend to be found in political economy, where dominant perspectives hold that globalization is the integration of national and local economies and polities into a single, global market-based economy (Smith and Bandy 2005). Some contend that this is often facilitated by the spread of ‘low-intensity’ democratic or polyarchic political regimes (Robinson 1996) and entrenched by a new transnational constitutional order (McBride 2006), represented most forcefully by supranational institutions such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) and so-called ‘free

¹ While I am citing Immanuel Wallerstein here, I am aware that the discussions of he and his colleagues on the world system predate the ‘current’ globalization debate and therefore do not name it as such.

trade' agreements.² Leslie Sklair (2001) situates these developments alongside the emergence and consolidation of transnational elites, a 'transnational capitalist class.' For some, this top-down form of neoliberal economic globalization represents the pinnacle of human economic history (Fukuyama 1992). For others, it is a contested space that has far-reaching political, economic, social and cultural implications not only for national states, but also for entire societies (Brecher et. al 2000; De Angelis 2006; Della Porta and Tarrow 2004; Smith and Johnston 2002).

Neoliberal globalization proposes a radical reduction of government regulation in the transnational flow of goods and capital and, critical perspectives argue, a new set of hierarchical relations between 'Empire' and the 'multitude' (Hardt and Negri 2001; 2005). In Latin America, as in much of the Global South, the cornerstones of the neoliberal project at the end of the 20th century were the "three pillars" of the so-called 'Washington Consensus': fiscal austerity, privatization, and market liberalization (Stiglitz 2003, 53). This essentially meant a program of economic reforms that extended processes since the 1970s that aimed to 'liberalize' labour, capital, and resources so as to promote what geographer David Harvey (1989) has called 'flexible accumulation,' a rejection of the rigidities presented by Fordism and a preference for "flexibility with respect to labour processes, labour markets and patterns of consumption" (147).³ In many parts of the world, the process has had much more profound and violent effects; such as in the case of what Harvey (2009, 2003) has called 'accumulation by dispossession.' Concurrent with these relatively new global processes of production and consumption are marked transformations of the national state towards a

² Many authors, for example, have examined the influence of capital in the pursuit of the so-called 'free trade agreement' agenda (cf. Clarkson 2008; Jacek 2000).

³ Obviously, the term 'flexibility' should be used with the caution: seen from another perspective, flexibility implies little more than a new form of regulation (Standing 1999) in the interest of new processes of global accumulation.

more transnational orientation (Robinson 2004, 2005). Orienting such transformations is an emergent logic, an underlying yet pervasive value system beyond policies that expresses views and assumptions about the way things are and the ways they should be. Most relevant to this study is the assumption that free market competition, not solidarity, drives human initiative and innovation. Globalization from above involves the imposition of a worldview that equates accumulation with development, military force with security, and profit for capital with prosperity for all. This logic is not universally shared.

In their influential work, *Globalization From Below*, Jeremy Brecher (2000) and his colleagues chart the rise of processes seeking to contest the globalization of neoliberal capitalism. Largely from a North American perspective, they observe that many participants in the most visible contemporary manifestations of globalization ‘from below’ are veterans of the so-called ‘new social movements’ of the 1970s and 1980s, engaging environmental, human rights, peace and anti-nuclear issues (ibid., 103-104), but above all, they are heterogeneous. For Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2005), these actors are a diverse ‘multitude.’⁴ Prominent participants in the Seattle protests of 1999, for example, were trade unions, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), transnational social movement organizations (TSMOs), and a diversity of informally organized networks of individual activists and groups (Della Porta and Tarrow 2005; Mertes 2004; Smith and Johnston 2002). In terms of unity, as Ivana Eterovic and Jackie Smith (2001, 207) have pointed out,

Globalization processes that integrate economic, political, and social institutions across national boundaries provide a structural basis for transnational social movement organizing, since problems experienced in different locales are often caused by the same transnational actor or policy.

⁴ In their preface to *Multitude*, Hardt and Negri (2005, xiv) argue that “[t]he multitude is composed of innumerable internal differences that can never be reduced to a unitary or single identity – different cultures, races, ethnicities, genders, and sexual orientations; different forms of labour; different ways of living; different views of the world; and different desires.”

Thus there is a visible convergence, an integration process, of diverse groups finding common causes.

These forces have generally been understood by social scientists in relation to social movement theory, which seeks to explain the motivations, processes, and relationships involved in this coming together. Commonly deployed analytical and explanatory tools and models focus on resource mobilization (McCarthy and Zald 1977); political opportunities (Cloward and Piven 1977); cycles of protest (Tarrow 1998); framing (Snow and Benford 1992); and networks (Keck and Sikkink 1998; Castells 2000). More recently, social movement theorists have tended towards a greater emphasis on culture and contentious politics (McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1996), border crossing (Patten 2003), and theories of transnational action (Bandy and Smith 2005; Olesen 2004, 2005; Tarrow 2005). However, against this impressive and rich body of scholarly work, Alex Khasnabish (2008, 188) has recently argued that such analytical frameworks are,

fundamentally structural, rationalist, and instrumental, [producing] perspectives on social movements, politics, and socio-cultural change that resemble rigid cause-and-effect formulas. Laws of repetition and predictability come to replace a commitment to appreciating the dynamic and often unpredictable nature of the interaction between culture, politics, action, lived realities and the people who inhabit them.

Thus alternative analytical approaches might take into account the complexities – the multiple layers and intersections, unfixed and ever changing – not of social movements with easily identifiable forms *per se* but of what renowned Latin American theorist Raúl Zibechi (2003) prefers to regard as ‘societies in movement.’ While arguably limiting, the approaches of social movement theory ought not be discarded altogether; they do provide some conceptual starting points for understanding how transnational solidarity groups are situated among a *milieu* of transnational contentious actors.

2.2 Solidarities

The concept of ‘solidarity’ is understood from a diversity of perspectives. Broadly speaking, the concept could be applied to other sectors of global society, such as solidarity as a basis for coalitions among transnational elites; but it is worth noting here that this thesis is specifically concerned with solidarity as a conceptual and practical phenomenon among the multitude, from below, and in confrontation with the fundamental logic of neoliberalism. In a sense, solidarity is a tie that can either bind together or push apart the networks, coalitions and movements that Jonathan Fox (2002) has distinguished as the primary forms of transnational cooperation among contentious actors. Ultimately, the possibility of solidarity rests upon how difference is negotiated along the complex and shifting contours of organizational forms and interests, resulting in cooperation and conflict, among these actors (Smith and Bandy 2005). Among scholars and activists, ‘solidarity’ has been defined in a number of ways, each of which evokes a plethora of critical issues embedded in its conceptualization and practice as a form of social relations. On the one hand, it can be seen in terms of what the authors of one volume (Giugni and Passy et al. 2001) have called (and called into question) “political altruism,” defined as the “actions of altruistic constituents, actions by ‘conscience constituents’ to promote interests of a different group of beneficiaries” (Eterovic and Smith 2001, 200). Embedded in altruism as a basis for solidarity are often complex power relations between ‘providers’ and ‘beneficiaries,’ such as othering (Perla 2008), paternalism and privilege (Weber 2006), and multiple forms of inequality that evoke visions of the ‘missionary’ or “*white knight in shining armour*” (Armbruster-Sandoval 2005, 25, *emphasis added*). On the other hand, solidarity can be seen as a fiercely political practice and a space for negotiating differences. In his work on labour internationalism, Peter Waterman (1998, 236) defines solidarity as “an active process of negotiating

differences, or creating identity,” in which activists in disparate contexts speak together. This definition emphasizes solidarity as a horizontal relationship that is rooted in a shared struggle, constituting the basis for a weaving together of diverse experiences with injustice towards a vision of reciprocity and mutual aid that is simultaneously cognizant of diversity. Thomas Olesen (2005) provides something of a typology of solidarity based on an evaluation of actors, their motivations and historical contexts, which I will outline here briefly along with some of my own reflections based on the literature so as to illustrate the complexity of the concept and bring up some key issues featured in recent academic debates.

The first form is *ideological solidarity*, which is rooted in the Marxist and socialist movements of the twentieth century. Ideological solidarity was linked to the spread of left internationalism during the first decades of the twentieth century and later ‘Third World solidarity’ during the Cold War era. A quintessential representation of left internationalism is perhaps the mobilization of the International Brigades during the Spanish Civil War (1936-39) in defence of the Republican government and against fascism. Olesen (2005, 104) argues that left internationalism also had the notable characteristic of being largely structured and directed from above, through national left parties, organizations and states with socialist governments; however, it might also be argued that the motivations of *brigadistas* also reflected a response to the international threat of fascism and the view that Spain was the frontline in an ideological battleground. While some (see Drainville 1998) have argued that this form of solidarity has disappeared since the end of the Cold War, the remnants of ideological affinity incorporated into the structures of some international labour unions (Waterman and Wills 2001) as well as the emergence of international campaigns in support

of 'left' governments and parties in Latin America show evidence to the contrary.⁵ Moreover, the practice of accompaniment remains an important component of solidarity work in the contemporary context. 'Third World solidarity' gained prominence in the 1970s and involved mainly South-South and North-South expressions. These involved what Dieter Rucht (2000, 82) calls 'distant issue movements,' or "movements that mobilize for issues that are not related, or are very indirectly related, to the situation of mobilizing groups in their home countries." In the case of North-South solidarity, that which is most pertinent to this study, these groups and organizations often saw their political solidarity work as an alternative to the kind of assistance flowing between and among states, which was especially important during the Cold War context. Into the 1980s, however, their 'radicalism' waned as they adopted more pragmatic approaches and tended to orient themselves in relation to institutions (Olesen 2005), both of civil society and of the state.⁶

A second conception of solidarity Olesen calls *rights solidarity*, one that is primarily concerned with human rights violations and other forms of oppression perpetrated by state and non-state actors. In most cases, rights solidarity also involves the representation in one space of others whose voices are largely muted. In a sense, this is closely aligned with what Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink (1998) have called 'transnational advocacy networks' (TANs), which have profound historical roots in the abolitionist movements and anti-dictatorship struggles in the Global South. Notable of rights solidarity is what Keck and Sikkink call the 'boomerang effect,' whereby abuses perpetrated by one state will face

⁵ An appropriate example of ideological affinity with leftist governments in Latin America might be the international chapters of the group 'Hands Off Venezuela' working in defence of the government of Hugo Chávez (1998 -) in Venezuela.

⁶ This claim is supported by my September 2009 discussion in Ottawa with Sheila Katz, who works on international solidarity with the Canadian Labour Congress and is a former member of the Eastern-Canada-based Latin America Working Group of the 1970s and 1980s. Katz noted that most former members of LAWG once worked from a sense of 'Third World' solidarity at the grassroots level and now continue similar work but *through* institutions like labour unions and other non-governmental organizations.

criticism and pressure from other states by way of pressure exerted by a TAN, making the political and sometimes economic costs of violating human rights too high. Still, it is frequently noted that rights solidarity groups tend to be less ‘politicized,’ preferring to take positions that they consider to be politically ‘neutral,’ and focused on particular abuses; these groups often tend towards positions that do not emphasize the structural causes of human rights abuses and exploitation (Keck and Sikkink 1998; Olesen 2005). Against this are studies such as Gregory M. Maney’s (2000) examination of the transnational mobilizations around the struggles for civil rights in the north of Ireland in the 1970s and 1980s, where the involvement of more powerful outside activists negatively affected local movements, often due to their distinct organizational interests and distanced or superficial understandings of local conditions. In addition, critical studies of the Central American sanctuary movement during the 1980s note the failure of activists to view solidarity as a set of political relations, such as the view of southern activists as objects rather than empowered and deeply political subjects in their own right (Cunningham 1995; Perla 2008). Still, as Héctor Perla (2008, 143) points out, in some cases the relationship between ‘providers’ and ‘beneficiaries’ of rights solidarity can involve a ‘signal flare strategy,’ whereby Keck and Sikkink’s ‘boomerang effect’ comes to emphasize beneficiary agency more forcefully: the solidarity relationship centres on *illuminating* the negative consequences of a country’s foreign policy while simultaneously *drawing attention* to the plight of an aggrieved population. When it recognizes its embedded politics, rights solidarity can mean a more horizontal relationship of shared struggle.

Olesen’s third conception of solidarity is that which is perhaps most commonly recognizable: the *material solidarity* typically directed towards victims of disasters of both the natural and human variety, its symbols being the International Committee of the Red Cross, groups like Doctors without Borders (*Médecins sans Frontières*), and other prominent non-

governmental organizations (NGOs). It is in the realm of material solidarity that a cadre of professional and bureaucratically structured NGOs has emerged as a powerful, influential group and, arguably, an industry unto itself. Some are state-funded, while others depend on philanthropy and private donations; but in nearly every case, the premise of material solidarity organizations is to ameliorate the effects of disasters, be they caused by natural phenomena or the negative consequences of economic policies and war. Olesen (2005, 106) argues that the fundamental basis of material solidarity lies in “[constructing] a world in which the fate of distant people can no longer be reduced to their ‘own business.’” However, this assumption is deeply problematic insofar as the impetus for and interventions of material solidarity are not guaranteed to be altruistic or free from opportunism (cf. Fenton 2005; Klein 2007). Although he does not say so, what Olesen and others describe as ‘material solidarity’ more closely approximates notions of charity, which I would argue is, at best, solidarity’s distant cousin.

While these three forms of solidarity hint at a panorama of perspectives on its conceptualization and practice historically, they also provide some context for a discussion of emergent forms. An important part of the above discussion revolves around how activists have addressed solidarity’s more problematic issues, such as paternalism, inequality, othering and varying degrees of radicalism in their pursuit of solidarity as a deeply political practice of human relations. As a concept, ‘solidarity’ is being re-configured to reflect some important shifts exhibited by its practitioners, most notably in the form of *mutual solidarity* (Eterovic and Smith 2001; Olesen 2005; Routledge et al. 2007; Sundberg 2007; Waterman 2001). If the forms described above involve, at times, unequal and one-way relationships between perceived ‘providers’ and ‘beneficiaries,’ mutual solidarity envisions a more reciprocal, two-way relationship. That does not necessarily imply an “answering back” (Giddens 1994, 97)

from the other but rather that the active process of constructing solidarity provides a space for convergence where “differences” can be “negotiated” (Waterman 1998, 236) toward shared visions of political struggles that speak together from diverse and shifting realities. Mutual solidarity “constructs the grievances and aspirations of physically, socially and culturally different people as deeply interlinked” (Olesen 2005, 109). Solidarity thus becomes not a matter of one group working for another but a shared political project that is articulated in a mutual and horizontal process. In a departure from other conceptual forms, mutual solidarity represents, at least in theory, both a relationship and a shared political project that consciously speaks *with* rather than *for*.

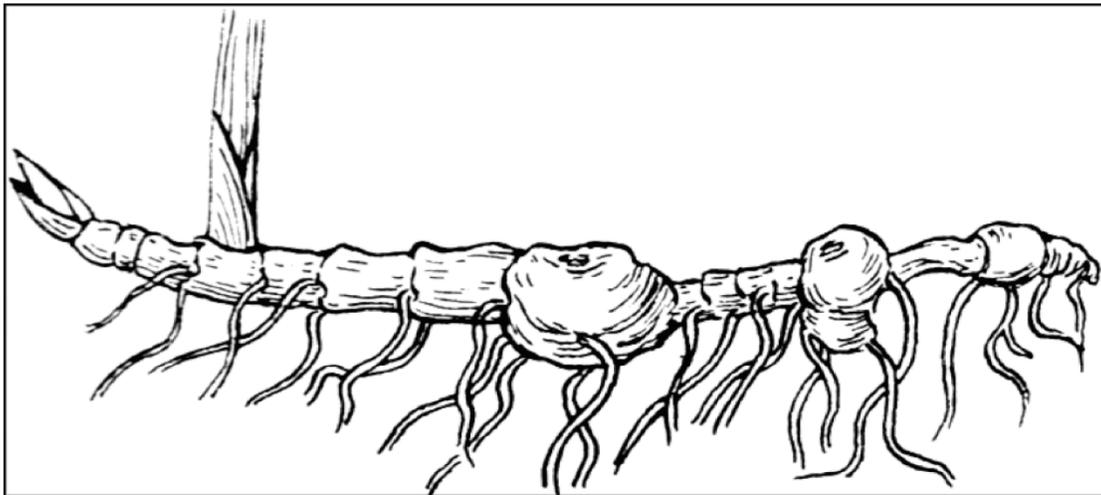
2.3 Rhizome and resonance: an alternative approach?

The preceding discussion provides some key points for consideration about the ways in which solidarity has been understood and practiced. These historical examples also indicate the heterogeneity of solidarity as an experience, as a complex and unquantifiable work perpetually in progress. In *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1980), Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari deploy the concept of the ‘rhizome’ as a way of taking into account the complexity of socio-political realities. In biology, a rhizome is an underground stem of plant that unpredictably sends out roots and shoots in unfixed patterns. Unlike a tree, it extends horizontally and is acentred. Deleuze and Guattari deploy the rhizome as a metaphor for understanding socio-political realities beyond static diagrams, categories and causal explanations:

Unlike a structure, which is defined by a set of points and positions, with binary relations between the points and biunivocal relationships between the positions, the rhizome is made only of lines: lines of segmentarity and stratification as its dimensions, and the line of flight or deterritorialization as the maximum dimension after which the multiplicity undergoes metamorphosis, changes in nature. These lines, or lineaments, should not be

confused with lineages of the arborescent type, which are merely localizable linkages between points and positions. [...] The rhizome operates by variation, expansion, conquest, capture, offshoots. [...] [T]he rhizome pertains to a map that must be produced, constructed, a map that is always detachable, connectable, reversible, modifiable, and has multiple entryways and exits and its own lines of flight. Its tracings must be put on the map, not the opposite. In contrast to centered (even polycentric) systems with hierarchical modes of communication and preestablished paths, the rhizome is an acentered, nonhierarchical, nonsignifying system without a General and without an organizing memory or central automation, defined solely by circulation of states (Deleuze and Guattari 1980, 21).

Figure 2.1: Line drawing of a rhizome as found in biology



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Thus the rhizome defies structure, definition and predictability and is characterized most by its spontaneity, its shifting links, paths and directions of movement. Like a rhizome, solidarity forms often overlap and shift across time and space, from one context to another and at different moments. Solidarity is connectivity. In his study *Zapatismo Beyond Borders: New Imaginations of Political Possibility* (2008), Khasnabish notes that the rhizome provides no easy tools for understanding social movements and political action. However,

What the rhizome does is assert the profound and unfixed complexity of social realities; it reminds us that the world is not composed of discrete

identities but rather is constituted by the connections between these elements. Thus, socio-political analysis ceases to be a process of interrogating identity, institutions, or any other fixed form and instead becomes a matter of understanding socio-political space as continually reproduced by connection and interaction. [...] The social, and the political, are spaces, spaces constituted by directions in motion. If we are to understand how the socio-political is constituted, we must then look not for 'frames' or 'cycles,' individuals or institutions; instead we must look for the connections that bring the social and the political into being, for the communicative acts that articulate the realities which we inhabit (ibid., 188-189).

The rhizome does not replace social movement theory but provides a useful metaphor for exploring different dynamics of social movements that are ever changing and sometimes understood, at best, as works in progress. It is a reminder of complexities and the futility of viewing social life in terms of totalities. The rhizome aids in revealing the complex lines among actors that are constantly in flux and affected both by shifting socio-political realities and by shifting visions of solidarity and terrains of political action across borders.

Looking at *zapatismo* as a communicative process beyond borders, Khasnabish (2008, 7) deploys the notion of 'resonance,' which he defines as the "non-linear and unpredictable dynamic by which meaning made in a particular context becomes significant in another" and, in turn, provokes "effects both predictable and unanticipated." He argues that the resonance of *zapatismo* transnationally is essentially rhizomatic. Similarly, this study demonstrates that resonance, seen as such, provides an opening for the construction of solidarity forms that reflect, if anything, possibilities. In Latin America, most notably since the mid-1990s, it could be argued that the coalescence of diverse political struggles have been articulated increasingly through the resonance of political imagination, often with scant regard for structure and predictability. They are what Deleuze might call new 'beginnings,' notable as much for their organizational qualities and structures as they are for the shifting principles that underlie them. Indeed, the amount of scholarly attention that the region's social movements have

recently received might reflect the presence of unlikely alliances and shifting terrains of social and political transformation. As Raúl Zibechi points out,

[It] is revealing that Latin America has seen a whole set of revolts without leadership, “without organizational memory or central apparatus” (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 26). Power relations within the space of the uprising tend to be based on other forms. The mortar which binds and drives those who are in revolt does not correspond to the state-form – vertical and pyramidal – but rather is based on a set of ties that are more horizontal but also more unstable than bureaucratic systems. The best-known instance of this rejection of representation is the slogan *que se vayan todos* (“they all should go”), which emerged in the course of the December 19 – 20 events in Argentina. Both in the neighborhood assemblies and among the groups of picketers and in occupied factories, this general slogan has concrete expressions: *entre todos todo* (“among everyone, everything”), which is very similar to the Zapatista *entre todos lo sabemos todo* (“among everyone we know everything”). Both statements (which express the daily life of the groups that coined them) are directed simultaneously at non-division of labor and of thought-action, and also at there being no leaders who exist separate from the groups and communities (Zibechi 2005, 30).

In many ways, what Zibechi describes – in emphasizing not so much the movements as identifiable organizations and formal coalitions but rather the ideas, principles and practices that provide the ‘mortar’ that binds them – might constitute the basis for a globalization from below that challenges not only the protagonists and regimes of neoliberal capitalism but the very principles and logic behind them. This is an important observation, as it is often in the realm of shared possibilities rather than ideology that diverse actors have come together, where they find cohesion and an often casual basis for cooperation and integration of struggles across the shifting and diverse terrains of socio-political realities.

2.4 Autonomy and horizontality

What makes solidarity different from other kinds of social relations is when it is practiced autonomously and horizontally. In Latin America, emergent political visions have emphasized principles like *horizontalidad* (‘horizontality’ or ‘horizontalism’) – as in that

exemplified by Argentina's popular movements in the wake of the 2001-2002 economic crisis (Sitrin 2006) and the ideal of mutual solidarity described above – and *autonomía* ('autonomy') – as in the Zapatistas' defiance and refusal of subjugation under neoliberalism (Stahler-Sholk 2007). The resonance of such visions in places as diverse as the Americas is evident in the (re-) imaginations of political struggle in hybrid forms rooted in inspiration rather than appropriation: thus visions like hope, desire, dignity, reciprocity, solidarity, and political imaginaries become mobile, globalizing principles, offshoots that unpredictably weave throughout disparate struggles and challenge the seemingly prevailing logic of neoliberal capitalism. They are echoes resonating in myriad timbres throughout a rhizome as new spaces for political possibilities. In this ethnography, I do not claim that the cases under study represent an emergent, ideal-typical form of solidarity produced by the resonance of diverse struggles within the space of globalization from below. I prefer to look within the day-to-day practice of solidarity, where we might find the emergence of autonomous and horizontal relations of people, relations that shift and evolve over time but are nonetheless important aspects of solidarity as a political relationship. I return to this discussion in the concluding chapter, but for now it is important to illuminate two central threads, key kinds of relationships and practices that tie together solidarity as a political possibility – autonomy and horizontality – and their relation to the above discussion.

Recently, the work of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2000, 2005, 2009) has popularized in North America what is already a long, vibrant discussion in Europe on 'autonomist Marxism.' In essence, the autonomist perspective, so named because it starts not from capital but from the autonomy of the 'working class,' holds that capitalism depends upon and is propelled by the energy and activity of those who work within it. As the prominent autonomist Harry Cleaver has argued, "[p]recisely because capital seeks to

intervene and shape all of life, all of life's rebels, each nook and cranny of it becomes a site of insurgency against this subordination" (Cleaver and De Angelis 1993). Thus every space becomes a possible site of resistance and refusal. Autonomy is not simply a characteristic but a relationship within which systems of domination and subordination are either accepted or challenged.

With respect to the movements confronting neoliberal capitalism, the question of autonomy has sparked much debate. Some, for example, question the notion of subordinate groups 'taking power' (Holloway 2002), and along with it the character of power itself. While power relations abound among the multitude, the critical question is to what extent 'power-with' can overcome tendencies towards 'power-over.' With respect to such tensions within spaces like the World Social Forum and the emergence of powerful multinational NGOs, more recent discussions among activists and academics revolve around the impact of what some have called the 'Non-Profit Industrial Complex' (NPIC), which consists primarily of the foundations of 'philanthrocapitalists' and state-funded agencies (cf. Barker 2007b; Bishop and Green 2008; Edwards; INCITE! et al. 2007; Roelofs 2003). At the core of this discussion is power as a relationship. Dylan Rodríguez (2007, 21-22) defines the NPIC as "a set of symbiotic relationships that link political and financial technologies of state and owning class control with surveillance over public political ideology, including and especially emergent progressive and leftist social movements, since about the mid-1970s," arguing that the NPIC manages and controls dissent by incorporating dissenters into the state-capital apparatus. For Andrea Smith (2007) the NPIC does not confront but rather reproduces and serves the interests of capital so as to:

Monitor and control social justice movements; divert public monies into private hands through foundations; manage and control dissent in order to make the world safe for capitalism; redirect activist energies into career-based

modes of organizing instead of mass-based organizing capable of actually transforming society; allow corporations to mask their exploitative and colonial work practices through ‘philanthropic’ work; [and] encourage social movements to model themselves after capitalist structures rather than to challenge them (3).

The NPIC’s influence over groups from ‘the below’ has prompted Michael Barker (2007) to ask, “do capitalists fund revolutions?” But the issue of autonomy goes beyond the question of funding. Close connections to state and capital through the NPIC ultimately engender a “social movement culture that is non-collaborative, narrowly-focussed and competitive” (Smith 2007, 10) – all of which are inimical to all fundamental notions of solidarity. Thus the kind of solidarity described in this thesis is inextricably linked to the question of autonomy as a component of the relationships within and among ‘solidarity’ groups as well as with other agents of globalization.

‘Horizontality’ also implies relationships. In many cases, horizontality is viewed in contrast to vertical structures within and among organizations and groups. As Gwyn Williams (2008) describes in her ethnography of ‘alterglobalization’ activists in Southern France, the concept of horizontality directly confronts both structure and power in practice:

In a vertical structure, a president sits at the top of an association, which is governed by a formal set of regulations. There is a delegation of authority and decision-making, made possible by a series of hierarchically arranged offices. Roles are well-defined within a clear set of parameters. Meetings are governed by statutes and formal procedure, with agenda, minutes, and voting. In a horizontal organization, in contrast, there is no fixed hierarchy, no president, no statutes governing meetings, no permanent chair, no formal rules, decision by consensus rather than vote, and minutes, as a formal record of proceedings, are rarely kept. Everyone, I was told, can contribute as and when they desire, and, in this sense, the movement and meetings are considered ‘participative’ (58).

Horizontal relationships that encourage the active and direct democratic participation of solidarity providers and beneficiaries form the basis for mutual intra-group solidarity through

the rejection of hierarchical structures and relations of power. In *Horizontalism*, a series of conversations with social movement activists in post-2001 Argentina, the primary interlocutor, Marina Sitrin, notes that when activists use the term ‘autonomy’ they mean not only to distinguish themselves from the state and other hierarchical institutions but also to imply different forms of relationships with each other, such as practicing *autogestión* (‘self-management’), creating new notions of protagonism and subjectivity, and favouring “direct, democratic participation” in community life (Sitrin 2006, 4-5). *Horizontalidad* (‘horizontality’, or ‘horizontalism’) not only implies a flat plane of non-hierarchical relationships; it is the practical basis for alternative social relations rooted in what Sitrin calls *política afectiva* (‘affective politics’). In many ways, the sort of horizontal relationships Sitrin and others have observed among many Latin American social movement participants reflects that sort of affective politics; that is, friendship as a beginning for solidaristic politics. Where these kinds of practices are emphasized, issues typical to the discussion on solidarity, such as paternalism and inequality, are constantly discussed and addressed. That does not imply that such challenges are overcome, but the important observation is that they are constantly on the agenda of groups seeking to transform human relations – the practice of politics – in ways that might prefigure alternative futures.

By now, it is likely clear that the focus of this analysis is rooted in David Graeber’s (2004) notion of an ‘anarchist anthropology’. The mode of inquiry guiding the chapters that follow reflects considerations for solidarity as a living concept, an active political process, examining not what people might or should do but what they are actually doing. Ethnography is thus indispensable for examining the kinds of questions this study is concerned with and moving beyond ideal-typical interpretations to tease out the implicit logics behind what are incredibly complex and dynamic social practices. Like the intersecting

and spontaneously shifting lines in a rhizome, the construction of solidarity is an unpredictable process visible in fragments, which exhibit the resonance of autonomous and horizontal relations as prefigurative political possibilities, as threads unravelled and woven together by people from disparate places and with unique histories into a multi-coloured fabric.

3: CANADA: LA CHIVA¹

*Eventually, I stumbled upon a group of people who were a bit more connected to what I was feeling and what I wanted to do. And I went for it.
– La Chiva member Oscar G.*

Political action is a conversation with desire. For La Chiva, initially, the desire to work politically in solidarity with Colombia does not begin at one specific point and for all members. What we can say is that an important component of that collective desire can be found in the histories of its Colombian members and their impulse to continue in a different context the political lives they had been forced to leave behind in Colombia. This chapter charts the beginnings of La Chiva, then called ‘La Chiva: Colombia Solidarity Group,’ providing a snapshot of the political histories of its initial members, and the realization of solidarity work at the University of Alberta campus from August 2006 to March 2007. In particular, it hones in on the disconnect between radical visions of university student life and the challenge of confronting the pervasive logic of neoliberalism on a Canadian university campus, ultimately outlining the terrain in which La Chiva was to gain a measure of political experience before embarking on a period of discovery, reflection, and transformation.

3.1 Beginnings

When I first went to Colombia in the spring of 2005, I bought a picture from a street vendor in Santa Marta, a city on country’s north coast. It was a drawing, and having a very naïve understanding of art, I bought it believing that the man who sold it to me was the

¹ By the name ‘La Chiva’ I am referring to the group that has operated under two names at different times: ‘La Chiva, Colombia Solidarity Group’ (2006-2007) and the ‘La Chiva Collective’ (2007 -).

artist. It was not until many months later, unfurling the paper from its protective tube at home in Canada, that I realized it was a very crude print. Still, I liked its crudeness, its smudges, incomplete lines, and apparent disregard for perspective. It was conventional and maybe even inauthentic, but at least it was honest; I was the mug who had believed otherwise. On the 'drawing' was a crowded *chiva*, one of those colourfully decorated buses found in many parts of Latin America, the ones that seem to be able to (precariously but reliably) carry hundreds of people through even the roughest of terrains, rain or shine. The chiva in the drawing is full of people, but it also carries bags and boxes of goods, providing an informal, inexpensive and convenient way for people to get around and make a living. What ultimately endeared me to the drawing was the way in which the bus deliberately turned a dangerous corner on a mountain road – and at considerable speed, given the pressure evident on one side of the machine's suspension – all the while seemingly on the verge of falling off the cliff. I framed it and hung it in my living room.

In August of 2006, I hosted a small meeting at my house that included five Colombians and myself. Most were students at the University of Alberta, in Edmonton, Canada, and had come together through introductions by mutual friends with the purpose of starting a Colombia solidarity group at the university. We wanted to 'do something.' At that first meeting, after introductions and a brief discussion of the political situation in Colombia, we thought it essential to come up with a name. It was the quietest moment, as we were excited about the possibilities of what we could achieve: here were several Colombian exiles, veterans of the vibrant Colombian student movements of the late 1990s that fought the privatization of public universities, were forced to leave under exceptionally harsh circumstances, but who were now ready to work again. Whatever they could do in Canada might be incomparable to their experiences and achievements in Colombia, but it could still

leave a mark in the generally apathetic political environment of Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. I was there, too, trying desperately to follow along and participate with my limited Spanish and understanding of Colombia's complexities. "I think I've got it," said Angelica, a native of Bogotá, anthropology student and single mother. "La Chiva," she announced. There was instant consensus and approval. As for what the group wanted to do, however, there was much less clarity. Like the lines in the framed drawing that gave Angelica the idea for the name, political vision would only become clear at certain points over the next year; more than anything, our work might appear as abrasive smudges, faded and incomplete marks on a page, but it was still possible to make out that something was there, outlines of solidarity. For the group's members, the name 'La Chiva' became a metaphor evoked to address (or sometimes dodge) difficult questions: "Where is this chiva going?" meant there was a lack of coherent political discussion, vision and strategy that would orient the actions of those of us 'on board'; "We need a map!" highlighted the difficulty of situating the group within broader Canada-Colombia solidarity efforts; "This chiva is running out of gas!" reflected pressures associated with burning out and confronting the reality of continuing political work beyond the university as well as a disjuncture between limitless imaginaries and possibilities and sobering realities; and, of course, "I'm getting off this chiva!" emphasized the challenges of intra-group solidarity and broader systemic pressures faced by would-be contentious actors in the 'real world.'

* * *

Those initial meetings led to some articulation of what the group wanted to do, outlined in La Chiva's first mission statement:

Our goal is to foster awareness of the Colombian social and political situation through proactive campaigns that reflect our commitment to social

change. Our events will include film screenings, boycotts against multinational companies involved in the violation of human rights in Colombia, conferences, the distribution of flyers, and other activities that we believe will contribute to the development of our goal. Through our actions, we will reach the public both inside and outside the University of Alberta (La Chiva Collective 2006).

These modest goals hint at some observations about the group's initial orientation and mode of action. First, the overarching theme is "awareness" with an emphasis on Colombia, recognizing that, as with other groups carrying out political work on distant issues, the starting point was to situate the "social and political" context of Colombia for those with either superficial or no understanding of far-away contexts and issues. Second, the scope of the group's activities was equally modest but perhaps appropriate for its limited capacities. Operating as a campus-based student group could only realistically reach the University of Alberta campus and *perhaps* the broader Edmonton public.² Finally, if the group's goal was to put Colombia and its conflict on the map the means were exclusively campaign-oriented. That the group explicitly named its tactics in its mission statement is perhaps unconventional; however, a more important observation is that they are situated outside a clearly articulated and politically-informed strategy: in other words, the group operated (for better or worse) under the assumption that they would reach their goals through carrying out tactics A, B and C, and avoided the political analyses and ideological discussions that logically preclude the development of strategies. These decidedly precarious foundations might foreshadow some critically important dynamics of La Chiva; but at least they were honest.

² With 36,000 students, the University of Alberta has one of the largest student populations in Canada. However, Edmonton is a relatively small city with roughly 750,000 inhabitants in 2006.

3.2 Histories

Driving from the Colombian llanos, from the Pacific Ocean to the Atlantic, up and down the Andes, carrying plantain, coffee, guayaba, dreams, hope, and much more. La Chiva is coming to Edmonton to tell our Colombian reality. Come and ride with us!
– *La Chiva member Erick's poetic aside to the group's original mission statement*³

Behind every political actor, collective or individual, are stories replete with dreams and desire driving them forward. If we are to understand the conditions in which La Chiva was founded, an appropriate starting point might be to consider how the political histories of its members influenced its formation and development. Of the members of La Chiva in the autumn of 2006, five of seven were exiled members of the Colombian student movement, which at the end of the 1990s was an important social movement that emerged in a critical political moment in Colombia. The Association of Colombian University Students (ACEU) was a coalition of diverse student organizations at that time, reaching a pinnacle of activity in 1999 with massive mobilizations, occupations and other actions. The focal point was opposition to Law 100, which sought to extend neoliberal reforms in the areas of health and education. Similar to neoliberal reforms sweeping other parts of Latin America at the time, the encroachment of the private sector in public universities, from the perspective of leftist student organizations and their allies, was often understood in radical terms: Law 100 meant the privatization of education and the continuation of social conflict. During our conversation in Calgary in 2009, Augusto B., a prominent Colombian student leader and later member of La Chiva, explained,

What we were trying to do was defend public education as the means for the construction of a country. [...] We strongly believed that an educated population would be the basis for peace and social justice, the dream of the country that we wanted. We saw education as an opportunity for that. [...]

³ La Chiva's 2006 mission statement, alongside which this text appears, is archived online at <http://lachiva.apirg.org/about.php>

At the core was the question of what kind of high school or university we want. It wasn't what we want from the university but what kind of university we want fundamentally. Professors can guide us, but it should be up to students to make decisions about the university. Without students, the university is just a think tank.⁴

In the late 1990s, social conflict between Colombian social and popular movements and the state was reaching a fever pitch, especially as the government under President Andrés Pastrana began the implementation phase of Plan Colombia. While it negotiated with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) guerrillas, the longest surviving armed insurgent group in Latin America, the Colombian government and its supporters simultaneously crushed unarmed opposition movements. Right-wing paramilitary groups, under the auspices of the United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia (AUC), were also expanding their operations and political influence, and by the late 1990s, many student leaders and militants were declared “military objectives” and “enemies of the state”⁵ by paramilitary groups that were ideological allies of successive Colombian administrations (Hristov 2009). Many of the initial Colombian members of La Chiva were among the first student activists to receive paramilitary threats at the end of the 1990s because of their political involvement and, along with hundreds of their *compañeros*,⁶ were forced into exile. Many found their way, grudgingly, to Canada. For La Chiva member Erick G., the trauma of displacement remains:

Leaving Colombia created for me a lot of resentment. I think I still haven't recovered; I haven't gone back in eight years, and [the experience] created a lot of fear, insecurity... I didn't know who I was anymore. [...] Now I have

⁴ Author's interview with 'Augusto B.,' member of the La Chiva Collective (Calgary, Alberta, Canada), 27 August 2009. See Appendix B for details of formal interviews cited throughout this study.

⁵ The terms “military objectives” and “enemies of the state” were used by 'Oscar G.,' a member of the La Chiva Collective during our conversation in Edmonton, Canada, on 2 September 2009.

⁶ The notion of *compañerismo* does not translate well into English. The closest we might get would be 'colleague' or 'peer,' but each of these words is, arguably, imbued with notions of professionalism. On the other hand, a *compañero* or *compañera* is quite literally 'someone you share bread with'. The difference may not immediately seem noteworthy, but in the context of this study of solidarity, attention to such nuance is important.

to define myself again? What did we do to deserve this? We weren't even violent! What did we do that was so wrong? I ask myself these questions all the time. [...] Leaving [Colombia] and coming to Canada messed with my dreams. The same went for my family, who also had to leave. We were forced to start over again, and it's a process we're all still dealing with every day, even eight years later.

Where they ended up, as immigrants in small towns and cities on the Canadian prairies, meant a number of adjustments: language, weather, culture and dealing with experiences of racism.⁷ Among those shocks was the striking contrast between their political experiences in Colombia and what they saw students doing at Canadian campuses, which they regarded with much derision. Angelica Q. relates her first 'activist' experience in Canada:

We started a group for international students at Red Deer College. The idea was to have fun, a social group. We commemorated International Women's Day, which was definitely the most political thing we did. We wrote a little leaflet explaining why it is commemorated internationally and distributed it around the college. It was interesting because the debate that we heard surprised us. Some people said it shouldn't be commemorated at all, that there is [gender] equality now. [Laughs sarcastically]. That was our first little taste of grassroots activism in a place like Alberta.

The attitudes of students in Canada were one thing; however, it was quite another to be forced to flee a vibrant environment of contentious politics only to end up in one that appeared to so thoroughly embody the system one had been fighting against. Throughout his time at university in Canada, Augusto B. came to understand the university system in Canada in similar terms:

In Canada, the university is already a commodity. Each university is a brand that says different things in the job market. In my case, the brand 'University of Calgary' tells employers that I have been well indoctrinated, that if I

⁷ At the time of their arrival, in the early 2000s, socially conservative parties had ruled Alberta without interruption for roughly 65 years. They continue to do so, and the bastions of conservative support remain concentrated in the province's rural towns and small cities.

passed, I probably share their [neoliberal] worldview, or at least can put up with it enough to get the grades, that I won't misbehave.

His experience with student activist groups suggests not only complacency about and participation in the university as a “commodity”-producing machine; he suggests that ‘activism’ itself can also be seen as a way to improve one’s market competitiveness:

I realized that student activism, the way I understand it, doesn't exist [in Alberta]. Many of the student clubs here seem to be about resume building [...]. Student unions don't get involved with probably the most important issue for student life: tuition. They might lobby, but there's no mobilization. A student union president is elected for a year and puts it on his or her resume and makes contacts all along the way. Some of these people go on to work for corporations and NGOs. [...] Other people want to work doing human rights impact assessments and corporate social responsibility stuff. They join groups, but don't take risks. I've actually heard people say, “if EnCana ever finds out that I was involved in ‘activism,’ I might not be able to get a job working for them in Ecuador.”⁸ So the ‘activist world’ [in Canada] is watered-down, and in many cases, it's not even activism from the way I see it.

For Augusto, beneath the surface of many activists’ motivations is the logic of market competition, whereby activism is a means to a career and not an end in itself, a political struggle. This observation contrasts sharply with Colombian La Chiva members’ experiences before coming to Canada. Erick G. explains the difference: “When we were in Colombia, we might have been broke, not a peso, but we were there, just heart and guts. But [in Canada], it's a much more organized and set approach: you can do or say this, but don't do or say that.” Their comments speak to the artificial boundaries confronted by many activists, which often define and regulate what are deemed appropriate forms of protest and resistance. This explains another noteworthy observation from their testimonies on the context of political action in Alberta: their refusal to be identified as ‘activists.’

⁸ EnCana is a prominent Alberta-based multinational company active in the oil and gas sector. Its operations in Ecuador have been quite controversial and are the subject of the documentary film *Risky Business: EnCana and the OCP in Ecuador* (Drost 2003).

Considering their criticisms of ‘activist culture’ and the decidedly sterile political environment in Canada, it is perhaps difficult to understand why they would want to form La Chiva in the first place. Part of an explanation has to do with how they came to manage the tension between their feelings of fear and desire. In terms of fear, their testimonies reveal three central tendencies. To state the obvious, there is the fear that the repercussions of political action would re-emerge, resulting in further displacement, especially for those whose immigration status put them more at the mercy of the system than others. Memory often drives this fear. For example, Oscar G., a La Chiva founding member and exiled former member of the ACEU, compares dealing with his experiences in Colombia to falling from a motorcycle: “you don’t just get back on it again, right? That fear doesn’t heal that quickly.” Then there is also the fear that the process of their victimization (in Colombia) and re-victimization (as immigrant refugees in Canada) would have been for naught: “I could just shut up, but that would mean that everything I went through in Colombia was for nothing” (Augusto B.). The third related tendency is the fear of passivity. Erick G. explained, “years go by, you read the news from [Colombia], and you feel like nothing changes. You react to that by becoming passive. But being like that is like turning into a rock, a piece of furniture.” On the other hand, while these fears are driven by memories of repression, the potential futility of the past, and perhaps even acquiescence, the desire to confront these forces ultimately pulled them back into a political world. The impulse to re-engage politically in Canada is seen as part of the process of recovering an identity taken away through the violence of exile. When he started attending La Chiva meetings, Erick G. later told me he felt a deep urge to “get back into this,” feeling “this is who I am.”

Tempering that tension was the important element of finding each other in Canada and the trust that was achieved through an understanding of shared experiences, past and

present. However, while participation in the student movement in Colombia may have created some unity, there was still little discussion of their political pasts; rather, the details of that shared experience were inferred. As Angelica Q. explained to me,

No one asked me, and I wouldn't ask anyone [why or how they left Colombia].... I knew the guys were part of the student movement, based on their age and where they studied (like me, at a public university). But even after years of being friends and working with them in Canada – my former partner was their roommate! – I still don't know which organizations they were a part of in Colombia.... All we knew was that we were now in Canada, and that's all that mattered, as long as we had trust and a desire to work from Canada for Colombia.

The past was taboo. This arrangement would be problematic later, as this hesitancy within La Chiva culminated in an ironic avoidance of political discussions about Colombia even in the day-to-day activities, “so we wouldn't discover each other,” as Angelica put it. I will return to this dynamic later, but for now, it is important to note two elements that brought these people together to form La Chiva in late August of 2006. First, the unique political experiences of Colombia represented a tumultuous past that resonated in the present; in spite of the shock of Canada as a new political environment, shared desires to work again in solidarity with the movements they left behind were reconstituted, forming a subliminal basis of trust that tempered (but neither would nor could conquer) those fears. The second was a major assumption: that trust could be achieved through practice alone, with scant ideological debate. Indeed, it was based on this assumption that La Chiva began its first campaign having only sketched outlines of what it wanted to do.

3.3 Action

The anti-Coca-Cola campaign was huge. I mean, we may not have been able to change a lot of things; but we weren't the only ones [involved in the campaign]. At the end of the day, at least we made a lot of people aware of Colombia. – Erick G., La Chiva

We proudly unfurled our banner at the office of the Alberta Public Interest Research Group (APIRG) in the busy Hub Mall area of the University of Alberta campus. Aaron Chubb, APIRG's then working group coordinator, who had recently approved La Chiva's application for some modest funding, looked on with surprise and excitement. We had spent two evenings painting a five metre-wide banner with the words, "Coke Kills: Colombian trade unionists are being killed for trying to fight for better conditions." From the right hand side of the banner was the image of a large gun, pointing to the left and its barrel in the shape of a Coca-Cola bottle.⁹ At that moment, Aaron knew we were serious and had the kind of enthusiasm necessary to propel forward what would turn out to be an eventful and controversial campaign at an otherwise quiet, complacent, and conservative campus. Throughout the autumn of 2006 and the spring of 2007, La Chiva members would carry that banner everywhere, hanging it from a number of places at the university – without official authorization – and with the explicit intention of generating awareness that Coca-Cola's pervasive advertising on campus, its symbolic and material presence, said much about the university's corporate orientation and represented a connection to Colombia. The banner drops signalled the possibility of contention.

The 'anti-Coca-Cola' campaign at the University of Alberta campus took place roughly between September 2006 and March 2007.¹⁰ It featured the emergence of a coalition of student and non-student individuals, groups and organizations called Students Against Killer Coke (SAK Coke), in which members of La Chiva played an important role. La Chiva's

⁹ For footage the banner mentioned here, see 00:00 to 00:34 of the video at the following internet link [Accessed March 22, 2010]: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c3_s00ZZc-E.

¹⁰ This account of the anti-Coca-Cola campaign at the University of Alberta between 2006 and 2007 is neither comprehensive nor authoritative. The campaign involved an array of groups with competing positions and a variety of motivations and levels of involvement. This section emphasizes the impact of the anti-Coca-Cola campaign on members of La Chiva and vice versa and from their perspectives. It also relies on testimonies of La Chiva members and textual sources available to the public.

participation in the campaign involved three key motivations: to emphasize what was perceived to be a local link between the University of Alberta and Colombia; to encourage a discussion on the role of corporations at the university; and to consolidate La Chiva's intra-group cohesion and build on foundations of trust through an action-centred campaign.

3.3.1 Background

In 1998, the University of Alberta and the Students' Union (SU) signed an exclusivity contract for campus beverage sales with the Coca-Cola Company.¹¹ The university was a "Coke Campus," which meant that, in exchange for \$524,377 in annual funding over ten years (roughly \$17 per student per year), the only cold beverages sold (or given away) on campus were required to be from Coca-Cola's product line. The company had bought itself a monopoly. But in May of 2008, that contract was set to expire, and a 'new' contract was under negotiation.¹² SAKCoke members identified the moment as an opportunity to expose the university's relationship with corporations. Such a campaign might, in turn, mobilize students to evaluate the situation and perhaps demand an end to such contracts in the future. Certain that the University Administration would not carry out such changes on its own, SAKCoke set its sights on the SU, an institution that appeared bound to reflect the interests of students. Furthermore, the SU had implemented an Ethical Purchasing Policy

¹¹ Meeting minutes from an October 30, 2001 Students' Council session provide a chronology of the deal between Coca-Cola and the University of Alberta: discussions with the company in December 1996 and the University Administration brought the deal to Students' Council in October 1997, "to overwhelming approval." For Coca-Cola, the exclusivity contract was attractive "because it gave [the company] the opportunity to gain a loyal customer base." For the university, "prices of Coke products would be fixed for a minimum of three years; athletics [programs] would receive a 'face lift,' and funding would go to bursaries and scholarships." In February 1998, the agreement was sent to plebiscite and was approved, and the Students' Council ratified the agreement the following month (Students' Council 2001).

¹² Because the University of Alberta campus had not reached the quotas set out in the 1998 agreement, Coca-Cola reserved the legal right to unilaterally extend its exclusivity status until May 2010, without paying any money to the university. Hence, from the perspective of proponents of the agreement, the only way to retain Coca-Cola funding from 2008 to 2010 was to sign another exclusivity agreement until 2015. Save for the campaigning of opponents, who emphasized ethical arguments against the deal, the debate was seen largely in economic terms: it was about financing, and students would 'lose out' if the deal were not extended.

that made certain ethical demands of the companies with which it did business.¹³ The strategic logic was that the student-led campaign directed at the level of the SU would reverberate at higher levels. The campaign had an explicitly anti-corporate dimension that came to include fragments of a vision for the university imported from Colombian student movements. For example, as we walked once with the banner, Oscar G. explained to me that vision concisely and applied it to Canada: “without students, there is no university and there is no Coke contract.” The campaign was thus about exposing the privatized university: a ‘market’ like any other, with students seen as an emergent base of Coca-Cola consumers and, more broadly, reproductive agents of the neoliberal system.

The second component of La Chiva’s participation in the campaign revolved around seeing the Coca-Cola-university-SU nexus as one of the most obvious local connections to the Colombian conflict. In recent years, campuses across North America and Europe have been the sites of numerous anti-corporate campaigns; but perhaps the most widespread and transnational has been the targeting of Coca-Cola and its alleged relationship to human rights and environmental abuses in places like Colombia and India.¹⁴ In the 1980s, similar international campaigns against Coca-Cola enjoyed some measure of success in pressuring company bosses in Atlanta to exert pressure on their bottling franchises, particularly in the Global South.¹⁵ It was a sort of ‘boomerang effect’ (Keck and Sikkink 1998) but applied to corporate head offices rather than to the state. In Colombia, the issues revolved around the murders of trade unionists, allegedly by paramilitaries tied to local managers, and the

¹³ The Ethical Purchasing Policy is an SU bylaw, the text of which is available online at: http://www.su.ualberta.ca/student_government/rules/operating_policies/general_operations.

¹⁴ By 2007, 192 university and college campuses, high schools and elementary schools across North America and Europe had carried out efforts against Coca-Cola (see Killer Coke n.d.).

¹⁵ In 1981, in response to a widespread campaign largely waged in the North, in 1981, Coca-Cola refused to renew its contract with a franchise bottling plant in Guatemala after the murders of union leaders there. As a result, those killings stopped.

dismantlement of the National Union of Food Industry Workers (SINALTRAINAL), one of the country's most radically contentious and outspoken unions that once included a significant portion of workers at Coca-Cola bottling plants. That Colombian Coca-Cola workers' murders and *en masse* resignations had neither been acknowledged nor condemned by the multinational was a significant point of contention for the international boycott campaign. La Chiva's position was that, for what amounted to 'corporate pocket change,' as the slogan went, the university and the SU made students if not complicit in human rights abuses in Colombia then willingly ignorant of them with every Coca-Cola purchase.

3.3.2 The campaign

The campaign began with a series of banner drops, leafleting and several well-attended presentations. While it counted on some limited support from some members of the SU Students' Council, a negative reaction from some of that organization's more conservative members was swift. For example, during a club fair, La Chiva was not allowed to have a table with information on Coca-Cola in Colombia on the grounds that it would interfere with the interests of an SU business partner. The Students' Council also welcomed Coca-Cola Company representatives to address one of their meetings on December 5, 2006. SAKCoke members were given twenty-eight hours notice, and the timing of the presentation meant that many were subsumed by exams and term papers and thus could not attend.¹⁶ When SAKCoke was later invited to respond to Coca-Cola's presentation during a meeting on January 7 2007, they arrived only to witness the Students' Council debate whether or not

¹⁶ Audio recordings of the meeting posted on the Internet featured representatives from Coca-Cola's Communications department and a "Coca-Cola employee in Colombia" addressing the Students' Council about the situation in Colombia, arguing that the accusations facing Coca-Cola at campuses around the world were unfounded and that Coca-Cola was interested in promoting peace in the country. It later became known that the man speaking was indeed a Colombian Coca-Cola employee but worked from its Atlanta public relations office. Audio files of these presentations are available online (accessed May 12, 2010): <<<http://dl.su.ualberta.ca/2006-2007/SC16-02%20Present%20C%20%28i%29.MP3>>>.

they should be allowed to speak at all, for fear that the SU's "business partners" might perceive the mere presence of an anti-Coca-Cola group to be an "unprofessional" and "deceitful" move for the organization.¹⁷ In the end, the group was allowed to speak for thirty minutes; it was just enough time to present counterarguments to Coca-Cola's public relations campaign and present the demands of SINALTRAINAL.

As for campus media, opinion editorials in the student paper, *The Gateway*, echoed the perspectives of some SU executive members, spinning the anti-Coca-Cola campaign as a misguided anti-corporate quest. The ethical questions about Coca-Cola, Colombia and the university were either disregarded or treated with contempt and sarcasm, as in this representative passage from an unnamed *Gateway* writer:

[SAKCoke's] ability to inform students without bias by plastering our campus' doors and bathroom walls with stickers is commendable, and will certainly drive a multi-billion dollar empire away from the University, as well as grant Colombians the freedom to choose which of the many other death squads in Colombia gets to kidnap their families (*The Gateway* 2007b).

SAKCoke members did hand out graphic stickers condemning Coca-Cola to students, but it was students who "[plastered] *our* campus" with them (*ibid. emphasis added*). In *The Gateway*, La Chiva and SAKCoke were continuously held up to idealized standards of journalism, which seemed incredulous for a coalition of political actors. Of course the anti-Coca-Cola campaigners were 'biased;' they were projecting a political position. Although they feigned otherwise, so were *Gateway* editorialists and writers. In one article entitled "The Dope on Coke" (*The Gateway* 2007c) much of the evidence 'disproving' SAKCoke's accusations against the company was provided from *cokefacts.org*, a website run by the Coca-Cola

¹⁷ Audio recordings of the SU's January Student Council meeting during which these events occurred were available in MP3 format online (accessed May 12, 2010): <<<http://dl.su.ualberta.ca/2006-2007/SC17-02%206C%20part%201.MP3>>>; <<<http://dl.su.ualberta.ca/2006-2007/SC17-04%206C%20Part%202.MP3>>>; and <<<http://dl.su.ualberta.ca/2006-2007/SC17-05%206C%20part%203.MP3>>>.

Company specifically to counter the arguments of the international boycott campaign.

Campus media thus seemed to have taken on a form of pro-corporate activism of its own, or at the very least a disdain for those shaking up complacency on campus.

3.3.3 'Pre-campaigning'

The extension of the Coca-Cola exclusivity contract was a contentious issue on campus, but the University Administration was steadfast in its resolve to keep the deal. Thus the Students' Council moved that the issue would be decided through a plebiscite during the March 2007 student elections. This meant that the anti-Coca-Cola campaign in which La Chiva had been participating was, as of February 6 2007, suddenly subject to the SU's election by-laws and regulations, particularly on rules pertaining to 'pre-campaigning.' Before La Chiva and SAKCoke had decided whether they would participate in the plebiscite, a student lodged a pre-campaigning complaint against what would be the 'No' side, the side opposed to extending the Coca-Cola exclusivity contract. The complaint cited hundreds of stickers and posters around the campus denouncing Coca-Cola's attitude in Colombia. With one fell swoop, the SU's Chief Returning Officer (CRO) revoked ninety percent of the campaign budget for whoever would take up the 'No' side.¹⁸ Thus the 'official' campaign against Coca-Cola would be run on a strict budget of \$100. In an open letter to the SU by members of La Chiva circulated by email, the group argued that the CRO's ruling was in contravention of their constitutional rights because violation of SU election regulations (interpreted by La Chiva as openly talking about the Coca-Cola-university-Colombia connection during the 'pre-campaigning' period) threatened their members with academic

¹⁸ In response to this ruling, another student complained that the presence of Coca-Cola advertising on the campus prior to the SU's plebiscite was, under the CRO's logic, also 'pre-campaigning.' The complaint was unsuccessful.

penalties under the Student Code of Conduct. It was censorship in the defence of the SU's 'democracy.'

There was much internal debate with respect to La Chiva's participation in the (non-binding) plebiscite. On the one hand, by participating, the group would recognize and be bound by the SU's election regulations, which were clearly being used to stop the campaign from succeeding. On the other hand, mere participation in the plebiscite would open spaces to talk about Colombia in public forums and debates; 'success' would be seen in terms of the spaces opened for debate more than the results of the vote. In the end, most members of La Chiva decided to participate, along with a more expansive coalition of other, decidedly more moderate, groups concerned with social justice and human rights and other sympathetic only because of what they saw as the unfair the response of the CRO.¹⁹ With posters made of recycled paper and painted with inexpensive children's paints and 1000 black and white photocopied handbills, the campaign seemed futile given Coca-Cola's pervasive advertising and the 'Yes' side's access to a budget ten times larger.²⁰ Still, the spaces were used to explain SAKCoke's position and talk about Colombia. It was 'heart and guts.' The results of the vote were surprising: 57% in favour of extending the exclusivity agreement and 43% against. By the time the plebiscite was carried out, however, the university and SU had already finalized a new agreement with Coca-Cola until 2015.²¹ Ironically, perhaps because of the controversy, or as a reward for weathering it, the amount of money the university would receive from

¹⁹ Some of these student groups included members of Journalists for Human Rights, OXFAM and Amnesty International. In many cases, activists participated in the plebiscite campaign on their own accord and not as members of their organizations, which were loath to endorse anything related to the international boycott.

²⁰ The pro-Coca-Cola side had 10 times the budget but also a plebiscite question that worked in its favour insofar as it mentioned only the financial benefits of the deal and excluded all ethical arguments.

²¹ During a Student Council question period after the plebiscite SU President Samantha Power was asked of remaining business for the new Coca-Cola contract since the plebiscite had been passed. According to *The Gateway*, "[Power] said that the contract had been finalized prior to the plebiscite and that there wasn't much left to do save signing it" (The Gateway 2007a).

Coca-Cola turned out to be even greater than before, resulting in a stronger financial relationship among the institutions.

3.3.4 Impacts

Overall, La Chiva had an important impact on the campaign. On the one hand, La Chiva members brought enthusiasm; a connection to Colombia that became the focus of the SAKCoke's ethical arguments; and a radical perspective that connected the Colombian conflict to the university's corporate orientation. On the other hand, these contributions had varying degrees of effectiveness. The group's enthusiasm, expressed in the constant barrage of leafleting and hundreds of stickers applied to Coca-Cola machines around campus, was interpreted by some writers in *The Gateway* and members of the SU as "vandalism," and may have alienated some who would prefer a more cautious, 'Canadian' approach. However, as Oscar G. put it during our conversation in 2009, "Edmonton is a city that is against anything that, you know, refuses to be polite. But with the enthusiasm of [other members of La Chiva] for what they wanted to accomplish ... we created a little revolution."

Intervening in an environment of complacency was an important component of La Chiva's approach to the Coca-Cola campaign, but the reaction it generated allowed SAKCoke's opponents to disregard the campaign as the work of obnoxious activists. It goes without saying that most students at the University of Alberta were not interested in a "revolution" of any sort. However, campaign tactics were also linked to generating awareness of Colombia's social and political situation. While public discourse in general, and most *Gateway* articles in particular, seemed to accept the assumption that Colombia's problems had little to do with the University of Alberta campus, the very presence and profile of the Coca-Cola issue forced the campaign's opponents and proponents alike to at

least locate Colombia as a central component of the public discourse on the beverage agreement. Presentations at public debates during the plebiscite campaign allowed for a relatively unmediated platform from which La Chiva members emphasized the complexity of the Colombian conflict and the ethical concerns of what they saw as the University of Alberta's connection to it. Finally, members of La Chiva projected a radical and confrontational critique of the university's relationship with corporations. While the response of their critics might have been less venomous had such an approach not been taken, it was successful in that it exposed an issue, pushed it into public debate, and thereby challenged indifference to some extent. 'Colombia' became unavoidable. The pro-Coca-Cola reaction revealed the extent to which they were prepared to stifle open debate, but the experience of that reaction may have had some unintended consequences. In our conversation in 2009, Angelica Q. explained,

It was interesting how the university and Coca-Cola reacted so strongly to the campaign. They even threatened some of the people voicing the campaign to be penalized from (*sic*) the university. But at the same time, that gave us some kind of unity as La Chiva. We had an identity that we built and projected.

Angelica's observations lead us to the ways in which the experience of the anti-Coca-Cola campaign impacted La Chiva. On the whole, the campaign consolidated the group and confirmed to some extent the notion that intra-group trust could be solidified through the day-to-day practice of political action. But there were several challenges that seemed to overshadow the effort. The first was that, after the plebiscite, La Chiva engaged in little sustained action around the Coca-Cola issue. It was a campaign that seemed to follow a predictable pattern: it begins, ignites some level of engagement and success, reaches a climax,

and for better or worse, seems to simply end.²² The issue is there, but successful or not, disappears without fanfare, often failing to lead to broader questions about the orientation of global societies. Another challenge centred on La Chiva's relations with other groups.

Angelica's observations provide some illustration:

That campaign made me realize that the way we were facing the other movements or organizations at the university was complicated. We always assumed that, because we were Colombian and came from a struggle, Canadians and their kinds of organizations kind of sucked. They didn't know how to do things. They aren't really belligerent. They don't riot, but we do. [...] But I think when we did the anti-Coke campaign that gave us some kind of new understanding. We did more kinds of grassroots things, but from there we were able to see what kinds of things [Canadian groups did] differently.

The experience of the anti-Coca-Cola campaign signalled a political environment where engaging with other groups, allies or not, might elicit considerations for a much more delicate strategic approach. While it would be simplistic to assume that La Chiva members believed they could transform student activist culture by bringing lessons from more "belligerent" experiences in Colombia, the attitude that underlay La Chiva's initial approach may have been neither inclusive nor conducive to coalition building; on the contrary, the group's attitudes seemed to convey a sort of disdain towards other activist groups.

Ultimately, La Chiva encountered what economist and long-time US activist Michael Albert (1998) has called the 'stickiness' problem of the left, whereby people who do not already share a progressive or left perspective tend to reject leftist proposals for a variety of reasons, perhaps including the way its messages are articulated and communicated. In a place like Edmonton, that was of critical importance for the resonance of the campaign.

²² At a forum in Lima, Peru, in early May 2008, I shared La Chiva's experience with Edgar Páez, SINALTRAINAL's international representative. He lamented that one of the primary challenges of the international campaign against Coca-Cola is that most efforts tend to revolve around high-intensity, short-term campaigns and thus do not engender more sustained, long-term action and engagement.

The first several months of La Chiva's existence were characterized by a flurry of political activity. They brought together radical visions of desire and possibility and transplanted them in a foreign environment. It is difficult to look on that time in terms of successes or failures because the criteria of such had never been clearly defined. La Chiva was an outline, smudged, incomplete and perhaps lacking perspective. It had moved forward without a map, a vision of the kind of solidarity it wanted to promote and practice. In sum, there were many lessons still to be learned about the experience of transnational solidarity work before finding ways in which to practice it.

4: SEEKING SOLIDARITY

Finding solidarity began as an elusive undertaking for members of La Chiva. With all the enthusiasm exhibited during the anti-Coca-Cola campaign, there was still little certainty in terms of what La Chiva perceived itself to be, how it defined solidarity and practiced it. In spite of this lack of clarity, the period in which the anti-Coca-Cola campaign took place was perhaps the closest La Chiva ever came to being a formal organization with meetings, minutes, and members with defined responsibilities. There was a mission statement, a constitution of sorts, but it was hardly adhered to at any point beyond the meeting in which it was originally articulated. Granted, it might have been appropriate to say that La Chiva was concerned with locating Colombia for Canadians, but it remained unanswered how that was seen as ‘solidarity.’ In this chapter, I describe La Chiva’s first encounter with the broader Canada-Colombia solidarity experience, what it looked like, and how La Chiva found itself, for better or worse, on its margins. I discuss the profound influence of those experiences and perspectives on members of La Chiva and their attempts to assume a vision of solidarity that was far beyond their means. Finally, I analyze the conditions that elicited significant transformations for the group.

4.1 Margins

In the ice and snow of Edmonton in January 2007, Angelica, Alejandro and I met downtown. We were going to the airport to collect Manuel Rozental and Justin Podur, two former members of the defunct Canada-Colombia Solidarity Campaign (CCSC) based in

Toronto,¹ whom we had invited to Alberta to give a series of talks on Colombia. As we got onto the highway, there was trouble. Winter driving is normally dangerous in Edmonton, but on this night, it was thirty degrees below zero and we were confronting a terrifying snowstorm. The scene on the road was eerie. Endless snow blasted the windshield and was made brighter by the truck's lights, beyond which was pure darkness save for the odd, faint brake light of a vehicle up ahead. Equally endless were abandoned vehicles on either side of the highway, some of which were overturned in ditches. My eyes were glued to the road, but I could see nothing, so we travelled at less than half the speed limit barely talking. The only way we could locate ourselves on the road was by the sounds of the rumble strips as the truck's tires travelled along its borders, margins beyond which loomed deep ditches. When we finally made it to the airport, we were visibly shaken by the ordeal.

Evidently, Manuel and Justin had been waiting there for some time. When we got to them, they did not shake our hands but hugged us. Their warmth was comforting, and it surprised us: they did not know us at all. In our prior email exchanges, Manuel and Justin had been excited not only to give the talks but also to meet with La Chiva and get a sense from where this unlikely Alberta effort was emerging. They did not ask for an honorarium but simply a “warm” place to stay – a couch would do – and a chance to “think together about follow-up and concrete initiatives.”² Yes, we all said. It was late, and we were all tired but curious and began talking immediately about the details of La Chiva, the CCSC and Colombia. We had forgotten about the road conditions back into the city until we stepped outside again.

¹ After the dissolution of the CCSC, discussed below, several former members formed the *Pueblos en Camino* Collective, which seeks to continue working from the same principles of the CCSC but in a much more informal manner.

² Rozental, Manuel. 2007. Email exchange with author, January 6.

* * *

On the morning before the first presentation at the UofA, we gathered for breakfast with Justin and Manuel, who were staying at my apartment. They shared quite openly their feelings and experiences, what the CCSC had meant as a possibility for international solidarity from Canada and its challenges. Justin and Manuel were critical and reflexive but their experiences also pointed to interests and tendencies within the more entrenched solidarity sector in Canada, which La Chiva members had hardly been aware of.³

The CCSC existed from 2001 to 2003 as a tightly knit coalition of organizations and individuals – Colombians, Canadians and many others – that sought to ‘weave’ together the diverse experiences with neoliberalism in Canada and Colombia into a fabric of reciprocal solidarity and resistance across borders. It carried out workshops on Colombia throughout Canada and, in late August 2001, organized a delegation of thirty Canadians to Colombia “to listen, observe and reflect on the underlying determinants of [the humanitarian] crisis and violence in Colombia, and to develop international solidarity activities to support a peaceful and just resolution to the situation” (CCSC 2001a). Later, it organized a delegation of Colombian social movement leaders to Canada that centred on what the CCSC called Colombia’s ‘invisible struggles.’

4.1.1 Solidarity ‘in minga’

At that time, the CCSC presented a new approach to solidarity work: the effort was collective and based on a set of shared ‘principles of solidarity,’ which meant “all who subscribed to the principles could work under them, but no one could control the process,

³ While I was not recording that meeting, I have since heard this story told and re-told countless times by Manuel and others and supplement the passages that follow with information from the CCSC’s massive document archive (CCSC 2001a) sent to me electronically by Justin Podur.

even if they brought funding or resources to the table” (Podur 2006). The first principle was that solidarity is reciprocal. That meant recognizing Colombia’s problems as not Colombia’s alone but deeply linked to the economic model that pervades and is projected from places like Canada. Consider Podur’s comments in an article on the CCSC:

Colombians didn’t need charity or aid or even ideas about how to solve their problems. Colombia had wealth, and there were plenty of people with ideas and strategies for a better future. They needed a reprieve from the savagery of the externally imposed economic model, and a chance to weave their own disparate struggles (Podur 2006).

Rather than providing funding, an approach that “demobilized” and “did more to divide Colombian movements than unite them,” the CCSC envisioned international solidarity as a means for supporting Colombian movements’ ability to coordinate with each other (ibid.). The second principle is closely related and implies a different approach for people working from Canada: solidarity from Canada should emphasize Canadian society by holding up a mirror. Communication was part of a key strategy through which the mirror would reflect not only the policies and actions of the Canadian and Colombian governments but also the linkages between the situation in Colombia and problems within Canadian society. The third principle is that solidarity must be responsive; it must expose relationships. For example, one must denounce human rights violations not simply as mere aberrations of a fundamentally sound system but as strategies of capital for undermining the pursuit of equally important social and economic rights. The final principle is that solidarity efforts must emphasize political over military solutions to the Colombian conflict, a negotiated peace over increased militarization. This required a recognition that Colombia has recently undergone important changes not the least of which has meant the rise of social and popular movements from sectors most affected by the armed conflict, many of which have come to favour popular processes of peaceful mobilization and collective construction over armed struggle. From

those principles, the CCSC developed a platform for solidarity. Canada-Colombia solidarity initiatives would emphasize opposition to the dominant neoliberal economic model and actively support and defend a negotiated solution to Colombia's armed conflict featuring and built around the genuine participation of popular movements and organizations. The platform also involved a critical appraisal and observation of foreign investment, foreign policy and foreign intervention in Colombia. Finally, the CCSC efforts would focus on "visibilization (*visibilización*), recognition of, and solidarity with Colombia's 'invisible popular struggles'" (CCSC 2001a).

Challenges to the CCSC were both internal and external; but they spoke to the complexity of the topographies of transnational solidarity efforts from Canada. The CCSC included people from diverse sectors, which was perhaps one of its greatest strengths. It was also transnational in that its Colombian partners oriented it and pushed it forward; thus, they too were a major part of it. However, "achieving coordination, appropriate communication and autonomy rooted in a common strategic plan" were important challenges for the feasibility of the initiative (CCSC 2001a). For partners in Canada and Colombia alike, reciprocal solidarity practiced autonomously remained a major challenge in terms of carrying out the day-to-day tasks of organizing without a budget: the CCSC depended entirely on volunteerism.⁴ Another set of challenges centred on balancing theory and practice. This meant that the CCSC was consciously concerned with not bogging down its activities with long-winded theoretical discussions that would orient activities on their own; rather, such

⁴ Volunteerism can be seen as a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it meant that people were not working for personal or financial gain (fame or fortune) but from a sense of shared struggle and political commitment. On the other hand, people face other obligations (jobs, family, life) that weigh heavily on how much time and energy they could commit. As Rozental explained to me in a phone conversation on 28 April 2010, when the CCSC's Colombian partners heard such complaints from their Canadian counterparts, they did not understand how that was an issue; solidarity work had to be carried out on a volunteer basis.

discussions could help with analysis but would be subordinate to the practical aspects of the campaign.

Perhaps the greatest internal challenge to the CCSC was to learn to do solidarity ‘in minga.’ The CCSC borrowed the concept of the ‘minga’ from a cultural practice of Andean indigenous peoples, explained in Chapter 1. The basis of the minga is a mutual and collective solidarity relationship; but what makes it a unique practice is that the product of a minga cannot be owned, as it emerges from a collective process and common commitment toward a shared objective. Applied to solidarity efforts from Canada, the minga has some important implications. Solidarity in minga is collectively controlled permanent action as a pedagogical process: solidarity as a way of life. The CCSC put it thus: “rather than a few doing a lot all the time, or all doing a lot some of the time, the minga is an invitation to growth, consistent personal commitment, to doing what is possible and necessary always, and to do it better and more clearly as time goes on” (CCSC 2001b). Before long, CCSC participants referred to their project as ‘the minga’ for its attempt at bringing the notion of the minga together with the practice of solidarity work beyond borders.

Many of the effort’s challenges were external to the CCSC. The post-September 11, 2001, context had profoundly negative effects on solidarity with Colombia and other countries. With a deepening humanitarian crisis in Colombia and a concomitant rise in aggression against popular movements and organizations facilitated by ‘anti-terrorist’ legislation, ‘invisible struggles’ were rendered further unseen. Approaches to ameliorating the effects of these challenges tended towards fragmentation rather than coherence and unity. Some labelled the CCSC as a front for terrorist organizations, while others saw it as taking a “social democratic” approach that hindered initiatives of broader social transformation (CCSC 2001a). Still others came to see the CCSC as an attempt to occupy all spaces of

solidarity with Colombia, which the CCSC called “a contradiction and an inherent impossibility” (CCSC 2001a). Perhaps the greatest and most decisive challenge to the CCSC was the reaction its impact triggered from more established solidarity organizations.

4.1.2 The ‘solidarity industry’

Manuel’s critique of the established solidarity sector was severe, and his analysis of Colombia reflected his decades of experience with social and popular movements (Podur 2006). As Manuel explained to us that day in 2007, Colombia was not the victim of a ‘culture of violence’ (Waldmann 2007) or a civil war without end; the country was facing a form of “development without people,” a ‘Colombia Model’ in which people were plagued by war so that they would be displaced from lands sought by national and transnational capital and, in turn, bound to capital as a ‘flexible’ labour force.⁵ The Colombian establishment’s wars – on ‘communism,’ ‘drugs,’ and ‘terrorism’ – were pretexts for gaining unhindered access to the country’s wealth. Most solidarity efforts did not question neoliberal notions of economic development; if they did, a funding-based approach that linked many of these groups to state funding agencies hindered their ability to act on that meaningfully. In some ways, traditional solidarity efforts ended up reinforcing the model.

That critique cut to the core of what Manuel called the ‘solidarity industry’: “One could focus on procuring funding for safe projects and distributing it in ways that demobilized, or one could step out of that comfort zone and risk one’s funding, one’s office, and one’s lifestyle” (Podur 2006).⁶ For Manuel, the more entrenched sectors of Canada-

⁵ As Colombian economist Héctor Mondragón has argued on numerous occasions, in Colombia, “there is not displacement because there is war; there is war so that there can be displacement.” For a more in-depth discussion of this and the ‘Colombia Model,’ see Rozental (2008).

⁶ In many ways, and even though it pre-empted it, the CCSC took a page from INCITE!’s (2007) critique of the ‘Non-Profit Industrial Complex’ (NPIC). For a discussion of the NPIC, see my discussion on autonomy in chapter 2.

Colombia solidarity efforts not only accepted the constraints imposed by funding agencies as a means to carry out often quite limited projects but also exhibited a culture that was sectarian, territorial and competitive; it was not 'solidarity' but a business as if comprised of firms competing in a market. Human rights concerns and connections with communities and social movements in Colombia were often used as ways for securing funding, treated as if commodities.⁷ In contrast, the CCSC never had an office, and many members, including Manuel, earned their livings outside of their activist commitments. While the CCSC began with some funding from various NGOs, church groups, unions and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) for its delegations, that support seemed to dissipate, especially as a vicious rumour campaign centring on Manuel came into motion. Manuel was simultaneously accused of being a CIA agent, a supporter of terrorism, and corrupt, all accusations made without sources or evidence (Podur 2006). The rumour campaign eventually made its way to Colombia, resulting in a number of the CCSC's counterparts being threatened, including Manuel (see Klein 2005).⁸ As a result, the effort was dismantled in 2003. The CCSC had pushed solidarity activism beyond the dominant approach of many prominent solidarity organizations; but by espousing a vision of autonomous, reciprocal solidarity that was carried out collectively and supported by an integral analysis of aggression and resistance, more established solidarity organizations had found reason for attack.

⁷ 'Development' issues in Colombia are a multi-million dollar industry among Canadian NGOs. In 2004-2005, the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) allocated nearly \$14 million in development assistance to Colombia with the stated purpose of protecting the rights of those impacted by the armed conflict, supporting mechanisms to promote peace, and assisting Colombians' in their capacity to address the root causes of violence (DFAIT). In order to gain access to these funds, Canadian and Colombian NGOs orient their projects along similar lines, focusing on human rights perceived as an issue apparently in isolation from the social and economic rights also threatened by neoliberal policies.

⁸ The Association of Indigenous Councils of Northern Cauca (ACIN), which whom Manuel had been working steadily since the early 2000s, carried out an investigation to determine the veracity of the accusations against Manuel. A week prior to his arrival in Edmonton, an Indigenous Tribunal in Cauca cleared Manuel's case, asserting that the accusations were indeed groundless and malicious. See *Pueblos en Camino* 2007.

It would be an understatement to say that Justin and Manuel's visit had a formative impact on La Chiva. It enlivened members' imaginations with both new possibilities and fears. We understood something about the ways in which solidarity could be manipulated for narrow, short-term gain, but there were also lessons within the experiences of Manuel, Justin and the CCSC: solidarity can also be synonymous with practical ideals – autonomy, horizontality and borderless struggle. They also revealed a “whole world” of solidarity activism in which La Chiva was situated clearly at the margins. Angelica explains,

What I think Manuel and Justin showed us was the solidarity movement. We wanted to do something for Colombia, but we had no idea. We felt we were pioneers at this thing. And we were entirely ignorant of the solidarity ‘movement.’ And they brought us this whole world. They showed us the experience of the [CCSC], the threat of the solidarity industry.

We had understood that we were on the margins of something, but we had not been sure what that something was. Justin and Manuel gave us an idea, a starting point for a deeper understanding. Initially, we took our marginality as a mixed blessing. On the one hand, we would have to do things on our own and away from the busy world of Ottawa and Toronto-based NGOs. On the other hand, we would be insulated from the infighting and politics of those seeking to build notoriety for their expertise of Latin American ‘issues’ and connections to people in struggles. More importantly, from the margins, we could articulate autonomous positions regardless of their impacts on our projects and livelihoods.

After Manuel and Justin left, we felt the need to evaluate what La Chiva had been doing at the University of Alberta, to reflect on the problems and possibilities of our new understandings of the context in which we were sketching an outline of solidarity. How did we define ‘solidarity’? What kinds of groups would we work in support of in Canada and in Colombia alike? While there was consensus in our rejection of the neoliberal economic

model, how did our work address it? These questions had been ignored as we occupied ourselves with campaigns and had little time and energy for anything else. In the summer of 2007, La Chiva entered a phase of transition; but as the group tried to answer these questions, things fell apart. Still, as they did, new configurations and possibilities emerged.

4.2 Transformation

*So it all fell apart. The core group was gone.
– La Chiva member Angelica Q.*

The early experiences of La Chiva featured the negotiation of structures, philosophies, and visions of solidarity and activism. As the anti-Coca-Cola campaign wound down towards the end of March 2007, there was a pervasive sense of fatigue among La Chiva's members. A phrase we used jokingly in those days was 'revolution until graduation' (*revolución hasta graduación*). It seemed to be a way of reminding ourselves of important question ahead: would La Chiva mean anything beyond the university? Could the effort be sustained? In the summer and fall of 2007, processes of reflection resulted in cleavages within the group as well as some important reconfigurations of La Chiva's collective visions of solidarity.

* * *

At one meeting in June of 2007, those questions were addressed explicitly. Reflecting on the anti-Coca-Cola campaign and what we had learned from the encounter with the CCSC, La Chiva members' comments ranged from enthusiasm to disillusionment. Oscar believed La Chiva had accomplished great things that shook up the university environment, and I was similarly optimistic about the possibility of moving La Chiva beyond the university and expanding to bring in new members, students and non-students alike. Denise and Erick

shared the belief that we would need to find new members, to “expand La Chiva,” but saw this as a major challenge. Angelica and Alejandro both felt the greatest failure of La Chiva was the lack of political debate within the group, the uncertainty of direction and absence of discussion around the group’s political vision. In sum, there were many gradations of optimism and will to move forward.

Angelica was prepared to continue working with La Chiva, while Alejandro announced his departure from the group, offering two reasons. The first was personal: he was going to graduate school in Ottawa. The second was political: with La Chiva’s failure to engage in frequent discussion and debate, Alejandro did not see it as a group that could exist beyond the university. There was an awkward feeling at that meeting, a tension resulting from the variety of our perceptions of La Chiva and the gravity of our having avoided these discussions and potential conflicts as we busied ourselves during the previous months. All of the concerns reflected truths and were thus valid for us to discuss, but we had kept them in the background. We decided that we needed to work hard over the rest of the summer to have those debates, to construct those visions and commit to strategies in consequence, if we wanted to keep things together and moving forward. After several long meetings throughout the summer, we did emerge with something, but things did seem to fall apart all the same. There were several explanations, ranging from possibilities we were unable to assume to a lack of intra-group solidarity and the pressures of burning out and moving on.

4.2.1 Adjustment

The lessons of the CCSC influenced much of La Chiva’s discussions in the summer of 2007. The period might be described using the metaphor of the chiva: it was felt that the group required much more than a tune-up but a complete overhaul beginning with its frame,

engine and wiring. The impetus for such change reflected the feeling that La Chiva was running out of gas and needed to incorporate what had been learned over the past year to refuel; moreover, there was a sense that the group had set out without a map and, having found something resembling one, with the group on the margins, needed to chart a new course.

Through hours of informal discussions from June to August 2007, La Chiva articulated a revised mission statement that expressed a vision of solidarity strongly influenced by the CCSC experience. However, faced with dampened enthusiasm and a context of action that would extend beyond the university, La Chiva's new emphasis was on small activities that individual members could engage in on a day-to-day basis. Research and translation thus became a new focus. In carrying out research, La Chiva members became aware of the important role of Canadian extractive sector investment in Colombia, the collaboration of the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and the industry-funded Canadian Energy Research Institute (CERI) in devising a new Mining Code for Colombia (implemented in 2001) that sought to facilitate increased mining investment couched in the discourse of 'development' (Campbell 2009). The group also became aware of communities of small-scale artisanal miners in Colombia who found the new mining code a threat to their livelihoods (see Ramírez Cuellar 2005). With the Alberta Tar Sands project well underway several hundred kilometres north of Edmonton, the impacts of the neoliberal economic model on societies and the environment came to be seen as global processes that had local resonance. Research aided in making those connections.

The translation of communiqués and reports from Colombian social movements and communities into English also became an important focus on a couple of levels. First, La Chiva members and volunteers would stay informed about issues facing Colombians and

could contribute to their struggles non-intrusively by bringing their messages across linguistic divides. Second, these texts were published on the Internet and contributed to a significant body of documents on Colombia available to non-Spanish-speakers, who could use them as information tools in their diverse campaigns and projects. Finally, translation projects could serve to bring more people into La Chiva by recruiting volunteers who wished to improve their translation skills and who would, by extension, become more aware of the gravity of the situation in Colombia. La Chiva's focus on research and translation is akin to what Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink (1998) have called 'information politics' engaged in by transnational advocacy networks (TANs), whereby advocacy and pressure is often situated in the battlegrounds of information and ideas, exposing realities and shaping discourses around them.

In spite of these new possibilities and roles for La Chiva, by the end of 2007, the group's activities were neither as collective nor formally organized as they had been previously. As an organized group, La Chiva seemed to fall apart and for a number of reasons that I will not be able to cover fully here. One reason is the emotional exhaustion that resulted from the anti-Coca-Cola campaign; meetings were difficult to organize and poorly attended. This might have been because people were tired and, given the result of the plebiscite campaign, felt defeated. Another centres on depersonalization and a lack of intra-group solidarity. In carrying out sustained efforts that involve intense personal involvement in contentious issues, inter-personal conflict is perhaps inevitable. However, during such times, La Chiva seemed to lack an internal culture of solidarity, a deficiency in terms of mechanisms that would deal with personal issues as they came up and generate synergy. This led to a general unwillingness to work as the group had in the past. In our conversation in

2009, Angelica's testimony emphasized these problems much more than the others had.⁹ She summarized these challenges succinctly:

So I think we faced a moment of transformation out of the [International Week] conference and what we did at the university. We were able to work as a group, we knew we were going to have an impact, but we were ultimately unable to assume that moment of transformation. We were lost in the big world of 'solidarity'. [...] Personal issues were all over the place, and the understanding of networking [with other groups] was also lagging behind. We were good at discussing some things, but we could never collectively face what we had to do. So we left to different cities, different worlds... Decentralized.

Oscar insists that, while recognizing that there were failures in the group's ability to work formally, friendship served as a tie that bound the group together: "It was worth it [...], every single thing we did. And I still feel very connected to those people." Yet, friendships were not enough to keep La Chiva together as a formal organization doing political work; however, some semblance of continuity and transformation did eventually emerge, which I characterize as revolving around notions of affinity.

4.3 Affinity

In *Post-Scarcity Anarchism*, Murray Bookchin (2004) revives the notion of the 'affinity group' from the *grupos de afinidad* of Spanish anarchists in the 1930s. The affinity group is an organizational form that has found resonance especially among contemporary direct action movements against capitalist globalization (see Graeber 2009). Alternatively called 'collectives,' 'communes,' or 'families,' Bookchin notes, "[t]he affinity group could easily be regarded as a new type of extended family, in which kinship ties are replaced by deeply empathetic human relationships – relationships nourished by common revolutionary ideas and practices" (quoted in Woodcock 1977, 73). For Bookchin, affinity groups are

⁹ It is worth noting that in my 2009 conversations with key informants from La Chiva's 2006-2008 period there was some hesitancy to discuss the group's internal interpersonal issues.

distinguishable by the degree of “intimacy” among those who compose them, are often “autonomous, communal, and directly democratic,” and constitute “free [spaces] in which revolutionaries can remake themselves individually, and also as social beings” (ibid.).

In some ways, La Chiva’s organizational configuration in 2008 and beyond resembles Bookchin’s notion of the affinity group. However, rather than “replacing” kinship ties with more overtly political relationships (“revolutionary ideas and practices”) (ibid., 74), the ways in which the group transformed internally and externally are evidence of a more parallel alignment of politics and friendship in the practice of solidarity. Indeed, almost parallel to the political work of members of La Chiva were everyday, headline-less expressions of solidarity. While, to some, this observation may be neither exceptional nor noteworthy, friendship and small acts of mutual aid served as the mortar binding together the group’s political activities, without which the group likely would not have existed in the first place, much less beyond its first several months.

By early 2008, La Chiva’s solidarity work was neither directed nor guided by the ‘constitutional authority’ of the mission statement but by the autonomous and diverse initiatives of members. During periods of heightened activity, they worked closely together; when less was going on, the group remained in touch owing to intimate ties of friendship. One or a few members of the group would take up spontaneous translation projects of an article or communiqué that they felt needed to be heard in English; others organized a presentation on Colombia at the Alberta Social Forum in March 2008; a member from Calgary, on his own, attended an anti-FARC and pro-Urbe government rally in February 2008 to challenge them on whether they understood the regime they were supporting; and all throughout, members would engage people in the issue of Colombia through conversations and in small workshops held at coffee houses and in their homes. A far cry from the ‘high-

profile activism' of the anti-Coca-Cola campaign that made campus headlines, such actions nonetheless represented a certain level of political maturity and understanding of the group's actual capabilities and context: As Augusto put it, "La Chiva started to grow up."

Individual initiatives were connected to La Chiva in that members received the unconditional support and encouragement of the collective. No top-down directive would determine the level of one's involvement and commitment; rather, the group took on the principle of voluntary association. This configuration did not come about as a result of discussion but as an almost organic or natural progression of the group's practice of solidarity work rooted in friendship. It was in this context that several members of La Chiva decided to travel to Colombia for several months in 2008. With the support of other members, they began to forge a similarly organic connection based on affinity, friendship and solidarity with communities and social movements primarily in Colombia's southwest department of Cauca. Augusto asserts the legitimacy of La Chiva even as a decidedly amorphous entity:

I think that [La Chiva] doesn't really exist, but it's still there. For me, it's way more real than so many things that actually exist in a formal sense. It has done a lot more things than some of those big, rich organizations have. See, La Chiva is unique. [...] It's not a bunch of people creating jobs for themselves or looking for power or fame. They're just going and creating things together with others who are doing important things in Colombia.

5: CAUCA: LEARNING TO WEAVE

Through Manuel Rozental, the *Tejido de Comunicación* of the ACIN, with which he had worked closely for several years, extended several members of La Chiva a generous and flexible invitation to the indigenous territories of northern Cauca: “come whenever you can; we are ready.” Manuel must have spoken well of what we were doing in Alberta. A few of us jumped at the chance, saving as much money as we could so as to be able to spend as much time as possible in Cauca. The first La Chiva members arrived in Santander de Quilichao in March 2008. For some, their time in Cauca was a comprehensive introduction to the complexity of Colombia and the critical situation faced by social and popular movements in the country. For others, it provided a deeper understanding of that situation from the perspective of some of the strongest community-based responses to conflict in the country. In this chapter, I outline the complex topographies of conflict in northern Cauca within which are situated the indigenous process and the Tejido. The chapter then engages a discussion of accompaniment and a description of La Chiva members’ activities alongside the Tejido from March to August 2008.

* * *

It was our first full day in Cauca. We were up early so as to be at Radio Pa`Yumat¹ for 7am. In Santander de Quilichao, working days typically begin at sunrise and end by the 7pm sunset; it is unsafe to be out after dark. Vilma Almendra, a founding member of the Tejido, had met with us the evening before and brought us to where we would be staying.

¹ Radio Pa`Yumat is the radio station run by the Tejido and the ACIN. It reaches hundreds of thousands of listeners throughout the Northern Cauca region. The phrase *Pa`Yumat* is a typical greeting in Nasa Yuwe. An English translation would be something along the lines of “What’s happening!”

That morning, she had left her mother, a veteran of the indigenous movement and widowed for her family's participation in the indigenous-led land recuperations of the 1970s and 1980s, in charge of bringing us to the radio station. In fifteen minutes, we were knocking on the bolted, green metal door of Radio Pa`Yumat. The only evidence that the building is home to the Tejido is a small antenna that peaks above the roof. Entering the building, there is a simple reception desk with a fax machine and a phone beyond which are soundproof radio studios with matrices of wires and microphones and an old audio mixing board. A narrow staircase leads to the basement and a patio where the radio antenna is fixed and through which sunlight creeps below. The basement opens up to a space where several desks and plastic chairs are set up in rooms beyond broad, arched doorways. In some ways, the space is like a small, underground dungeon. Still, it remains relatively cool, a subterranean refuge from the suffocating 'heat'² and sun of the street above. The dungeon is comfortable for another reason: the people that work there, the *tejedores*, or communication 'weavers,' maintain a jovial atmosphere as they work at their computers and come and go. Traditional Andean music and salsa plays constantly in the background, as Radio Pa`Yumat's transmissions inevitably pass into the basement, from where its news segments and analyses originate. Our earliest days with the Tejido were, at times, a series of awkward introductions not just to the *tejedores* but also to the context of conflict and resistance in northern Cauca.

² The word *caliente*, or 'hot,' has a double meaning in Colombia, which is worth noting here. Regions of fierce conflict in the country are known as *tierra caliente*, or 'hot country'. Cauca is one of several parts of Colombia that frequently receives such unwelcome notoriety.

5.1 Conflict

The Uribe government and ‘democratic security’³ advance with guns and machetes in northern Cauca, Colombia. – Title of an ACIN communiqué, July 1, 2008.

Geographically, northern Cauca is divided into two portions: the plains and the mountains. The Cauca river serves as a pseudo-border between two departments: Cauca, with its highlands and forests that descend to the eastern valley of the Magdalena River and up again into the department of Huila, an important gateway to the Amazon; and Valle del Cauca, a department known for its vast fertile plains and the urban centre of Cali, Colombia’s third largest city and an important nodal point for goods leaving and entering the country through the busy Pacific port of Buenaventura. Colombia’s self-identifying indigenous population, the most recent census data reveal, accounts for roughly 1.4 million (or 3.4%) of the country’s 41.5 million inhabitants (DANE 2007). Cauca is one of its most indigenous departments with 248,532 self-identifying indigenous peoples (ibid., 35),⁴ most of whom have historically lived in the rural mountains (Espinoza Álzate 2003). Valle del Cauca is home to over twenty-five per cent of the country’s 4.2 million Afro-Colombians (DANE 2007, 36), concentrated mostly in the department’s urban centres.

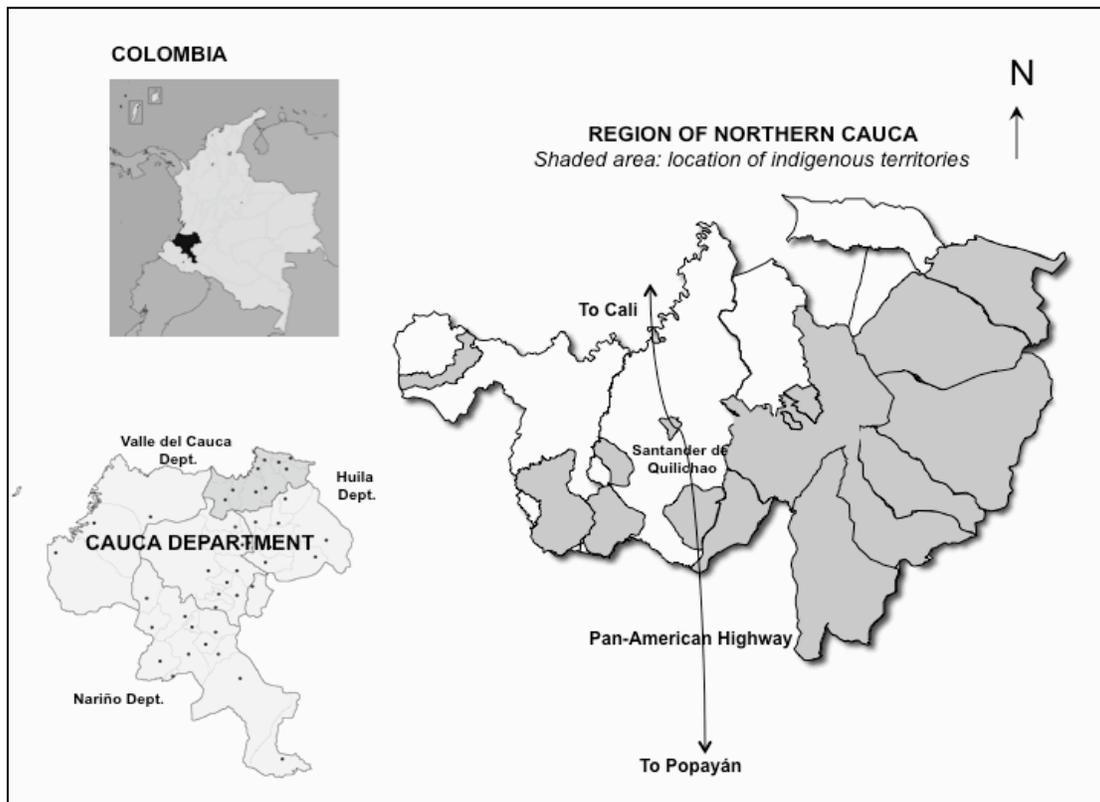
Northern Cauca uniquely features demographic and topographic characteristics of both Cauca and Valle del Cauca: it is where the mountains meet the plains, with Afro-Colombians living in its small and medium-sized towns and campesinos, primarily indigenous, living in mountain villages. Travelling by land from the south, goods and people

³ ‘Democratic security’ refers to the name of the Uribe government’s policy (formally called the ‘Democratic Security and Defense Policy’), which is related to the US-sponsored ‘Plan Colombia’ and has the declared objective of consolidating state control of the national territory through a dramatically increased military presence and explicitly seeks civilian “engagement” in military intelligence gathering (Colombia, 2).

⁴ Cauca’s indigenous population is a close second to that of La Guajira (278,212) (DANE 2007), where the *Wayuu* live in territories on and around both sides of the northern coastal Colombia-Venezuela frontier.

must pass through northern Cauca on their way to Cali; hence, the region is a nodal point, a junction, of globalization. Santander de Quilichao, the department's most important city save for the southern capital Popayán, is situated on that junction. The indigenous territories extend latitudinally across eight of the Northern Cauca's thirteen municipalities, consisting of fourteen indigenous reserves governed by sixteen *cabildos*, or traditional authorities. Land under indigenous control includes some 191,000 hectares with vast hydro and mineral resources (Tejido de Comunicación, "Nuestra historia").

Figure 5.1: Location of indigenous territories in northern Cauca, Colombia



The presence of armed actors in northern Cauca is an important part of the region's history and present. Historically, innumerable leftist guerrilla groups have operated in the

region;⁵ narco-traffickers have used its forests and highlands to process coca into cocaine (Espinoza Álzate 2003); and since the 1990s, right-wing paramilitaries of the United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia (AUC) have circulated throughout the region, fighting the guerrilla, providing ‘protection’ for landlords, and carrying out massacres to assert their power,⁶ much in the same way as do other armed groups at the other end of the ideological spectrum. Currently, the primary armed actors in the region include two battalions of the Colombian Army, the 6th Front of the FARC, an extensive network of narco-traffickers, and evidenced by recent threats and attacks against the civilian population and social movements,⁷ re-emergent paramilitary groups, such as the so-called ‘Black Eagles’ (*Águilas Negras*) and ‘New Generation’ (*Nueva Generación*). Within and in spite of this complex terrain, community processes of the region’s indigenous peoples seek to bring together a vision of political struggle closely intertwined with the Nasa cosmovision. Supporting these processes

⁵ Guerrilla groups operating in northern Cauca have included Liberal guerrillas, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the National Liberation Army (ELN), the M-19 (which had its negotiation zone in indigenous municipality of Toribío), the Ricardo Franco Front (FRF), the Revolutionary Workers’ Party (PRT), the largely indigenous Quintín Lame Armed Movement (MAQL), the Jaime Bateman Canyón Movement, and the Jorge Eliécer Gaitán Movement (JEGA) (Espinoza Álzate quoted in Wilches Chau 2005, 37-38). In *El Espectador*, Colombian sociologist and journalist Alfredo Molano recently interviewed Garmán Rojas, a former M-19 commander, who argued forcefully of northern Cauca’s historical and symbolic importance for guerrilla groups like the FARC (Molano 2009).

⁶ For example, the El Nilo massacre is an important event in the collective memory of the indigenous movement in Cauca. In December 1991, roughly sixty hooded gunmen opened fire on a community meeting. An investigation by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights revealed the involvement of the National Police in planning and carrying out the massacre. In 1998, President Ernesto Samper acknowledged state responsibility in the events, apologized to the relatives, and promised to abide by the recommendations of the IACHR ruling: the handing over of indigenous lands. (Murillo 2008a).

⁷ See for example the 24 February 2010 threat made public by the Regional Indigenous Council of Colombia (CRIC 2010); a separate threat sent to community leaders in Buenos Aires-Suárez, Cauca, dated October 22, 2009 (La Chiva Collective 2009a); and a communiqué describing the murders of three indigenous civilians in the nearby area of Cerro Tijeras that same month (La Chiva Collective 2009d). In each case, emergent paramilitary groups either forewarn or claim responsibility for the events.

are two primary indigenous organizations: the Regional Indigenous Council of Cauca (CRIC)⁸ and the Association of Indigenous Councils of Northern Cauca (ACIN).⁹

For the indigenous movement in Cauca, broadly speaking, the conflict is a symptom of global processes of accumulation that resonate locally. Historical experiences with colonization are seen as connected to the present, not occurring along a linear plane but as cyclical events recurring throughout history as in a helical spiral. At its core, for the Nasa, this history is the on-going confrontation of two competing logics. On the one hand, there is the logic of *ser para tener* ('to be in order to have'), which defines human existence in terms of accumulation and renders all life, including what the Nasa consider the living being of 'Mother Earth,' as commodities. How this logic is expressed the movement has called 'the Death Project,' where 'economic development,' takes precedence over the survival of all species and is pursued through an 'integral plan of aggression' consisting of three interconnected components: war and militarization, 'laws of plunder,' and propaganda (Tejido de Comunicación 2008). Confronting this logic and strategy, the Nasa present an alternative paradigm, that of *tener para ser* ('to have in order to be'). 'To have' is not seen in terms of ownership but the accompaniment of nature and life as the essential purpose of human existence. This alternative logic is reflected in what the Nasa call 'Life Plans.' Through this vision, the Nasa have come to view Colombian governments, capital and violent groups as parts of the death project for their failure to respect the life and autonomy of communities with their diverse projects in defence of life and territory.

⁸ The CRIC was formed in 1971 in Toribío, Cauca, within the context of indigenous-led land recuperations. Direct action within a community-based process provided the political base and unity necessary for the CRIC's formation; it is widely recognized as one of Colombia's strongest and most institutionalized departmental indigenous organizations (Van Cott 2005).

⁹ The Association of Indigenous Councils of Northern Cauca (ACIN) was formed in 1994 as a regional community-based process. Ethnically, the organization is predominantly Nasa but includes Guambianos, Coconucos and other indigenous groups in the northern Cauca region.

While indigenous-led armed groups have emerged in Cauca at different historical moments, such as the Quintín Lame Armed Movement (MAQL) and the *Nietos de Quintín Lame* ('the Grandchildren of Quintín Lame'), and indigenous community members have participated in nearly all sides of the war, the broadest sectors of the indigenous movement have more recently taken a position of 'active neutrality,' a rejection of armed struggle but with a continuous engagement in ameliorating the root causes of war and the expansion of the death project.¹⁰ They are not pacifists; the movement deploys the use of direct action through massive protests and mobilizations and land recuperations, calling the latter 'The Ritual of the Liberation of Mother Earth.' The war system and concomitant processes of capitalist accumulation provide the impetus for the construction of conscious, community-driven life plans. Within the ACIN's structure, five 'weavings of life' (*tejidos de vida*) promote and defend these life plans in the areas of people and culture; the defence of life; justice and harmony; economy and the environment; and communication and external relations. It is worth noting how the responsibilities of the tejidos recognize the correlations and inseparability of issues central to social and political life, such as the economy and the environment for example. Knots tie them together. The ways in which these life plans are promoted and defended is understood through the Nasa concept of *umya`*, or 'weaving,'¹¹ which I now explain and relate specifically to the work of the ACIN's *Tejido de Comunicación y Relaciones Externas para la Verdad y la Vida*.

¹⁰ A demonstrable example of this is the *Guardia Indígena* ('Indigenous Guard') of northern Cauca, an unarmed security force comprised of community members of all ages with a demonstrated political maturity and commitment to the indigenous process. Unlike a police force, the legitimacy of their authority is not derived from the carrying of a gun; rather, it is represented in the decorated 'staves of authority' carried by each member of the Guard, which represent the authority of the community. The Indigenous Guard received Colombia's National Peace Prize in 2004 for its peaceful resistance in the context of war. For more in-depth descriptions and analyses of the Indigenous Guard, see Ballvé (2006) and Zibechi (2008a).

¹¹ *Umya`* is translated from Nasa Yuwe to Spanish as *tejer*, which is used in the Caucan context to refer to what English-speaking cultures might refer to as both 'knitting' and 'weaving'. In Cauca, the distinction between the two actions is virtually non-existent, so for the purpose of this study, I understand *umya`* as meaning both 'to knit' and 'to weave,' acts of constructing a fabric.

5.2 ‘Weaving’ resistance

The Nasa conception of ‘weaving’ can be understood in two inter-related ways. The first is rooted in the ancestral knowledge of the Nasa people, and the second is derived from the first but applied in a more explicitly political context. Nasa scholars Marcos Yule Yatacué and Carmen Vitonas Pavi (2004) describe the spiritual meaning of weaving in the following excerpt from their book *Pees kuxpɔx fxi`zenxi: nasa üsa` s txi`pnxi:*

[‘To weave’] is to gather together, to record an idea, a thought about something. [...] When one weaves, one creates memory; thought, knowledge and understanding are developed and assemble the body. That’s why, when one weaves a *mochila* [or ‘bag’] one is also creating memory from the very origin of life, which is represented by the uterus of Grandmother Uma¹².

[...] [The *mochila* is] considered a symbol of commitment [...]. To weave is to wind together thought, which is why [the *mochila*] begins at one point but is wound together in a spiral. To review our history, we have to unravel the weaving so as to see and understand the thought, the footprint of our elders. This is put back together when we weave the *mochila* and the hat.

[...] To weave allows us to have distinct ways of seeing things, such as when one builds a house, or makes a poncho or a blanket [...]. When we weave, we can see the territory in different ways and form means for apprehension, of understanding and knowing. (quoted in Wilches Chau 2005, 23-24).

Creating a *mochila*, itself a symbol of commitment to the origins of the community, involves bringing together distinct threads of knowledge and interpretations. The *mochila*, with its multi-coloured threads, is thus the collective spirit of the Nasa community, which makes possible, nurtures, and sustains all life.

While in other societies, the spiritual and political appear to have little explicit dialogue with each other – at least in theory and in law – the Nasa consider them to be

¹² Note the etymological similarity between the Nasa word *umya`* (‘to weave’) and the reference to the uterus of ‘Uma,’ the Nasa name for ‘Mother Earth.’ Yule Yatacué and Vitonas Pavi describe the presence of water in the uterus, “the path of the children,” and water in streams and rivers as both the sacred origins of life (quoted in Wilches Chau 2005, 35).

inextricably intertwined. For the Nasa, the spirit of the community binds both word and action, as in this frequently evoked Nasa proverb:

*The word without action is empty;
Action without the word is blind;
Word and action outside the spirit of the community are death.*

Bringing word and action together through the spirit of the community situates the concept of weaving in a political world. At the Cauca indigenous congress in Caldono in 2004, a community assembly discussed and approved the formation of a *Tejido de Comunicación*, which would integrate diverse communications techniques to make visible the community process and strengthen internal and external relationships among the indigenous communities in northern Cauca and other social sectors in the region, country and the world. The vision of communication discussed then and now, and constantly being woven, revolves around the notion of communication *para qué*, the ‘for what’? During our conversation in October 2009, Vilma Almendra explained that the situation facing the communities required a response beyond communication for its own sake; that meant constantly addressing a series of critical questions in relation to the spirit of the indigenous communities in northern Cauca: “How do we understand the Life Plans of the indigenous process? How do those Life Plans resonate with or support the reality of the base [communities]? And how are [they] really alternatives to the Death Project”? The *Tejido* has since come to articulate communication not only as a tactical response to the reality lived in northern Cauca (visibilization through ‘alternative’ media) but in line with the spiritual-political process of weaving the ‘word’ and ‘action’ in defence of life and territory and nurturing the ‘spirit’ of local communities (conscientization and mobilization).

For the tejedores, the communicative concept of weaving has three components: *hilos* (“threads”), *nudos* (“knots”), and *buecos* (“spaces”).¹³ Hilos refer to mechanisms of communication. Like many Andean indigenous communities, the Nasa have a vibrant oral tradition. At local assemblies, regional congresses and mingas, communication is the foundation of community life. In the 1970s and 1980s, Vilma told me, “[communication was] a strategy to recuperate land and to defend the land that had been recuperated.” Later, the establishment of indigenous-run radio stations in the region signified the “appropriation” of “other” communication and information technologies. In spite of some initial scepticism from some leaders and community members, she explained, the door was eventually opened for the use of print, video and the Internet “depending on our understanding of how [these mechanisms] might strengthen or damage the community process.” The deployment of hilos also depends on the audience. For example, on numerous occasions, tejedores explained to me that radio is considered “the front door to the community,” as community members are less likely to read print or Internet publications than they are to carry small radios with them as they work in the fields. Radio as a medium of communication also complements the Nasa oral tradition. Increasingly, video has come to serve the local community through the regular (and popular) ‘video-forums’ held throughout the territory by the Tejido. The Internet, on the other hand, is still widely considered a tool of and for the external. One member of the Tejido explained, “[t]he Internet is a window to the world, an opportunity to put out there what’s going on here and [vice versa].” The tejedores bring together these threads towards an integral view of communication that displays the community process in that window as much as it looks through it to other processes and contexts.

¹³ The clearest explanation of these components can be found in Vilma Almendra’s (2009b) undergraduate thesis in social communication from the Universidad Autónoma de Occidente, Cali, Colombia, a book version of which is in print at the time of writing. My attempt here is partly based on that work but primarily from my interviews with Almendra and other members of the Tejido in October and November of 2009.

When one knits or weaves, one ties a series of knots. For the Tejido, ‘nudos’ are persons internal and external to the community process that collaborate with respect to communication. In a meeting I recorded in Cauca in early November 2009, Vilma explained to visitors from Medellín the character and importance of nudos most lucidly: “[nudos] help us to raise consciousness, to make visible the process as well as defend, protect and strengthen it.” Internally, nudos are local members of the cabildos, schoolteachers, and other ‘organic intellectuals:’

They don’t have to be professionals in terms of communication. They are people with a great ability to bring people together, people with a lot of respect in their communities, and people who really understand what’s going on [in northern Cauca]. They are also people who are able to help us with technical things, like helping us get access to equipment when we’re putting on a video-forum. They are leaders, but they are also weaving consciousness in their communities.

There are also external nudos:

Nudos are also external intellectuals, academics and regular people that have a profound understanding of what we’re about, what we’re facing, and want to accompany us. [Vilma lists several prominent social movement theorists and intellectuals]. They are people who, in broad terms, support the idea of what we’re doing. Their work has always been about supporting communities like ours, and so we accept that support and take it on.

Between a weaving’s knots are spaces, which represent the third component of the Tejido’s communicative vision. Vilma explains,

Huecos are the themes or spaces both inside and outside the community that help us to understand critical issues. For example, some themes we’ve been working on are the free trade agreements, agrofuels, mining, water, militarization, Plan Colombia, and many more. [...] But there are also internally specific themes, such as family violence, drug addiction, and of course, the many contradictions within our process, too!

Thus the Tejido’s work is to bring together these hilos, nudos and huecos through a communicative process, the weaving of a mochila carried along by the spirit of the

community in word and action. What this ultimately looks like is a pedagogical process comprised of four components of action: to inform (the word), to reflect (raise consciousness), to decide (deliberation) and to act in consequence (word and action in the spirit of the community). In indigenous Cauca, a frequently heard phrase represents this process put into practice: *caminar la palabra*, ‘to walk the word’ or ‘to walk the talk.’ The actions and analyses that eventually emerge from these spaces are ultimately collective and rooted in an understanding that, says Vilma, “their products are of the community as a whole.” Seen in its entirety, the Tejido is itself a mechanism rooted in protection (through visibilization of the community process) and committed accompaniment (through nurturing community consciousness) that facilitates the collective walking of the word. Accompaniment is an important aspect of the Tejido’s work in the communities; but it is also critically important in its application as a practice of external relations.

5.3 Accompaniment

A central component of the practice of solidarity is accompaniment, the most fundamental notion of which implies walking together. In Cauca, the Tejido accompanies local communities as well as others in its relations with other peoples. Speaking more broadly, in terms of North-South solidarity, there are numerous examples of accompaniment, each of which entails a diversity of solidaristic practices. To briefly illustrate, there are northern activists from groups like the International Peace Brigades and Christian Peacemaker Teams, who accompany human rights defenders and communities in war-torn countries; the Quakers’ notion of accompaniment as ‘bearing witness’ to injustices in a number of settings; the presence of hundreds of northern activists accompanying the revolutionary Sandinista government in Nicaragua in the 1980s; and the frequent vigils

carried out by activists at the ‘School of the Americas’ (now known as the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation, or WHINSEC) military training facility in Fort Benning, Georgia. I present these examples merely to illustrate the diversity of approaches to North-South accompaniment.

More recently, some other manifestations of accompaniment have tended toward more short-term and arguably limited and problematic tendencies. While largely occurring among solidarity activists, a discussion is emerging around the notion of ‘solidarity tourism’ (see Higgins-Desboilles and Russell-Mundine 2008), which in some cases can reproduce the capitalist tendency to commodify or fetishize, in this case, even contentious social and political struggles. An example is the so-called ‘reality tours’ provided by some NGOs that feature ‘delegations’ of northern activists travelling great distances to visit with social movements in the global south, often for a period of a fortnight or less and in exchange for significant sums of money. On the other hand, some would note, some social movement processes in the Global South have accepted these developments as means for financing local projects; moreover, so the argument goes, such encounters, if short and limited, might generate awareness, people-to-people connections, and the possibility of follow-through once delegation members return to their home communities. A prominent example of this is the *zapatour*. With reference to the Zapatistas, Alex Khasnabish (2008, 214) touches on this debate in a section of his book called “the dark side of resonance” and what the Zapatistas themselves have called the “Cinderella Syndrome” of transnational solidarity. Khasnabish cites his interview with Manuel Rozenal on the topic of *zapatourismo*:

Thousands of tourists [...] stand in the plaza [of San Cristobal de las Casas, Chiapas] and shout for the Zapatistas with expensive cameras, this is a holiday that provides meaning for those in the North that feel themselves progressive ... But you don’t see any Indigenous people or people from

popular movements or organizations ... You see greed, another kind of greed, but it's greed, too (quoted in Khasnabish 2008, 218).

In a sense, making a 'holiday' of the real-life struggles of others might imply walking *on* rather than walking *with* others in solidarity. In contrast to solidarity tourism as accompaniment, consider Denis O'Hearn's (2008, xvi) account of the latter:

Accompaniment goes both directions. Sometimes, if not always, we find that when we take our expertise to someone, we learn from each other. The accompanist becomes the accompanied. That was what [Subcomandante Marcos of the Zapatistas] found when he went into the jungle intending to accompany the Mayans. The Mayans accompanied him.

In Cauca, the presence of non-indigenous collaborators has always been a fact, but the basis of that relationship differs substantially from what we might now find among the crowds of expensive camera-wielding accompanists in places like Chiapas. For example, when La Chiva members first arrived in Cauca, tejedores were busy organizing the separate visits of US-based sociologist and globalization scholar William I. Robinson and prominent Uruguayan social movement theorist Raúl Zibechi, both of whom were giving talks to community assemblies and meetings and getting to know the indigenous process. Their presence then was a sign of the indigenous movement's position since at least the 1970s: 'outsiders' were welcomed to the region not as advisors or tourists but as collaborators in a horizontal intercultural exchange. Ethnographer Joanne Rappaport, herself a long-time collaborator with the CRIC, writes extensively and reflexively about this theme in her book *Intercultural Utopias: Public Intellectuals, Cultural Experimentation, and Ethnic Pluralism in Colombia* (2005). Accompaniment as 'walking together' implies horizontal collaboration, a chance for people to learn from each other and weave those collective understandings together as both the fruits and basis of solidarity.

* * *

“Look,” said Vilma as we sat in the basement of Radio Pa`Yumat that first afternoon in March 2008. “We welcome you to our territories, but first we have to explain some things.” Sitting around the table were several members of the Tejido, Elena and I from La Chiva, and a Colombian-German journalist doing freelance radio work on Cauca for a major international media outlet. Elena and I knew what this meeting would be about: the conditions for our visit. Prior to our arrival in Cauca, Vilma had sent us a document entitled “Criteria for External Relations,” which the Tejido sends to those who come to visit, work with, or carry out work in the indigenous territories in Cauca. The document begins with a quote from Father Antonio Bonanomi, an Italian priest who for many years lived and worked in northern Cauca and continues to accompany the process from Bogotá. I include here Father Bonanomi’s passage in abbreviated form so as to outline the context of these conditions, to give a sense of why they were deemed necessary:

Throughout history, our external relations as indigenous peoples have been both a problem and a disgrace. We have been invaded, colonized, humiliated, studied... We have been considered and treated as ‘savages,’ ‘underage minors.’ Almost everyone, in some form or another, has taken advantage of our peoples. [...] [Some of us have disappeared], others have been able to resist, but at a high cost. Consequently, it is difficult for many to accept intercultural processes, to enter into a sincere dialogue with other groups or cultures. Some [of us] reject every relationship as a danger and become closed in ethnocentrism or aggressive *indigenismo*. Others accept creating some relationships but with bad intentions [and] look to respond to self-‘interests’ by taking advantage of the other; others act with ambiguity, verbally rejecting relationships in the name of their identity or culture while assuming in practice, and without criteria, external elements, especially vices... (quoted in Tejido de Comunicación, “Criterias para las relaciones externas”).

The Tejido’s document then goes on to argue that the context in which the Nasa live, and the process they have been able to weave in spite of it, renders inevitable collaboration with others. A commonly heard phrase in Cauca is *solos no podemos* (‘we can’t do it alone’), which speaks to the feeling that intercultural dialogue and the sharing of experiences and struggles

with others can be mutually beneficial, if carried out horizontally, but above all, it is necessary. The Tejido's document reads:

There is a new climate, which in the short and medium term makes possible the beginnings of an intercultural process, a horizontal dialogue based in respect, reciprocal solidarity and the strengthening of the political process and the Life Plans. These are fundamental components of the Minga of the peoples (ibid.).

“We hope you learn a lot while you're here,” Vilma told the three of us. “But we also hope you understand our efforts in just having you here. So in exchange, we are asking that you offer something to the process. What I mean is that we can't just have people coming here, visiting and leaving. Of course, we understand that you will leave, but what we ask for now is some idea of what you think you can contribute.” Vilma's question was an obvious one: what would we do? The silence became awkward, so I thought out loud, saying something along the lines of the following:

The truth is, we are here to learn. We only know about the process through your webpage and some books. The invitation was a huge gesture, and I'm grateful. In exchange, I can only think of some of the kinds of things we've been doing with La Chiva all along: translating and writing articles in English. I don't know if that's important, but maybe for now we can commit to that as a gesture, at least until we figure out other ways we can be useful, and maybe plan with you some initiatives for follow-up from Canada.

Elena essentially echoed my suggestion, saying she was unsure but willing to figure things out as we went along. “Excellent,” Vilma responded.¹⁴

* * *

How we would collaborate was an evolving process. Elena and I began translating into English the major pages from the Tejido's website, nasaacin.org, and a number of other

¹⁴ The journalist at the table with us did not answer right away. He was there for a story, doing his job. Vilma suggested, as a gesture, he leave his recorded interviews for use by Radio Pa`Yumat, and he agreed. When he left the territories a few days later, however, Vilma told me he didn't follow through.

important texts as the Tejido produced them. After several days, Vilma invited us to her house for dinner. After we cleared the table, she pulled out her notebook. The tejedores had met and discussed events occurring in the territory that we might be interested in attending. If we approved, different members of the Tejido had offered to accompany us in the process. In Vilma's notebook was a full week's itinerary, a demanding schedule that included attending community assemblies, workshops, and presentations; time with the Youth Movement in Toribío; meetings with indigenous authorities and leaders; and a survey of the other Tejidos. The initial, week-long visit, or *recorrido* as Vilma called it, would allow us to observe the process in its component parts as well as the territory as a living part of that process. It was not just a tour; it was an invaluable gift that would be given over and over again in the following months, and that we would try our best to reciprocate.

By the end of the recorrido, we had seen direct democracy in the assemblies and consciousness-raising in video-forums and workshops. We walked with leaders, the tejedores and community members and asked endless streams of questions. We also saw grave contradictions and other internal and external challenges faced by the process explained in candid conversations with the Tejedores and community leaders. Ultimately, we began imagining our contributions while in Cauca and beyond. Back in Santander de Quilichao, we watched the tejedores as they carried out their processes of communication, and we soon began to be included. “Maicito del Tul,”¹⁵ a tejedor would call to me across the dungeon, “do you think you could translate a little video script, if you're not too busy?” Soon, we began to find our voices in various spaces. Elena is from El Salvador, and I am from the north of Ireland, and we soon began contributing our own experiences – of migration,

¹⁵ This affectionate nickname I consider another gift from the tejedores. It is a Spanish-Nasa Yuwe variation on the Irish spelling of my name. “Maicito” came about from their difficulty to pronounce the ‘k’ sound in ‘Mike’; ‘Del Tul’ is from the pronunciation of Ó Tuathail (or “O’Toole”), *tul* being the Nasa Yuwe word for a traditional garden. Hence, “Little maize from the garden.”

second-class citizenship, of being colonized and colonizers in Canada – to the Tejido’s collective analyses. Such small insights from our personal histories might have evoked blank stares in similar settings in Canada. In Cauca, who we were and what we had lived meant something, much more than political or intellectual consistency. The sharing of those stories was an on-going dialogue carried out in the day-to-day and in late evening conversations with tejedores. I was asked questions the likes of which I had never been asked before anywhere else. What kind of peace did you end up with in Ireland? Why don’t you speak Irish? Such basic questions were loaded. I came to see those exchanges, those honest, person-to-person discussions, as profound contributions in their own right that simultaneously urged me to make sense of my own history and experiences. I also came to regard those exchanges as foundations of solidarity, the search for common ground and understanding.

Augusto and Dawn, two other members of La Chiva, arrived in May and June respectively. Our contributions began to deepen. Augusto, a Colombian with an incredible energy, intelligence, and wit, began giving talks on globalization “as it is understood in the neoliberal university [he] just graduated from” in Canada. Dawn is a Canadian journalist who engages with activism against large-scale mining in Latin America, and she began giving talks and presentations on that theme. During our time in Cauca, Dawn and I wrote a fourteen-page pamphlet on the impacts of large-scale mining and community-based resistance entitled, *Minería a gran escala: una reconquista*, which was later distributed in the communities by the Tejido. It was soon proposed that members of La Chiva start going to communities with the tejedores to complement their presentations and aid in generating discussion. We began collectively formulating an analysis that, for example, linked large-scale mining interests to strategies of displacement, the free trade model and the discourse of economic development,

an analysis collectively constructed with the Tejido. Dawn had a wealth of experience from her work in Guatemala, Honduras and Ecuador and presented videos on evictions related to mining projects; Augusto had lived the realities of displacement and exile so frequently felt in Colombia; and I had some academic experience in international political economy with which I would (clumsily) attempt to tie these threads together into a broader context.

The cabildo in Corinto had requested the urgent accompaniment of the Tejido because the reserve had seen much combat between the FARC and the Colombian Army. The leaders felt the community needed to find ways of making sense of the ‘theatre’ of war in which they were situated. Thus we were frequently dispatched to Corinto, sometimes to assemblies and other times to small schoolhouses in townships of thirty people accessible only by hours of travelling on foot or (if we were lucky) by horseback. Although we would always arrive with a planned outline of what we would discuss, it was more often the case that discussions with the community would shift away from the global economic system – of which we found the communities to have much more succinct and profound understandings than we did – and tended towards the sharing of our personal life experiences, where we come from, what life is like there, our lives. Our lives were like mochilas, being unravelled and put back together again through this constant dialogue and with new threads provided by the communities in Cauca. At one such presentation to some sixty teachers in Corinto, we were asked about indigenous peoples in Canada: what were they like? Were they organized politically? What were the main issues? There was a strong sense that such lines of questioning reflected the desire to know if they were alone. These questions also contained profound truths about us, as ‘solidarity activists’ from Canada in the indigenous territories of Cauca, Colombia. What about Canada? Was the ‘integral plan of aggression’ not also present

there but in a different form? In all our concern for Colombia, what were we doing about that?

In our initial naivety and ignorance, we might have seen our presentations in the communities as our way of accompanying the indigenous process in Cauca; but the reality was more along the lines of the community accompanying us. Those experiences showed us the daily practice of that sometimes abstract and empty but frequently evoked word: 'resistance'. In Cauca, a protest or mobilization might look and feel like resistance, yet they are only its expressions. Resistance is a much more profound and grounded practice: everyday life (Scott 1985), in real terms and in real time. We learned of the doubling of the price of rice over a six-month period. We learned of communities working to stop youth recruitment into the war by addressing the problem of family violence that fills the ranks of the guerrilla and the army more effectively than any ideology. We learned of people joining together at mingas to help a neighbour sow crops, reap harvests, or build a home. The communities in northern Cauca accompanied us by sharing those realities and forcing us to confront our own.

* * *

By the end of August of 2008, members of La Chiva in Cauca had returned to Canada. Our friendships with the tejedores and others engaged in the indigenous process had been such that the events of our leaving meant gatherings with long, tearful speeches and food and beer in Radio Pa`Yumat. We had accompanied and been accompanied. Much more important than political affinity was the commitment established through friendships. Friendship tied threads into knots, which tightly bound the on-going connections between La Chiva and the Tejido beyond those few months in Cauca and into a transnational fabric

of affinity and affection. La Chiva members' months in Cauca lead to some observations about accompaniment as an important component of solidarity in practice and as a point where autonomous and horizontal notions of solidarity intersect.

La Chiva's time in Cauca was not solidarity tourism as described above; it was the autonomous initiative of individual members that made the encounter possible, not the funding of an NGO. Furthermore, it was not the connections of an NGO that, like a gatekeeper, would serve as the basis for coordinating the visit; rather, La Chiva members were invited to Cauca in the first place based on their previous and on-going political work in Canada, and the exchange was open, flexible, and organic. In a sense, the encounter was itself a fruit of collective efforts and seemed to negate a formalized, central organizing apparatus. These facts have important implications. Funded independently, La Chiva members did not face the pressure of 'producing' a tangible outcome from the exchange; their time in Cauca did not appear as a section in an annual report to be held up to funding agencies but took the form of internal group report-backs that served to reinvigorate the spirits of those who stayed in Canada, to provide some energy (gas in La Chiva) and direction (a map) for the collective's future work. La Chiva's agenda was not determined by the demands of a funded project but through an on-going process of negotiation and discovery of what their time in Cauca was to entail and, ultimately, to mean upon the group's return. Thus the important point is that the flexibility derived from that autonomous space opened the way for a more reciprocal and horizontal relationship with members of the Tejido.

That autonomy laid the groundwork for a more organic form of cross-border interaction, which I will call mutual accompaniment. Like mutual solidarity, mutual accompaniment implies a two-way process of negotiating the terms of solidarity in a

horizontal dialogue on the conditions and practice of that exchange ‘on the ground.’ Perhaps the greatest expression of mutual accompaniment was the breakdown of preconceived notions of the ‘do-gooder’ or the ‘advisor,’ which made way for finding common ground in personal experiences, friendship, and affection *alongside* ideological or political affinity. La Chiva members engaged in small contributions that made no headlines – from humble interventions in discussions at meetings to intimate person-to-person exchanges of ideas, experiences, and feelings – all of which were reciprocated by the Tejido and the indigenous communities in their accompaniment of La Chiva throughout Cauca and providing innumerable lessons in ‘weaving’ and ‘walking the word.’ In sum, the connection with the Tejido and Cauca was not to be marketed for the benefit of La Chiva, because the fundamental basis of that connection was friendship and the practice of *walking with*. It is at this inter-personal level that the seeds of autonomous and horizontal solidarity were sewn, founding the basis for follow-through upon La Chiva members’ return to Canada.

6: A TRANSNATIONAL *MINGA*

The preceding chapters feature a description and analysis rooted mainly in the particular geographic spaces of Canada and Cauca. In this chapter, the focus shifts towards a more transnational, or trans-border, terrain. The events of the *Minga de resistencia social y comunitaria* ('the Minga'), massive cross-sector popular mobilizations in Colombia at the end of 2008, are of particular importance as the connection of solidarity and affinity between the Tejido – a prominent promoter of the Minga process – and La Chiva – an effort opposing the ratification of the pending Canada-Colombia Free Trade Agreement, seen as the antithesis of the Minga's project – was solidified in practice at that time. This chapter provides an overview of the Minga, its possibilities and challenges. Particular emphasis is placed on the Tejido's role in that process and the dire circumstances it faced during and following the initial mobilizations of late 2008. I then provide a description of La Chiva members' reaction to the Minga as it unfolded, as the Tejido came under attack, and as the Canadian parliament began debating implementation legislation of the Canada-Colombia Free Trade Agreement in late March of 2009. Embedded in these descriptions I present discussions of underlying processes, problems and possibilities. I conclude the chapter with a discussion of transnational resonance.

6.1 'Without owners'

In early October 2008, Colombian television screens showed images of tens of thousands of indigenous activists in northern Cauca blocking the Pan-American Highway at

La María-Piendamó, a small village and indigenous reserve south of Santander de Quilichao.¹ Of the countless video clips produced of these events, broadcast on television screens and streamed on Internet sites, there are two prevailing images. One shows the Colombian state forces, the National Police's Mobile Anti-Disturbance Squadron (ESMAD by its Spanish acronym) and the Colombian Army, gathered behind a wall of Plexiglas shields. One can hear the sound of their batons clunking against the plastic of their black body armour amidst the cacophony of distant chaos. Weapons fire indiscriminately over the barrier and into an abyss of smoke, and interviews with officials claim that the protestors are acting under the manipulation of terrorist groups.

Another image is of rocks and boulders strewn across the road, where scores of indigenous youths run about dodging canisters raining from above and engulfing them in a dense fog of tear gas. Their wooden staffs, decorated with colourful ribbons, are fastened to their belts and sway with their movement. Some unsuccessfully hurl rocks at the ESMAD barrier a hundred metres away, while others carry the wounded toward cover at the road's grassy embankment. In one scene, a man is carried by several youths onto the back of a small truck. He is unconscious and bleeding from his head, which is wrapped in a red shirt. As the truck speeds off towards the hospital in Popayán, those left behind speak to each other in incredulity: "Bullets!" An indigenous spokesperson tells the camera, "We aren't terrorists. We are a people with an agenda. We are in minga, and we want to talk to the country."

Over the following days, five indigenous protestors would be murdered and over one hundred wounded (Murillo 2008d). While some, such as the reactionary Colombian

¹ For video footage of the Minga's mobilizations and surrounding events, see the documentary film produced by the Tejido de Comunicación of the ACIN entitled, *País de los pueblos sin dueños*, available from www.nasaacin.org.

Association in Defence of the Fatherland (ASCOLDEPA), would express outrage against the protesters through racist public pronouncements and comments left on news websites (Murillo 2008b), there is little doubt that these events drew national and international attention to Cauca in particular and the country's social movements more generally. Public outrage against the state forces' use of violence against the protesters gave way to political possibilities, a coming-together of diverse social forces from below that burst onto the national scene calling for and working towards the construction of a new country.

* * *

In northern Cauca in particular, the months preceding these events were marked by intimidation, militarization, and bloodshed. The Corinto region saw almost daily combat between the FARC guerrilla and the Colombian military, as armed groups each accused indigenous authorities of collaboration with the other (Ó Tuathail 2008); an emergent group calling themselves the Furious Campesinos of Cauca (*Campesinos Embejucados del Cauca*) (CEC) sent a threatening and racist missive to the CRIC and the ACIN, warning of ethnocide (ACIN and CRIC 2008); and President Uribe announced a bounty (*recompensa*) on the heads of indigenous leaders engaged in land recuperations (Zibechi 2008a) and suggested publicly that Congresspersons supportive of or sympathetic towards such actions be arrested and jailed (ACIN and CRIC 2008). In the first week of August, a campaign of terror swept through northern Cauca: Twenty-five young people were murdered in the streets of Santander de Quilichao, acts which some speculated were linked to a paramilitary 'social cleansing' campaign to rid the city of drug addicts and dealers, and ten commoners were massacred in the Caucan township of El Tambo.² Among the dozens of urgent messages

² These events, including the original text of the CEC threat, are documented in a joint statement from the ACIN and CRIC published by the Tejido de Comunicación on 11 August 2008. See ACIN and CRIC 2008.

circulating on La Chiva's list-serve at the time, Vilma Almendra wrote, "what scares me is that this same thing happened seven years ago, just like this. And once the killings began to be seen as normal, they started to kill our compañeros and leaders, too."³

Since March and April of 2008, the Tejido's meetings and *barridos* ('sweeps' of presentations and discussions) in communities in Northern Cauca had already begun raising consciousness of the advancing aggression against the indigenous process of which the above events are but expressions. In a comprehensive article tracing these events, Almendra (2009c, 12) writes, "[t]he fruit of these spaces of collective reflection was the proposal of a 'Minga of Resistance for the Integral Defence of the Territory.'" She outlines three phases of this proposal: socialization and the collection of diverse experiences (to inform and reflect); mobilization (to discuss, decide and act); and the consolidation of a plan for action (a plan of continuous resistance) (*ibid.*). Putting this proposal into practice, however, exhibited both possibilities and challenges.

With the October 2008 emergence of the Minga, the indigenous movement of Cauca seemed to burst from its regional base. However, the story of the Minga did not begin when the mainstream media started covering it, nor was its vision accurately reflected in that coverage (Murillo 2008c, 2009). In a seminal text written on October 12 by the Tejido de Comunicación (2008b), then the primary 'spokesperson' of the Minga, the mobilization's roots are traced back much further and brought to the present:

Today we mark 517 years of resistance against an uninterrupted aggression. The neoliberal conquest, crueller and more technologically developed than [...] the European invasion, advances with its insatiable appetite for accumulation. This conquest joins rivers with oceans, crosses through mountains, cuts through forests and builds highways, thereby expelling

³ Almendra, Vilma. 2008. Email exchange with author. Subject: "Re: Fwd: Desalojo de la comunidad Guaraní..." August 7.

populations, while robbing them of their ancestral wisdom, condemning to death cultures that are indispensable for the construction of life.

The actions of the current regime [...] have generated an urgent crisis in the current context. It is a crisis that gets more acute with each passing day. They displace, lie, threaten, and murder, forcing peoples to resist at all costs. With their own acts of terror against peoples, they hope that we will respond with terror of our own, in order to justify an even greater military response [...].

Those who respond with terror to the terror of the current regime only serve its interests. This government obliges us to rise up in dignity, to resist and to mobilize, so that this country of owners without people collapses, and in its wake emerges a country of peoples without owners.

Rooted in colonialism as both memory and contemporary experience, the Tejido's analysis reflects both defiance and refusal to participate in military responses to the 'death project' as it is felt in Cauca and of the desire to imagine alternative futures. Rather than "[serving] its interests" they react to the regime with "dignity," which means resistance and mobilization without resorting to armed struggle but a unifying process of diverse struggles towards "a country of peoples without owners" (ibid.).

6.1.1 Weaving beyond Cauca: possibilities and challenges

During the initial mobilizations at La María-Piendamó, Minga participants accused the state forces of using live ammunition, which government officials denied. A decisive moment came when members of the Tejido filmed footage of a masked man in military fatigues walking out from behind police lines and firing several live rounds before returning back to cover. The Tejido sent this footage to *CNN En Español*. It was broadcast internationally alongside the commentary of a nudo of the Tejido, Nasa leader Rafael Coicué. This forced officials to retract their earlier claims, and President Uribe announced at a press conference: "a video has appeared on a television channel showing a member of the public forces firing. So it looks like the president has lied to the country" (Telesur 2008). A

General accepted full blame for misleading the president, and mounting pressure forced Uribe to meet with the Minga, first unsuccessfully in Cali and then later in La María-Piendamó. Discussions lasted several hours before a crowd of thousands. Reflecting on the events that day, one participant said,

The whole meeting was just a debate; they all left just as they came ... We have to continue with the Minga and take it to Bogotá, and as we do so, we'll meet and walk with the other social sectors, those other marginalized Colombians ... That's the work we're going to do: generate consciousness [and] generate opinions based on the social reality. We'll bring that to Bogotá (Tejido de Comunicación 2009).

Along the way, participants met with other social sectors, and their numbers swelled. Reviving the spirit of the Indigenous and Popular Mandate of 2004 – ‘the challenge before us: we can't do it alone’ (*el desafío que nos convoca: solos no podemos*)⁴ – the Minga emphasized a five-point popular agenda that expressed a rejection of the status quo and a call for the convergence of social movements and communities across Colombia. I paraphrase these points based on their pronouncement in October 2008:⁵

1. Rejection of the neoliberal economic model and the free trade agreements;
2. An end to terror and war, come from where it may;
3. Repeal the current *leyes de despojo* (“legislation of plunder”) in favour of laws that defend life and the wellbeing of peoples;
4. Compliance with previous agreements between the state and diverse peoples; they are the result of struggle and must not be violated or ignored; and
5. An agenda of the people. The creation of mechanisms through which Colombia's diverse peoples might speak together towards a better future.

⁴ *El desafío que nos convoca* and *solos no podemos* are both phrases frequently spoken in Cauca and taken from the September 18, 2004, “Indigenous and Popular Mandate,” the text of which is available online in Spanish at <<http://www.nasaacin.org/mandato_indigena_popular.htm>> and in English translation at <<<http://www.en-camino.org/node/33>>>.

⁵ See Tejido de Comunicación (2009) for the original text of the Minga's agenda in full and in Spanish.

The successes of the Minga were numerous. The power of the five-point agenda was in its resonance with social movement sectors as diverse as numerous trade unions, the Movement of Victims of State Crimes (MOVICE), the Colombian Action Network in Response to Free Trade (RECALCA), the Process of Black Communities (PCN), and Colombia's massive human rights community, most of which not only endorsed the Minga but also participated actively in it. It was the first time in years, perhaps since the era of the Unión Patriótica (UP),⁶ in which social forces had united in such a way. Still, it differed from most previous efforts substantially, as it was not seeking a seat at the table (political inclusion in the state and its institutions) but a new table entirely (a radical transformation of the country).

The Minga was a call for a path forward in a popular process, emanating from below and operating nationally. When it arrived in Bogotá on November 21, 2008 – by then some 60,000 strong and comprised of a great diversity of social and popular sectors –, President Uribe was at the APEC Summit in Lima, Peru. But he did not need to be in Bogotá for the Minga to have an impact, as the objective was now to meet with the country, *beyond* the state. A passage from a speech given that day by Nasa leader Feliciano Valencia sums up the collective character and spirit of the Minga:

Whenever there is a big job to be done, [indigenous peoples] call together a Minga. In Colombia, we have a big job to do. That's why we've gone collecting the pain, anger, sadness and hopes of all Colombians. The Minga proposes to you that we put this all together, all of us resisting together, working together so that there can be a good harvest, so that there will be a future for all (quoted in Tejido de Comunicación 2009).

It was a tremendously important moment. The country's social movements seemed to get behind the Minga as a collective and inclusive process that could not be owned or controlled

⁶ The Unión Patriótica (UP) was a leftist Colombian political party formed in 1985. By the early 1990s, it had virtually disappeared due to a campaign of political genocide waged against it by paramilitary and state forces. It is estimated that some 3,000 UP members were murdered, from rank and file activists to presidential candidates, and most with impunity. For a history in English, see Steven Dudley (2004).

by anyone. In concept and practice, the Minga came from the indigenous movement, but it sought to move beyond it. Raúl Zibechi wrote of the Minga in Mexico's *La Jornada*, describing it as “the other Colombia” and quoting another well-known journalist, Colombia's Alfredo Molano, who wrote, “something new is cooking in [Colombia]” (Zibechi 2008b).

However, there were also important continuous challenges for the Minga.⁷ First, the mobilization is frequently painted in the press, as well as among sectors of the Left, as the ‘indigenous Minga’ (*la Minga Indígena*), as though the Minga indeed did have an owner: the indigenous movement. I had been conscious of this tendency as I followed the Minga from Canada, but when I returned to Colombia in September 2009, it was visible even in the work of Bogotá's graffiti artists, who had adopted the playful slogan, ‘*indios* we trust.’ This is a challenge in that it signalled a certain protagonism or exclusivity embedded within what had been projected as a collective process; it implied the borrowing of the *concept* of the minga and disregarded its meaning in terms of *praxis*. This is something that some of the Minga's proponents have tried to overcome but with great difficulty. The Minga was a wave that attracted much national and international attention for its ability to mobilize and inspire. As if already aware of the possibility of manipulation, Valencia warned during the same Bogotá speech cited above,

This minga cannot end in an election, no sir. This Minga is not a trampoline for [political] candidates who want to give speeches so as to arrive in those kinds of spaces, no sir. Let's not let this force be used for small things. It must be cared for like a newborn, or like a seed that we're planting today for

⁷ While there have been few critical analyses of the Minga to date, Manuel Rozental and I (2009) co-authored an article in English entitled “‘Authorized’ Minga: the Challenges of Popular Movements,” which emphasized the possibilities and challenges of the Minga as of October 2009. Rozental also published an article along similar lines in Spanish entitled “¿*Qué palabra camina la minga?*” (2009) in the journal *Deslinde*. My observations here are based on arguments advanced in both of these articles as well as my conversations with members of the Tejido de Comunicación and Minga participants from September to December 2009.

a long-term process. Take up the five points of the Minga, and we'll all strengthen them within our processes. The Minga comes from all of us (Tejido de Comunicación 2009).

The risk of political-electoral manipulation was quickly turned a reality in January 2009, as the Indigenous Social Alliance (ASI), an indigenous-led political party connected to the CRIC, began cultivating political support for its electoral candidates in the 2010 Congressional and Presidential elections. In its pronouncements and pamphlets, the ASI began disarticulating the five-point agenda towards a decidedly more indigenist, vindictive, and human rights-oriented approach that sought to defend the “good name” of the indigenous movement and sidelined the more radical elements of the agenda, such as the rejection of the FTAs (Ó Tuathail and Rozental 2009).

By October of 2009, the Minga's massive mobilization capacity portrayed resistance not in radical terms but in terms of spectacle. Manuel Rozental and I have argued elsewhere (2009) that this tendency is akin to Charles Hale and Rosamel Millamán's (2006; see also Hale 2004) notion of the '*Indio Permitido*' and neoliberal multiculturalism, whereby contentious political subjects are effectively neutralized, or rendered 'authorized' (*permitido*) through their inclusion within the circuits of neoliberalism. Rozental and I argue that the Minga, one year on, is facing this risk insofar as the co-opted image of resistance is being used as an empty reflection of what was once a radical and popular possibility. The authorized Minga is thus tolerated by the regime it purports to confront. In numerous conversations with tejedores and Minga participants in October 2009, I found that widespread disaffection with the misdirection of the Minga stemmed from a commonly recognized tendency: powerful organizations were using the Minga to sell the image of resistance; once that image is projected, they collect funds from international NGOs and funding agencies, leaving the more radical elements that propelled the mobilization forward

in the first place to fend for themselves. At risk was the Minga as a minga, an autonomous and collective process without owners.

For the Tejido, some of the original promoters and spokespersons of the Minga, the challenges facing the process were felt severely and involved the isolation of tejedores as ‘unauthorized’ elements. During the Minga’s initial mobilizations, this small group of Nasa communicators gained national recognition, with one Colombian magazine naming them collectively one of the country’s twenty-five most influential “leaders” (*Cambio* 2008). An element capable of mobilizing and drawing attention to Colombia’s invisible struggles, the Tejido correspondingly attracted much unwelcome attention, which I outline as follows:

August 11, 2008: Amidst increasing violence in northern Cauca, the Tejido receives a threatening email from the CEC referring to the Nasa as “*Pa-Heces*” and using hateful plays on words derived from their communiqués (Paley 2008).

October 13-14, 2008: The Tejido-run website *nasaacin.org* and list-serves are temporarily shutdown precisely as mobilizations shake northern Cauca and state repression intensifies (IPC 2008).

December 14, 2008: Saboteurs destroy Radio Pa`Yumat’s antenna at Cerro Munchique. The station is off the air for several months and risks losing its broadcasting license. Repairs cost upwards of \$25,000, which the Tejido eventually receives due to fundraising efforts carried out primarily in northern Cauca, New York and Vancouver (Tejido de Comunicación 2008a).

February 7, 2009: Two gunmen burst into the home of Gustavo Ulcué, Webmaster for *nasaacin.org* and long-time member of the Tejido. Ulcué is not home, but the men take his laptop computer and leave a message with his brother: “Lucky for you, Gustavo isn’t here, for we would have done him in otherwise”. Gustavo is forced into exile and eventually resigns from the Tejido (La Chiva Collective 2009).

March 4, 2009: *Cambio* magazine publishes an article with unsubstantiated claims that Manuel Rozental, a Tejido founding member, former coordinator, and collaborator, is linked to the ELN guerrilla group. This ‘signalling out’ (*señalamiento*) forces Rozental to flee Colombia indefinitely (Podur 2009a).

March 14, 2009: Two people follow Tejido audio technician Hugo Dagua home for the second successive night. Dagua and his family are placed in hiding and under community protection for several months (Tejido de Comunicación 2009).

April 5, 2009: Police detain Radio Pa`Yumat personality Emilio Basto and accuse him of “carrying subversive material and inciting violence” while returning from hosting a video-forum. The “subversive material” consisted of DVD copies of the documentary films *Sipakapa no se vende*, about a community consultation process on large-scale mining in Guatemala, and *El precio de la tierra*, about the African palm agrofuel industry and displacement in Colombia. While in detention for two hours without a lawyer or outside contact, Basto reportedly explained to his interrogators, “we want to build a new country by sharing the truth and showing realities” (Tejido de Comunicación 2009a).

The culmination of the above events generated a climate of immense pressure and fear for members of the Tejido, greatly affecting their ability to work. However, these situations elicited numerous gestures of solidarity from groups in Europe and across the Americas. I now hone in on three threads of La Chiva’s reaction in particular.

6.2 Reaction

There are a number of instances I might have chosen to describe La Chiva’s reaction to both the inspiration and challenges presented by the events of the Minga in 2008. However, in the interest of space and coherence, I am limiting my description and analysis to three key threads that are somewhat representative of the solidarity La Chiva and the Tejido put into practice and are also important to situate within the analytical scope of this study. First is a description of how La Chiva responded to the events of the Minga in 2008 and the challenge of bridging the divides between Colombia, Canada, the transnational and the local. Second is La Chiva’s reaction to the continuous repression against the Tejido and the sense that close connections established through previous experiences of accompaniment led to mutual solidarity at a key moment for both La Chiva and the Tejido. Finally, I discuss La

Chiva's reaction to the Canadian government's push to implement the Canada-Colombia Free Trade Agreement in 2009 and the application of lessons learned in Cauca the year before. Embedded in these descriptions are the processes behind campaigns, with particular emphasis on problems and possibilities.

6.2.1 'The thing is, they are resisting'

In October of 2008 in particular, news of the Minga was both inspiring and troubling for members of La Chiva. The months in Cauca and report-backs to the group had provided a certain amount of clarity and purpose for the collective's work from Canada: there was a connection with the Tejido through political affinity and friendship that would provide the mortar of commitment and accompaniment, even if both were to be practiced from Canada and in transnational space. This had an important implication as La Chiva attached meaning to reports of attacks on *protestors* as violence inflicted against their *friends*. La Chiva members kept up with events in Cauca as best they could and continued to find a supporting role through translations, public statements, and letters to Canadian politicians. Still, there were feelings expressed in La Chiva's conversations over teleconferences and email at that time: a sense of frustration in feeling that the group was not doing enough coupled with a desire to make the Minga transnational by bringing its message to Canadians. One of Augusto's frequent phrases at that time is a loaded reflection on those feelings worth dissecting here: "The thing is, they are resisting."

With the daily repression and multiple forms of violence inflicted by the economic model and armed actors in rural Cauca, many had found resistance to be an imperative. The emergence of the Minga signalled the desire of many to confront 'the death project' with 'life plans' articulated collectively in minga, and the consciousness through which that wisdom is

derived was one of the Minga's greatest achievements. The word had been articulated from below and put into action. Hence the importance of Augusto's phrase: "They" (communities engaged in collective processes) "are resisting" (a gerund and thus presently and continuously active in response to the economic model and as a consequence of their understanding of it). For La Chiva, the questions that led from that phrase centre around what the group was doing from Canada: "*The thing is...*" concerned our reactions to events in Cauca and how that was an expression of transnational solidarity in resistance. Were we resisting in our actions? If so, in what ways were those actions of resistance an imperative to a group of people in Canada? These underlying, critical questions brought up frequently by Augusto and others were the source of much underlying tension.

Throughout the last months of 2008, we held public workshops on the Minga in coffee shops and on campuses, translated the all communiqués that we could, and provided updates written as editorials in English and disseminated on list-serves and our blog through a project we called '*Colombia Review*.' The *Colombia Review* closely resembled the weekly bulletins distributed by the Tejido. Recognizing some people's limited tolerance for inboxes filling with what we considered urgent updates from the Minga and other events in Colombia, these bulletins were seen as a means for consolidating items that could be circulated in a single email with an introductory editorial providing updates on context and an analytical framework for the content. The *Colombia Review* editorials always tried to frame the Minga as relevant to a Canadian or North American audience, sometimes by linking it to events in Canada and other times to Canadian and US foreign policy. In general, they sought to allow the material's authors (primarily members of Colombian social movements involved in the Minga) to speak for themselves by bringing their messages across not only language

boundaries but also barriers of context. In our conversation, Augusto Bohórquez explained La Chiva's vision of communication projects like *Colombia Review* thus:

We recognize that [Colombian movements and communities] already have a voice, so it's not like we're giving them a voice but transporting their own voice to the context of [the English-speaking world] through translation. [The editorials serve to say], 'listen to what these people are saying' [...]. In the end, they are the ones creating social change, and we contribute a small part by using communication [as a way] for others to hear about it.

The emphasis was on facilitation. Bohórquez speaks positively about La Chiva's use of communication as a contribution to the Minga's trans-border resonance. But there is also a degree of self-criticism in his comments (a "small" contribution), a feeling that communication and internet-based activism is 'not enough.' Dawn Paley told me,

[The internet] is not enough by itself ... Yes, it is a valuable resource for us [in] connecting our movements, learning about each other, and getting our stories out ... [but] activism still has to be real world activism. We still have to be in our communities....

Paley's comments suggest the need to move what we might call 'virtual accompaniment' into concrete action, to ground the transnational in the local. To answer the first question posed above, La Chiva was indeed resisting in a transnational space. But as Paley relates, connecting struggles through the Internet and communication strategies is but one component of solidarity work.

Grounding something like the Minga in the context of Canada is no short order. For members of La Chiva, it seemed insurmountable and remains a major challenge. Ultimately, that challenge resides in confronting the realities of the Canadian context. In Canada, the situation for 'activists' is much different than in other places: deference to authority and power (Kanji and Nevitte 2000) and the logic of neoliberal capitalism (McBride 2005) are firmly embedded in the country's socio-cultural and political fabric with only scant and

scattered enclaves of opposition. Resistance is laden with innumerable barriers, isolated, and compared with Latin American social movements, decidedly incoherent. In contrast, Colombian movements seem to be at least speaking a similar language, establishing the parameters of resistance through common visions of what was to be resisted. If, as in the Nasa saying, the Tejido orients word and action around the spirit of their community, and thus grounds resistance to transnational processes of accumulation in their own local context, what community spirit might La Chiva engage in Canada in confronting the same?

La Chiva members provide no answers. But their communication work indicates an intent to establish something like a community of likeminded people in Canada, however imagined that might be. This effort is expressed most explicitly through La Chiva's blog entitled, *The Canada-Colombia Project*. The premise of the blog is essentially to provide information and analysis on Canada-Colombia relations from below and its relation to the above, to talk not *about* but *from* Colombia as an experience in which the Canadian government and Canada-based companies have had an influential role in exacerbating conditions. The blog also postures as an informal alternative forum, a space for Canada-Colombia relations beyond the state. Most frequently addressed topics include 'neoliberalism,' 'free trade agreements,' 'transnational watch,' and a section called 'Colombia is the world,' which identifies Colombia as a model of global conflict. In its postings, La Chiva poses challenges to Canadians, as expressed in titles such as the following: "FTA with Colombia: Not in Our Name," on the secretive and mainstream media non-story of the Canada-Colombia FTA; "Shame or Dignity," which poses an ultimatum to Canadians to become informed about their country's foreign policy and act in consequence; and "The Minga Continues," which calls for a transnational minga of resistance. Without a doubt, the majority of La Chiva's work, especially around the Minga, is internet-based and thus not

directly engaged with communities in Canada. That does not mean, however, that community engagement is non-existent; La Chiva members began to create a community among themselves and with their allies through exchanges and inclusion of people feeling similarly in different parts of Canada. For example, by early 2009, there are several former members of the CCSC on the La Chiva list as well as a number of indigenous students at Algoma University in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, who have engaged the issue of Colombia and the Canada-Colombia FTA with a similar perspective. These exchanges transformed the feeling of ‘not doing enough’ into one of doing what they could and with whom they could, all with the broader view of agitating within Canadian society toward making resistance at least a possibility by providing continuous gestures of support to their friends in Cauca as well as in Canada.

6.2.2 ‘Today, they tried to get Gustavo’

The repression facing the Tejido during the Minga in 2008 required a more direct response from La Chiva. It would be against these threats that the group mobilized around concrete and continuous action and directly engaged communities in Canada. On February 7 2009, La Chiva received word of an attempted attack on Gustavo Ulcué, a close friend of those who had been to Cauca and the editor of *nasaacin.org*. The first reaction was in the form of the following statement published on the *Canada-Colombia Project* blog:

DEATH THREAT AGAINST INDIGENOUS COMMUNICATOR IN CAUCA, COLOMIBA
<http://www.canadacolombiaproject.blogspot.com/death-threat-against-indigenous.html>

February 7, 2009

Today, they tried to get Gustavo. With fear, outrage and relief, we denounce the latest attack against [the Tejido]. [...] [T]his attack, which was fortunately only successful enough to instil fear and nothing more, is part of a series of recent attacks against the indigenous movement in Cauca, Colombia. In the words of the Tejido, “[we] feel at imminent risk, not because we have committed a crime, but simply because we speak truth and defend life.”

The intended victim of this attempted attack, Gustavo Ulcué, is a dear friend of La Chiva and instrumental in the publication of the ACIN's profoundly effective webpage (nasaacin.org). It is Gustavín that (*sic*) manages the technical end of the website and keeps it regularly updated, [providing] the primary means through which the indigenous movement in Northern Cauca has brought the messages of their communities, the 'life plans' as they so appropriately describe them, to the broader national and international community. They provide a source of information and inspiration not only for Colombia's social movements but also for those of us in other places that seek to weave together our struggles for another possible and necessary world.

We call on the appropriate Colombian authorities to seriously investigate the series of aggressions made against the Tejido. More importantly, we call on all of those with an eye on Colombia to rally in support and defence of the communities in Cauca and their *Tejido de Comunicación*, which has ceaselessly brought their messages to us, threatening the viability of the transnational 'death project' in every corner of the world that it lingers.

THEY ARE NOT ALONE! LET US WALK THE WORD WITH THE TEJIDO!

La Chiva Collective, Canada

Gustavo's situation required La Chiva to move from word to action, beyond online activism. In the weeks following the threat, we were in constant contact with Gustavo and members of the Tejido, discussing what was to be done. Gustavo had left Cauca and was in hiding, uncertain of his future. Since he had left the indigenous territories, there was little the Tejido or the ACIN could do for him in terms of his safety. In Canada at that time, I had been helping to organize an activist-academic workshop on Colombia at Simon Fraser University, and having already proposed inviting a member of the Tejido to speak in Canada, the Tejido decided that it should be Gustavo who would go. For Gustavo, time in Canada would allow his immediate security situation to subside somewhat as well as provide some time for reflection. For La Chiva, it was a chance to support Gustavo directly and to organize events and talks to further socialize the Minga in Canada and mobilize support for the Tejido.

Gustavo would be in Canada for one month, arriving in Calgary before travelling to Edmonton and Vancouver and staying with members of La Chiva, who had organized a series of speaking events in those cities. The university had paid for Gustavo's flight to Canada and supported the visa application. La Chiva had no money to support his stay, but as Augusto said at the time, "we'll just add more water to the soup."

Gustavo's schedule in Canada was packed. Aside from giving five public talks in three cities, there were also interviews with local radio stations and meetings with other activist and solidarity groups in Canada. Each event was a space for encounter and exchange, where not only did participants become aware of the situation in Cauca but Gustavo became aware of the situation in Canada, where La Chiva was trying to work. "Maicito," he told me at the time, "the problem is greater in Canada because the death project is everywhere and people seem to think it's normal." Gustavo became aware of the pressures of life in Canada, where engaging in autonomous political action is a significant challenge, especially when there are bills to pay and few examples of alternative community processes.

Organizing Gustavo's time in Canada was itself a minga of sorts. It involved the small but consistent efforts of at least twenty-five people – both members and friends of La Chiva – each of which had critical roles to play, from providing food, lodging and transportation to organizing and promoting the various events. Furthermore, while members of La Chiva coordinated it, the effort was collective and involved the efforts of many other groups and individuals. At the events, Gustavo spoke about Colombia and the situation of Cauca in particular, not just of the dire aspects but also of the Minga and community processes that sought to challenge Colombia's status quo. This generated much public sympathy for the Minga that would become apparent later. On the popular Vancouver Spanish-language radio program *Latino Soy*, host Eduardo Olivares interviewed Gustavo,

who explained clearly the immense opportunity of the Minga in Colombia and the need for support for the Tejido. After that interview, Olivares suggested a radio telethon (a *radiotón*) in support of the Tejido. Another minga was underway. The result was a massive effort in Vancouver over several weeks in July and August 2009 in which individuals and groups raised \$6,673 to help repair Radio Pa`Yumat's antenna. It was an important financial contribution, but there were also other successes. While *Latino Soy* coordinated the fundraising, the diversity of individuals, groups and activities involved was astounding. There were hundreds of small, individual donations and activities ranging from the sales of *pupusas* (by the Salvadoran community), musical events and *peñas*, and salsa parties and film screenings. Olivares had almost daily on-air interviews with members of the Tejido, La Chiva, and other nudos; these interviews provided an opportunity to expand consciousness on the context of Cauca as well as communicate the urgency of the appeal. The 'Radiotón for Pa`Yumat,' as it was called, was a minga insofar as it was a collective effort for a common goal and a pedagogical process that raised community consciousness. Gustavo's short time in Canada provided a necessary push for moving La Chiva's work into the local Vancouver community and some direction in terms of finding ways to practice solidarity as a collective and horizontal process. Furthermore, finding that community support through the experience of the radiotón spoke to the possibility of raising funds beyond writing proposals to funding agencies. 'Fundraising' was not a dirty word, as the radiotón demonstrated community processes as an alternative means for carrying it out.

Gustavo's visit was timely for another important reason. One week after his arrival in Canada, the Canadian parliament began debating implementing legislation for the Canada-Colombia Free Trade Agreement (CCFTA). His presentations also placed an emphasis on Canada, challenging Canadians to take responsibility for the activities of the Canadian

government and transnational companies. This was another push for La Chiva in finding ways to carry out solidarity work while emphasizing Canada.

6.2.3 Emphasize Canada

By March 2009, La Chiva's *Canada-Colombia Project* blog featured more than 150 individual postings over its first eight months online and had begun to receive considerable traffic (not to mention letters of support and hate mail), especially as parliamentary debate on the CCFTA ensued. La Chiva was soon invited to participate in frequent teleconference calls with other groups and organizations opposing the CCFTA that were hosted and facilitated by New Democratic Party (NDP) Member of Parliament and opposition trade critic Peter Julian. Those organizations included well established Canadian NGOs and labour unions. While the mere invitation one member called "a major coup for La Chiva," there was still a sense of proceeding with caution. The experience of the CCSC effort and the potential for one group or another to dominate or control the process remained omnipresent. I was delegated the responsibility of participating in the teleconferences and reporting back to La Chiva. Over the next several months, the coalition's teleconferences were extremely insightful, exposing La Chiva to the intra-parliamentary processes and offering a chance to observe how the larger, more powerful solidarity groups organized and treated Colombia as an issue. La Chiva took from those teleconferences up-to-date information on the parliamentary process around the CCFTA and offered background analyses articulated collectively on the group's internal list-serve and communicated through regular bulletins published on the *Canada-Colombia Project* blog and various public email list-serves. La Chiva's blog became one of the primary sources of information dedicated to the campaign against the CCFTA at that time (Podur 2009b).

Still, many members of La Chiva preferred to engage in action beyond the radar of more established ‘civil society’ groups and the parliamentary debates. For example, a group in Algoma organized a Call for Ceremonies against the FTA. They engaged in a spiritual gathering among indigenous groups in Canada and Colombia on the day that President Uribe was to appear in Canada to promote the FTA’s passage. Joanne Robertson, a member of the Algoma group, told me later:

[My involvement with Colombia] always feels so abstract for me, because I’ve never been there. That’s probably why I call so many ceremonies in this area, because that’s the only way I feel connected. I call it a spiritual minga. In one of our classes here we talk about the spiritual thing. And we talk about the American Indian Movement, the things that they did, a group of them anyways. When they involved spirit and kept it that way, all those things succeeded and had lasting effects.

Thus the emphasis seemed to be split between efforts directed at influencing events in Canada’s institutions and other efforts outside those official political spaces, on the campaign against the CCFTA and the process of confronting it in diverse and perhaps more ‘lasting’ ways. La Chiva’s focus thus differed from other groups organizing against the CCFTA in that it emphasized Canada as a society and not simply its political institutions.

The group’s analysis was also different. While most groups thought it strategic to fight the CCFTA on the grounds that there were human rights abuses in Colombia and, in turn, demanding an independent Human Rights Impact Assessment of the deal before ratification, many La Chiva members insisted that the very notion of neoliberal ‘free trade agreements’ was the root issue and the rejection of the FTA was unconditional. In other words, whether or not trade unionists or human rights defenders were murdered in Colombia and regardless of statistics surrounding such issues, the free trade model must not be extended, neither in Canada nor Colombia, because its premise and the ways in which it

was proposed favoured the interests of capital over people. Accordingly, La Chiva's bulletins brought together information on the impacts of the free trade model as it is experienced in both countries and beyond, rather than arguing that Colombia has problems with respect to human rights, democracy, and in other areas; the understanding was that Canada had similar problems, though they were hidden, and Canadian groups were in no position to point out problems in Colombia without at least some mention of the same problems in Canada. Underlying La Chiva's perspective was an emphasis on Canada. Consider Dawn Paley's comments during our conversation:

With the Colombia stuff, it's really been about changing [discourses]. It's not about the same story over and over again about the [CCFTA] and how it's bad, how it's going to hurt Colombian unionists. It's more about ... saying this is about Colombia *and* Canada's whole policy towards people inside and outside both countries....

La Chiva participated in broad efforts but remained on a different path. In many respects, the group remained operating on the margins Canada-Colombia solidarity, but this was seen central to maintaining the group's autonomy. The bulletins were not polite and, with arguments built upon facts from the on-the-ground experiences of neoliberalism in both countries, La Chiva frequently challenged Canadians to choose "shame or dignity" in their reaction to the Canadian government's foreign and domestic policies (La Chiva Collective 2009b). Importantly, the group's autonomy meant that it could express such positions without repercussions from funding agencies or other forms of aggression emanating from a dependency on institutions from above.⁸

⁸ Autonomous expression and political engagement is an important issue in the current public debate among the international NGO sector in Canada. This debate has arisen from the events involving decidedly moderate NGOs being 'de-funded' by Canadian government agencies evidently for expressing positions deemed offensive to the Harper government, such as support for Palestinian rights. See KAIROS (2009); Kirzner (2009); and Canadian Minister Jason Kenney's (2009) speech at the "Global Forum for Combating Anti-Semitism" held in December 2009.

6.3 Resonance

In his *Zapatismo beyond Borders*, Alex Khasnabish (Khasnabish 2008, 7) defines resonance as “the nonlinear and unpredictable dynamic by which meaning made in a particular context becomes significant in another,” adding that, once that happens, “it provokes effects both predictable and unanticipated.” An important observation touched on in this chapter is the way in which the Tejido and the experience of the Minga impacted members of La Chiva due to the close connection established during the process of mutual accompaniment carried out in early 2008. While La Chiva members may have wrestled with finding ways to make what was happening in Colombia have meaning in Canada, the practices of the group and their understandings of solidarity as deeply political work are manifestations of the resonance of dynamics taking root across both places. This chapter has described a number of examples of that resonance – the word and action in the spirit of a community, the negotiation and dialogue of campaigns and processes, and the importance of political work beyond the radar of institutional politics – but I will conclude this chapter with one more explicit and direct observation, one that revolves around La Chiva’s perhaps unintended emulation of the Tejido’s communicative process.

La Chiva’s communications work began with translation but later involved the articulation of its own analysis of the political situation in Canada; the process of that articulation points towards the resonance of the Tejido’s communicative practices and notions of prefigurative politics. In terms of process, the bulletins were collectively constructed. Like a minga, they began with a problem, event, or sometimes even a statement by a politician or official. The process would then typically involve the following: one person would send a series of points to the group; a collective discussion would ensue, adding to and developing the points of the first; then another person would put together a draft of the

bulletin based on the discussion of those points, which would be shared with the group and edited until all were satisfied. The final bulletin would be published on the blog and distributed on list-serves with attribution not to those who participated most but to the collective as a whole. Collective attribution recognized that the bulletin was a ‘creation’ in some way or another of each and every member of the group. Indeed, the process was at times tedious and time-consuming, especially for those involved in drafting and editing the final version to the diverse tastes of all involved. On the other hand, the process of collective creation and attribution in many ways prefigures the practice of direct democracy, where decision-making is shared and based on fairly horizontal participation and continuous engagement and dialogue. One gains by learning from the experiences of others and, in turn, creating one’s own experience.

How this process can be seen as resonance is in how it was a practice learned in Cauca and then transported to La Chiva’s work in Canada. Compare the above description with the following passage from my conversation with Tejido member ‘Betty C.’ in Cauca:

We share a collective analysis that we’re always developing together. When we’re working on the radio, the same analysis is there [as it is in the other areas]. So we’re taking advantage of the tools created by globalization, but using them in our own way to fight processes aimed at destroying us.... *Beyond appropriating these tools, we are transforming them ... from our culture, from our history, from our needs, and more than anything, from the context of aggression lived by the base [communities]. We transform [communication technologies] into weapons of truth, the means for generating a position that is ultimately based on harvesting the opinions of everyone* (emphasis added).

As the Tejido demonstrates in its practice, “harvested opinions” are collective, developed from a group of people working together, and attributed accordingly.⁹ The notion of collective creation, or perhaps what one might call ‘communication in minga,’ contrasts radically with the practices of many activist-writers and journalists, even those claiming to be progressives and supportive of radical social change, who derive analyses from a collective process and later present it as though it came from them alone and then enjoy all the notoriety and opportunities that come about from it. Considering this contradiction, we get a clear vision of how collective processes might compare with other, more dominant, hierarchical, and power-laden practices fundamentally, from the very logic that claims thoughts and interpretations (the word) and the actions that flow from them as commodities as if in a market.¹⁰ To confront that tendency is to recognize how others form people in the context of collective work, how the maturity and experiences of others encourage the unleashing and communication of individual experiences but from that collective voice. Coming back to the notion of the minga, it is clear that solidarity carried out in such a way – without owners, autonomous and horizontally – hints at an alternative way of relating across borders.

⁹ The writing of Vilma Almendra, cited throughout this study, is exemplary of this conviction in practice. Although Almendra has studied at a university and written widely on the topic of social communication and from her experience as a founding member of the Tejido, articles she has written alone are published not just under her name but also alongside that of the Tejido de Comunicación, in recognition of where and with whom ‘her’ analysis originated. This is the essence of a minga put into practice.

¹⁰ The tendency among progressive groups to be concerned with ‘getting credit’ is illustrative of this point. For example, based on a complaint from an unnamed participant in the campaign to stop the CCFTA, the following sentence was included in a La Chiva bulletin in April 2009: “CUPE, CUPW, PSAC, NUPGE, OPSEU, BCTF, USW, and the CLC have been distributing a comic [on the] ‘Top Ten Reasons why Canada Should Not Ratify the FTA with Colombia’...” (La Chiva Collective 2009c).

7: SOLIDARITY WITHOUT OWNERS

The basis of La Chiva has really been this connection we've established with a group of people, the Tejido of the ACIN. I mean, it took time and sacrifice... But I think if solidarity can be anything, it has to be something like that relationship. We have learned so much from each other, and we understand our differences. We aren't using each other but working together... It's really about starting to change things that way from the roots, from people to people connections. – Augusto B., La Chiva

Throughout this study and in the cases presented, I have at times described political solidarity work as an incomplete sketch, often consisting of little more than shifting outlines of 'solidarity.' At other times, like members of La Chiva, I evoke the metaphor of a chiva, sometimes running on fumes and without a map but ever in motion. I have also emphasized the Nasa vision of the mochila being woven in a circular motion, a tying together of diverse strands and creating knots and holes, people interacting in spaces. Given these interpretations of La Chiva, the Tejido, and their encounters and confrontations with solidarity experiences in both macro (transnational) and micro (interpersonal) spheres, the deployment of such imagery is not only appropriate but indicative of certain commonalities: action, construction and movement.

I do not posit that the experiences related in this study represent an emergent, ideal-typical solidarity form; on the contrary, if the preceding chapters tell us anything it is that these cases present no replicable models and do not fit neatly into any particular category offered by any number of broad theoretical approaches. Rather than developing a solid and unified praxis of solidarity, the experiences of members of La Chiva and the Tejido leave us with mere fragments (graphite specks, tire tracks, loose threads) of political possibilities. However, there are sketches of what the experience of solidarity might feel like and mean in

practice. I now turn to some theoretical reflections on the rhizomatic lines of solidarity ‘without owners,’ a possibility of autonomous and horizontal social relations that challenge the logic of globalization from above.

In the theoretical exposition in chapter two, I discussed Deleuze and Guattari’s (1980) notion of the rhizome as a pliable and thus more appropriate approach for understanding complex social and political worlds. I again call upon part of their description here:

[T]he rhizome pertains to a map that must be produced, constructed, a map that is always detachable, connectable, reversible, modifiable, and has multiple entryways and exits and its own lines of flight. Its tracings must be put on the map, not the opposite (21).

Solidarity, as experienced by La Chiva and the Tejido, tends toward something similar. From La Chiva’s beginnings, “tracings” of solidarity appeared as vague sketches on a “map” that did not quite exist. One might argue that this led to precarious foundations for the group, a lack of direction. On the other hand, there was always flexibility; even in the most strained of moments, there was a willingness to construct, a commitment to learn and allow experiences to shape new ways of working, new “entryways and exits,” imaginations and possibilities. The encounter with the experiences of the Canada-Colombia Solidarity Campaign (CCSC) situated La Chiva on the margins of a much larger and complex map than its members had envisioned. While the CCSC experience provided something of a guiding vision for what La Chiva might be able to do from Canada, the actual defining and carrying out of solidarity work required members to engage in a discovery process of their own. This paved the way for a new period of transformation based on affinity and mutual accompaniment, intra-group solidarity in everyday political practice from the margins.

Going to Cauca modified La Chiva's map of solidarity, providing new outlines of understanding what the practice of solidarity and accompaniment might look and feel like: a weaving together of deep connections of friendship and political affinity through conscious political action. Visions would shift again as the Minga took shape in Colombia and La Chiva members were forced to find new ways of working in a transnational space; wrestle with issues of grounding that work in local action; and recognize the need to weave consciousness, if not in Canadian society at least among each other. These processes were replete with conflict and contradictions, but perhaps it is the persistency that is most notable, the desire driving that continuity. These rhizomatic shifts and movements offer fragments of an incipient practice of solidarity in minga, or 'without owners.' The linkage between solidarity and the minga is rather obvious: communal work and a pedagogical process for collective benefit. The minga is a coming together and sharing of struggle, a negotiation of differences that unites people in the understanding that *solos no podemos*. At the end of chapter two, I discussed two threads woven throughout this study – autonomy and horizontality – that constitute bases for the practice of an alternative (if immanent) kind of solidarity. I now return to that theoretical discussion in light of the preceding ethnographic chapters.

For La Chiva and the Tejido, constructing autonomous solidarity has a number of important implications. One revolves around motivations and commitment. Representing La Chiva at meetings with other groups, I would often describe our efforts as “solidarity from the heart, not the wallet.” To illustrate, consider Augusto's comments,

As a part of this collective world, this society, the big question is whether we are ready to make a difference and really change. Are we ready to live in a community and start supporting each other [in solidarity]? Most people I know would say yes; but they stop as soon as it appears like it might affect their standard of living, as soon as solidarity reaches into their wallets. They're like, 'yes, I want to support what you're doing but... I still want a career and the American dream.'

For some members of La Chiva, like Augusto, autonomy and the practice of solidarity go hand in hand. It is not that La Chiva operates with no funding at all (over the years, many members have paid significant amounts of their own money to fund the projects they later even volunteered to carry out); but funding does not ultimately determine whether or not solidarity work is carried out. To illustrate, any number of government or foundation-funded organizations might spend considerable time and effort procuring funding for projects and self-promotion, perhaps more than on carrying out the projects themselves, and may end up reproducing within their structures and practices the same tendencies they profess to oppose (Smith 2007). By contrast, because of La Chiva members' commitment to each other, their friends, and their politics, the group's work (however limited in scale) is carried out regardless of funding or other collective or individual interests. No one is paid for the work, and the result is collective, shared.

An important implication of constructing autonomous solidarity involves maintaining and developing imagination and possibility. What I mean by this is retaining the power to dream, weave, and shift perspectives and practices: to operate like a rhizome in which experiences from different places resonate and come together, not in a way that creates a unitary centre but as reverberations constantly in movement. Virtually free from any overt political doctrine dictated from above, there are few affiliations that might restrict La Chiva members' ability to speak and act freely and as situations present themselves. Thus autonomy also means being able to construct analyses that reflect imaginations and to put them into practice (or, alternatively, abandoning them when they are no longer deemed viable or desirable). Furthermore, La Chiva works autonomously from other solidarity groups and organizations in Canada, which means that it retains some degree of choice as to which groups, issues or processes with which to engage and to what extent. This implies the

potential for breaking the barriers of territorialized struggles and compartmentalized issues, for weaving and facilitating that coming together ‘in minga.’ Dawn Paley expressed something along these lines in our conversation:

[When we weave], we move with each other and realize that all struggles are our own struggle. We can’t compartmentalize things and say, ‘I only work on mining stuff so ... whatever else is happening in your community doesn’t really fit into what I’m doing right now.’

For its part and without a doubt, the Tejido has broken significant barriers of this kind on a massive scale, most notably through its work during the Minga in 2008. Were it bound by allegiance or doctrine (political, ethnic, or otherwise), its character and the ways in which it functions might be different. The Tejido has at times acted even in defiance of the ACIN’s leadership, insisting on serving as a critical voice within the Nasa communities in defence not of the ACIN but of the community process itself. The praxis of the minga, and the notion of the word and action intertwined with the spirit of the community, call for defending that autonomy and putting it into practice. For the Tejido, autonomy thus provides much of the basis from which the word can walk.

In chapter two, horizontality was treated mainly in terms of organizational practice, specifically non-hierarchical participation in collective decision-making. While that is a significant observation and one supported by the participatory processes of collective creation evidenced in this study, horizontality can also be seen as a practice of solidaristic social relations beyond organizations and specific contexts. Within and amongst La Chiva and the Tejido, friendship serves as a binding mortar. While political affinity may have provided a motivation for initial contact and connection and remains an important component, the relations among members of these groups are reconfigured along the lines of friendship. This has important implications when we take into consideration some of the

central issues discussed in the literature on North-South solidarity movements. Friendship implies a challenge to relationships exhibiting distance, inequalities, paternalism, and othering; in other words, the “dark side” of ‘solidarity’ work (Khasnabish 2008, 214). Brought together with solidarity as a deeply political practice, friendship becomes a powerful basis from which horizontal relations among people from disparate contexts is a political possibility, an imminent solidarity ‘in minga,’ without owners, and lived everyday experience.

Autonomous and horizontal solidarity appears as a process in flux, constantly confronting barriers and challenges both internal among those working towards something resembling that ideal and external as pressure from above seeks to ensure that even resistance to neoliberalism follows a particular pattern (is predictable) and tends towards certain structures (is recognizable). Alternatives come from a desire to step outside those bounds and thus represent in their practice something different. In this ethnography, I have only touched on some of the practices of members of two groups that seek alternatives to not only neoliberalism but also the practice of solidarity. I have not included every detail, every observation or suggestion, every success or contradiction. What is in fact the complex reality of the people, processes, and stories described in the previous chapters defies one cogent analysis, written down in a way that might be legible to those who were not ‘there.’ What I have presented here is just one depiction, derived from many with the intention of being faithful to each in some way or another but aware that the whole story would be impossible to confine to the page. Hence there is much that is not written here, just as there is much to come as the stories of members of La Chiva and the Tejido continue, in some cases beyond either group and in diverse projects but with some things in common, roots and shoots detachable and ever in movement.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Glossary of Terms

ACEU	Asociación Colombiana de Estudiantes Universitarios (Association of Colombian University Students)
ACIN	Asociación de Cabildos Indígenas del Norte del Cauca – CXAB WALA KIWE (Association of Indigenous Councils of Northern Cauca)
ALAI	América Latina en Movimiento {Latin America in Movement)
APEC	Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
APIRG	Alberta Public Interest Research Group
ASI	Alianza Social Indígena (Indigenous Social Alliance)
ASOCOLDEPA	Asociación Colombiana para la Defensa de la Patria (Colombian Association for the Defence of the Fatherland)
ASONASA	Asociación Nasa (Nasa Association)
AUC	Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia)
BCTF	British Columbia Teachers' Federation
CCFTA	Canada-Colombia Free Trade, Labour Cooperation and Environment Agreements
CCSC	Canada-Colombia Solidarity Campaign
CEC	Campesinos Embejucados del Cauca
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency

CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
CLC	Canadian Labour Congress
CNN <i>en Español</i>	Cable News Network (in Spanish)
Coca-Cola	The Coca-Cola Company
CRIC	Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca (Regional Indigenous Council of Cauca)
CRO	Chief Returning Officer, University of Alberta Students' Union
CUPE	Canadian Union of Public Employees
CUPW	Canadian Union of Postal Workers
Democratic Security	Democratic Security and Defense Policy, Government of the Republic of Colombia
DFAIT	Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, Canada
ELN	Ejército de Liberación Nacional (National Liberation Army)
ESMAD	Escuadrón Móvil Antidisturbios (Mobile Anti-disturbance Squadron, Colombian National Police)
FARC	Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia – Ejército del Pueblo (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – Peoples' Army)
FRF	Frente Ricardo Franco (Ricardo Franco Front)
FTA	Free Trade Agreement
FTAA	Free Trade Area of the Americas
<i>Hilo</i>	Thread; communication mechanism
<i>Horizontalidad</i>	Horizontality; horizontalism
<i>Hueco</i>	Hole; space

JEGA	Movimiento Jorge Eliécer Gaitán (Jorge Eliécer Gaitán Movement)
<i>La Chiva</i>	La Chiva: Colombia Solidarity Group; La Chiva Collective
M-19	Movimiento 19 de Abril (April 19 th Movement)
MAQL	Movimiento Armado Quintín Lame (Quintín Lame Armed Movement)
Minga	Minga de Resistencia Social y Comunitaria (Social and Communitarian Minga of Resistance)
MOVICE	Movimiento de Víctimas de Crímenes de Estado (Movement of Victims of State Crimes)
MPTR	Movimiento del Partido de Trabajadores Revolucionarios (Revolutionary Workers Party Movement)
<i>Nasa Yuwe</i>	Nasa language; Páez
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NPIC	Non-Profit Industrial Complex
<i>Nudo</i>	Knot; collaborator
NUPGE	National Union of Public and General Employees, Canada
OPIC	Organización de Pueblos Indígenas del Cauca (Organization of Caucan Indigenous Peoples)
OPSEU	Ontario Public Service Employees Union
PAR	Participatory Action Research
PCN	Proceso de Comunidades Negras (Process of Black Communities)
PenC	Pueblos en Camino Collective
PRT	Partido Revolucionario de Trabajores (Revolutionary Workers' Party)

PSAC	Public Service Alliance of Canada
RECALCA	Red Colombiana de Acción Frente al Libre Comercio y el Área de Libre Comercio de las Américas (Colombian Action Network in Response to Free Trade and the Free Trade Area of the Americas)
SAKCoke	Students Against Killer Coke
SINALTRAINAL	Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Industria de Alimentos (National Union of Food Industry Workers)
SU	University of Alberta Students' Union
TAN	Transnational Advocacy Network
<i>Tejido</i>	Tejido de Comunicación y Relaciones Externas para la Verdad y la Vida – Asociación de Cabildos Indígenas del Norte del Cauca (‘Network’ of Communication and External Relations for Truth and Life – Association of Indigenous Councils of Northern Cauca)
UP	Unión Patriótica (Patriotic Union)
USW	United, Paper and Forestry, Rubber, Manufacturing, Energy, Allied Industrial and Service Workers International Union; United Steelworkers
WTO	World Trade Organization
<i>Zapatismo</i>	The movement phenomenon associated with the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (Zapatista National Liberation Army)

Appendix B: List of Formal Interviews

Over the course of fieldwork, I complemented ethnographic data by carrying out a number of informal conversations with people in Canada, the United States and Colombia on the topic of this research. While many of these conversations were neither cited nor recorded, many of them came to influence the direction and analysis of this project. I include here a detailed list of recorded interviews carried out during fieldwork:

‘Angelica Q.,’ member of the La Chiva Collective (Edmonton, Alberta, Canada) 1 September 2009.

April Howard, co-editor of *Upside Down World* (Burlington, Vermont, USA) 14 September 2009.

‘Augusto B.,’ member of the La Chiva Collective (Calgary, Alberta, Canada) 27 August 2009.

Benjamin Dangl, editor of *Upside Down World* and *Toward Freedom* (Burlington, Vermont, USA) 14 September 2009.

‘Betty C.,’ member of the *Tejido de Comunicación* (Santander de Quilichao, Cauca, Colombia) 2 November 2009.

Dawn Paley, freelance journalist (Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada) 14 February 2010.

Erick Gasca, member of the La Chiva Collective (Calgary, Alberta, Canada) 26 August 2009.

‘Marcela B.,’ member of the *Tejido de Comunicación* (Santander de Quilichao, Cauca, Colombia) 21 October 2009.

Joanne Robertson, member of La Chiva and Fair Trade Algoma (Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario) 12 February 2010.

‘Antonio F.,’ member of the *Tejido de Comunicación* (Santander de Quilichao, Cauca, Colombia). 21 October 2009.

‘Oscar G.,’ member of the La Chiva Collective (Edmonton, Alberta, Canada) 2 September 2009.

Sheila Katz, Canadian Labour Congress (Ottawa, Canada) 8 September 2009.

Stuart Trew, Trade Campaigner with the Council of Canadians (Toronto, Canada) 4 September 2009.

Vilma Almendra, member of the *Tejido de Comunicación* (Santander de Quilichao, Cauca, Colombia), 10 October 2009.

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