AWAKING TO THE DREAM:
EDUCATION, LEADERSHIP, AND
POLITICAL-CULTURAL FORMATION
IN FOUR
NEO-ZAPATISTA COMMUNITIES OF CHIAPAS

by

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ABSTRACT

The Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN), which surfaced on January 1st 1994, has generated a great deal of interest among social scientists, as expressed in the publication of several books and articles that analyze the uprising. Education, however, is one aspect of the neo-Zapatista movement that social scientist have not explored in those publications.

After the uprising, the EZLN along with its base communities undertook the development of an education system autonomously from the Mexican state. The goal of this thesis, therefore, is to understand the role of that education system on the political-cultural formation of the neo-Zapatista movement. Based on field research conducted in four neo-Zapatista communities and on the analysis of the relationship between regional culture, education, and leadership, this thesis concludes that one of the roles of the education system is the development, maintenance, and reproduction of a democratic leadership within the neo-Zapatista movement.

Keywords: Chiapas (Mexico) -- Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (Mexico) -- Peasant Uprising, 1994 -- Education -- Politics and Government

DEDICATION

Esta tesis la dedico a los niños y niñas Zapatistas, porque de nosotros depende que ellos crezcan en un México liberado de capitalistas y políticos. Un México donde sus sueños e inquietudes no sean destruidos por un sistema explotador y asesino.

¡Zapata vive, la lucha sigue!

También quiero dedicar la tesis a mis hermanos Ignaki y Julio y a mi nueva sobrina Julieta, con todo mi amor y el deseo de un mejor futuro para todos.

This thesis is dedicated to the Zapatista children, because it is up to us that they grow up in a country free of capitalists and politicians. A country where their dreams and hopes are not destroyed by an exploitative and murderous system.

Zapata lives, the struggle continues!

I also dedicate the thesis to my brothers, Ignaki and Julio, and to my newly born nice Julieta, with all of my love and wishes for a better future for all of us.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

Antonio dreams of owning the land he works on;
he dreams that his sweat is paid for with justice
and truth; he dreams that there is a school to cure
ignorance and medicine to scare away death; he
dreams of having electricity in his home and that
his table is full; he dreams that his country is free
and that this is the result of people governing
themselves; and he dreams that he is at peace with
himself and with the world. He dreams that he
must fight to obtain this dream, he dreams that
there must be death in order to gain life. Antonio
dreams and then awakens...Now he knows what
to do, and he sees his wife crouching by the fire,
hears his son crying. He looks at the sun rising in
the east and, smiling, grabs his machete.

Subcomandante Marcos (2001: 36)

Although much has been written about the Zapatista National Liberation Army

(EZLN)[1], I could no find any studies in the literature that touched on the subject of

education and schooling within neo-Zapatista communities. This thesis, therefore, will

focus on the role that the neo-Zapatista education system has, if any, on the political-

cultural formation of the Lacandón jungle communities of Chiapas. I have centered the

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[1] Rovira, 1994; Collier, 1994; Tello, 1995; Gilly et al., 1995; Montemayor, 1997; Le Bot, 1997; Womack
Jr., 1999; Harvey, 2000; Toledo, 2000; Weinberg, 2000; Nash, 2001; De Vos, 2002; Muñoz, 2003; Rus et
al., 2003; Rochlin, 2003; Imaz, 2003; Otero, 2004; Higgins, 2004; Rodriguez Araujo, 2005; Earle &
Simonelli, 2005; Olesen, 2005.

analysis specifically on the relationship between regional culture, education, and leadership in the conformation of democratic self-governance as it exists in neo-Zapatista communities. I expect to show that one of the roles of education in these communities has to do with the development, maintenance, and reproduction of a democratic leadership within the Neo-Zapatista movement.

After the January 1994 uprising, the EZLN transformed itself from a peasant army into a nationwide social movement which contested bourgeois hegemony over Mexican civil society. Furthermore, the EZLN is conducting its struggle outside of the traditional political channels and has therefore avoided the much beaten path of taking over state's power, choosing instead to concentrate its efforts on the strengthening of civil society from the bottom-up. The EZLN has rooted its struggle on eleven demands — work, land, housing, food, healthcare, education, independence, liberty, democracy, justice, and peace— all of which clearly have an economic basis. However, upon further analysis one can see that these demands also have political and cultural dimensions. A patent example of such dimensions is the fact that by 1995, the recognition of indigenous people's right to autonomy and self-governance became the central demand of the movement. Demands such as these go beyond the realm of economics and into the territory where politics and culture intersect. Furthermore, the strategic turn of the EZLN towards indigenous rights and culture became the catalyst for the consolidation of a nation-wide indigenous movement prominently represented by the National Indigenous Congress (CNI).

The cultural arena is where the neo-Zapatista movement has made the most important strides up to date; and education, as I will show, is centrally related to this

arena. Gradually, after the cease-fire on January 16th 1994, access to education for the neo-Zapatista's children became one of the top priorities of the movement. It was in 1996 when the first schools for communities' children were created and the effort to create one for every community has been ongoing ever since (Interview with education promoter, April 2005). The process, however, has not been simple and many resources, work, and consultations have gone into building the schools, providing them with resources, and shaping a curriculum that addresses the needs and concerns of all the neo-Zapatista communities.

The analysis of the relationship between education and hegemony is important because, as Antonio Gramsci proposes, "every relationship of 'hegemony' is necessarily and education relationship" (Gramsci, 1971: 350). The bottom line is that education is one of the main mediums for hegemony building within liberal capitalist societies, because it is an arena almost entirely controlled by the state. Consequently, educational institutions such as elementary schools, secondary level schools, and colleges and universities have a twofold goal: on the one hand, they provide people with the knowledge and skills needed for the social production and reproduction of the capitalist mode of production. On the other hand, however, education institutions also function as arenas where hegemony may be contested by subaltern groups and classes, such as the working-class, the peasantry, women, and ethic minorities.

Hegemony is thus a contentious issue and in order to understand the political processes it involves, one needs to pay attention to the way in which it is attained, maintained, and eventually lost. In order for a political organization to contest bourgeois hegemony, it has to achieve a level of cohesion and autonomy, which permits such

organization to engage in alliances with other subaltern groups and classes within civil society and to pressure the state to intervene in its favor.

This introductory chapter is divided into three sections; in the first section I will present the literature review on culture, leadership, and education and I will outline the theoretical framework adopted for this thesis. In the second section, I will present my research question and hypothesis. Finally, in the third section I will describe the research methods used data collection.

Political-Cultural Formation and the Literature on Culture, Leadership, and Education

When analyzing rural communities such as the ones that comprise the EZLN's grassroots constituency, one first has to understand the background and context of the region that one has set out to research. Background and context are conformed by history, class structure, the forms of state intervention, and regional culture. Once one has established the characteristics of the context, one may advance on the analysis of specific subjects, such as education and schooling, and their impact on the region. Out of such inquiry, important questions surface and in this thesis I have decided to focus on the following: how does state intervention and regional culture affect education, and in turn, how does education affect political mobilization and its leadership? In order to answer the question I have chosen Gerardo Otero's (1999, 2003, 2004a, 2004b, and 2004c) political-cultural formation theory. The fundamental reason for using that theoretical framework is the fact that political-cultural formation theory, or PCF, takes into account variables such as regional culture, state intervention, and leadership types as the mediating determinants between class structural processes and political-cultural

formation of groups, communities and classes. Therefore, PCF theory systematically overcomes the main theoretical dichotomy prevalent in the social movements' literature: the dichotomy between the structural approach and the culturalist approach to the understanding of social movements' political behavior.

Political behavior and its root causes become the first problem that one encounters when tackling the study of peasant organizations such as the EZLN. If one frames the analysis from traditional social movement theory, one would need to start by asking if the EZLN is a class-based organization, or if it is one based on identity; therefore, reproducing the above mentioned dichotomy. At first glance, one observes that the EZLN is mainly comprised and supported by indigenous rural communities, but this fact offers little insight into the culture, leadership, and class structure of the neo-Zapatista communities. Furthermore, even when one is able to establish the precise class structure of the communities, one is no closer to answering the question posed above. One needs, therefore, to use a theoretical framework that will allow a coherent and comprehensive understanding of the basis of political mobilization.

According to PCF theory, peasant communities can be politically conservative, co-opted and articulated by bourgeois-hegemonic discourse, or they can become progressive forming oppositional or popular-democratic organizations. As Marx pointed out in The Eighteen Brumaire of Louis Bonparte when talking about the French peasantry:

In so far as there is merely a local interconnection among these small peasants, and the identity of their interests begets no unity, no national union and no political organization, they do not form a class. They are consequently incapable of enforcing their class interests in their own name, whether through a parliament or through a convention. They cannot represent themselves, they must be represented. Their representatives must at the same time appear as their master, as an authority over them, as an unlimited governmental power that protects them against other classes, and sends them the rain and the sunshine from above. (Tucker, 1978: 608)

In Marx's perspective, therefore, the main criterion for political formation is the capacity of the class to self-organize and self-represent. In a similar view, the Italian communist Antonio Gramsci considered that in order to determine the level of historical and political consciousness of subaltern groups, one should first determine the level of "autonomy vis-à-vis the enemies they have to defeat" and the level of "support from the groups which actively or passively assisted them [...]" (Gramsci, 1971: 53). Consequently, both Gramsci and Marx considered that only through political struggle do subaltern groups really become formed as social classes. Nonetheless, these two theoretical frameworks are not sufficient to determine how a class, community, or political organization will react in terms of political action.

In order to find a perspective that took into account the importance of the concept of class in the study of politics, but that at the same time overcame the limitations of both Marx and Gramsci's perspectives, I had to take a look at the literature produced by Neo-Marxists such as William Roseberry, Gavin Smith, and Frans Schryer[2]. The main contribution of these authors to Marxism was the introduction of the concept of culture in the study of peasant and indigenous movements.

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[2] The above mentioned authors owe much of their analysis to the work of previous Marxist scholars such as Antonio Gramsci, Georg Lukàcs, Lucien Goldman, Raymond Williams, and E.P. Thompson; authors who in turn were inspired by the writings of the Young Marx.

William Roseberry (1989) was one of the first students of rural communities who developed an understanding of culture from a Marxist perspective—not in any way a grand synthesis. Roseberry was concerned with the underlying theoretical dichotomy present in anthropology between "materialism" and "idealism", between "those who promote 'practical reason' [...] and those who seek a cultural account" (1989: 30-31).

Roseberry affirmed that culture and consciousness are not subsumed within the material base; instead, he argues that any research starts with a given population and its material circumstances, and he "includes culture and consciousness among the material circumstances to be examined" (Roseberry, 1989: 41). This seemingly structural view of culture has to do with the fact that "the autonomy of culture, in my view [Roseberry's], comes not from its removal from the material circumstances of life but from its connection [...] to them —a materialism that saw consciousness arising solely and directly out of activity would be specially impoverished" (1989: 42). Consequently, activity and thought have its basis on the material circumstances of the individuals. In other words, human action (including political activity) takes place within a meaningful context and activity gives new meaning to the context; hence, culture is socially constituted and socially constitutive. With this perspective, Roseberry wanted to avoid the reduction of culture to a mere epiphenomenal structure. However, although social structure and culture are intimately related to each other empirically, the main problem with this perspective is that he did not develop a framework that allowed for the analytical separation of class structural processes and culture. Such separation is important because between political outcomes and the structural processes, there are mediating factors such as culture, state intervention, and the leadership types and modes

of grassroots participation. As I will show below, political-cultural theory, or PCF, provides such an analytical framework.

Roseberry's conception of culture also coincides with Gavin Smith's (1989) understanding of experience as constitutive of consciousness. Following the influential work of E.P. Thompson (1966), Smith analyses politics in an Andean peasant community of Peru. In an effort to integrate cultural studies with class analysis, Smith focuses on the structural tensions, which he considers, have a dynamic impetus on political action, but within which the conscious agency of social actors is central. He believes that "[...] in the process of struggling they [peasants] discover themselves as classes [...]" (Smith, 1989: 224). Smith, however, does not develop this argument into a theoretical framework grounded on the political organization of peasant communities. Smith is in agreement with Marx's distinction between a class in itself and class for itself, the former referring to the class' objective existence, and the latter to its conscious and organized existence. Yet, his analysis is incomplete because there is no elaboration upon the problem of how peasants are to represent themselves within political organizations. Are peasants going to organize themselves around the defense of peasant interests, or are they going to join working-class organizations and subordinate their interests to those of the working-class?

In *Ethnicity and Class Conflict in Rural Mexico* (1990), anthropologist Frans Schryer's main interest is the issue of class and ethnic identity within Mexican peasant communities. Schryer subscribes to the perspective that he calls the historicist Marxist perspective, which was developed through the influence of the writings by scholars such as Antonio Gramsci and Georg Lukàcs. Schryer considers that the perspectives that see

ethnic identity as reinforcing class conflict, and the opposite one, which considers that ethnicity hinders the development of class-consciousness, are both inadequate. When Schryer applied his perspective to the study of a multiethnic rural region of Mexico (Huejutla), he discovered that some of the region's cultural elements had been incorporated by the local bourgeoisie into the hegemonic project of the ruling class. Yet, he also observed that these same elements were being reworked by subaltern classes into an oppositional political discourse that denounced and fought against exploitation and oppression.

Important as it was, Schryer's analysis left out the influence that the state and its interventions have in rural regions. By limiting his study to the regional, Schryer fails to explain the process through which local political movements influence national politics. Furthermore, Roseberry, Gavin, and Schryer overlook the power struggles between leadership and constituency within social movements and political organizations. However, we should credit these authors with challenging both the economic determinism of "orthodox" Marxism and the overwhelming emphasis on identity and culture that New Social Movement theory propounds.

The theories on culture and class reviewed here are a firm starting point for the analysis of power relations within and without organizations; however these theories have limitations. In order to understand all the nuances of political-cultural formation one needs to have a synthetic approach that does not privilege class, identity, mobilization of resources, or the political opportunities available to organizations.

My research problem has to do with the role of education in the formation and maintenance of a democratic leadership; therefore, I also reviewed literature on the

subject of leadership within social movements and political organizations. I examined Robert Michels' seminal work, *Political Parties* (1962). Michels was a close friend of Max Weber and he was concerned with bureaucracy and domination in complex societies. He was responsible for the development of the concept: "iron law of oligarchy", which has been very influential in most studies of complex organizations' leadership and constituency. Michels considered that large-scale political organizations such as the nation-state, political parties, unions, and churches are inevitably condemned to become controlled by an "oligarchy" –meaning those few at the top of the organization– that would exert an authoritarian control over the grassroots membership. He believed that, as organizations grow leaders inevitably become party professionals and their status is perpetuated by the fact that they possess the knowledge necessary to keep the organization functioning.

Authors such as Jonathan Fox (1992), however, have criticized the "iron law of oligarchy". Fox considers that the elites' authoritarian control of organizations is more a tendency than an unavoidable fact. He, in turn, has adopted a more optimistic view of organization politics; Fox considers that large-scale organizations may possess accountability mechanisms to keep the leadership in check. Furthermore, organizations may undergo shifts in the internal balance of power throughout their history. He relates these power shifts to internal factors such as the presence, or not, of checks and balances, and to external factors such as the degree of organizational independence from the State. Fox's contribution helps to establish better the factors that need to be present in terms of mechanisms and values within leadership of an organization if we are to consider it participatory and truly democratic. In terms of political-cultural formation, the

acknowledgment of the existence of organizational power shifts within organizations allows for a better understanding of how leadership types and grassroots participation may combine and change throughout the history of a political organization.

Since my research interest has to do with the role of education in politics, before providing further elaboration of PCF theory, I will briefly review some relevant literature on education and its relationship to social movements. In particular, I am concerned with how education becomes a critical element in building an alternative hegemonic culture, one that generates democratic leadership and modes of grassroots participation.

Critical or Radical adult education is a theoretical perspective that originated from educators and researchers in North America and the United Kingdom (Youngman, 1986; Jarvis, 1987; Giroux, 1988; McLaren, 1989), who applied Antonio Gramsci and Paulo Freire's ideas on education to the analysis of political activism and organization. I have specifically focused on Critical or Radical education literature because it avoids the assumptions of other education theories that consider education as a neutral knowledge transmission activity. However, I should mention that within this approach there is a division between two main perspectives. On the on hand, Critical education is derived from the Marxist theory of class-consciousness and Gramsci and Freire's ideas on education. On the other hand, there is the Radical Pluralist perspective, which has its roots in the identity politics of the New Social Movement (NSM) theory. These two perspectives replicate the class/identity dichotomy that, as I have mentioned before, exists within social movement theories. Both perspectives, however, coincide in looking at education as an arena where power over knowledge is contested, instead of considering it as a politically neutral activity.

An important contribution of Critical or Radical adult educators to the analysis of social movements has to do with the fact that they are the only academics who have studied "social movements as education forces" (Holst, 2002: 87). Authors such as Paula Allman (2001) and John Holst (2002) have stressed the fact that, when people participate in social movements they take on activities such as seminars, workshops, teach-ins, and distribution of leaflets; people also take part in poetry readings; music recitals, pickets, rallies, marches, and petitions; all activities in which politics and culture come together and where, either formally or informally, an education process happens.

Radical adult educators such as John Holst, Corina Dykstra, and Michael Law consider that people who participate in social movements or political organizations are learning skills and gaining knowledge that will allow them not only to run their organizations, but also to unmask the power relationships that exist in society. On the other hand, although Radical Pluralists recognize the potential that education has for unmasking power relationships, they focus their attention on the production of knowledge within social movements because it "[...] is central to the development of collective identities within social movements [...]" (Holts, 2002: 82). Critical educators, on the other hand, consider that social movements are not only "knowledge producers" (Holst, 2002: 83) and that one should not loose sight of the importance of political economy and the analysis of political praxis.

As I have mentioned before, critical education is heavily influenced by Brazilian educator Paulo Freire's pedagogy and Antonio Gramsci's views on schooling. This fact is of importance because, as I will show in chapter five, both authors have also indirectly

influenced the neo-Zapatista education system. Hence, I will outline both Gramsci and Freire's perspectives on education.

Antonio Gramsci's concern with education grew out of his study of the problem of hegemony within modern western democracies. For him, schools were becoming highly specialized because of the need to provide different types of knowledge and skills to the dominant and subaltern classes within capitalist societies. Gramsci categorized these two types of schools as follows, "the vocational school for the instrumental (subaltern) classes, [and] the classical school for the dominant classes and intellectuals" (1971: 26). He also considered schools as the privileged arenas where mass consent for social rule is achieved and/or contested. Through his intellectual and political career, Gramsci was preoccupied by the fact that the liberation of the subaltern classes required a massive educational effort.

> The social character of each type of school is determined by the fact that
> each social group has its own type of school, intended to perpetuate a
> determined function, ruling or subordinate. If one wishes to break this
> pattern one needs, instead of multiplying and grading different types of
> vocational schools, to create a single type of formative school (primary-
> secondary) which would take the child up to the threshold of his choice
> job, forming him during this time as a person capable of thinking,
> studying, and ruling —or controlling those who rule. (Gramsci, 1971: 40)

Even though Gramsci discussed the relevance of the pedagogy methods of his time, the concept of education in his writings went beyond schooling and into the arena of the political party (the "modern prince"); hence, also into the field of social movements and political-cultural formation. Gramsci considered that progressive intellectuals should integrate themselves to working-class political parties, thus, becoming organic intellectuals of that class. Consequently, such integration would help

consolidate the movement into a moral bloc. This intellectual moral bloc, in turn, had the responsibility of providing the masses with a "scientific understanding of the social world and of politics" one that could be "disseminated in the institutions and other social spaces of civil society" (Aronowitz, 2002: 115). If the dissemination of this scientific understanding of the world became successful it would, therefore, create an opposing hegemony to that of the bourgeoisie in civil society. Gramsci considered that this was the first step towards engaging the subaltern classes in the class struggle.

If Gramsci introduced the issue hegemony to education and schooling, Paulo Freire introduced the concept of dialogical education. Paulo Freire developed a pedagogical method that systematically addresses the question of liberating people from oppression. Freire viewed education as a dialogue that gives voice to the voiceless and awakens consciousness; therefore, he believed that trust and critical thinking were crucial within the educational process (Freire, 1970: 76-81). He was also concerned with student/teacher relations because he believed that they could set the tone for political organizing. Freire considered that student/teacher relationships should be egalitarian and based on dialogue, thus becoming a relationship between educator and educatee. Freire saw students not as empty vessels that need to be filled with knowledge; for Freire, students' experiences were important to the education process because they contributed to the generation of knowledge; hence, the educator's responsibility was to act as a facilitator.

We also owe to Freire the creation of a critical literacy education methodology that avoids the traditional types of functional and cultural literacy education. Critical literacy refers to an emancipatory process in which one reads not only the word but also

the world, a process whereby a person becomes empowered to unveil and decode "the ideological dimensions of texts, institutions, social practices and cultural forms such as television and film, in order to reveal their selective interests" (Mayo, 2004: 37). Therefore, "[p]edagogical activity is discussed not in a vacuum but in the context of an analysis of power and its structural manifestations" (Mayo, 2004: 5).

Finally, Freire also supported practical measures such as the creation of popular public schools. In Freire's opinion, such schools should be developed "[...] as learning communities with all the personnel involved, from teachers to janitors and cooks, being prepared as educators" (cited in Mayo, 2004: 8). It is also important to point out that most of Freire's work and research was conducted in Latin America, and as such, it reflects many of the social and cultural specificities of the developing world context.

Two elements that are present in both Gramsci and Freire's perspectives are the use of the Marxist concept of praxis as the guiding principle of any educational activity, and the emphasis on the need for intellectuals to become organically linked with the subaltern classes. In conclusion, for Gramsci and Freire education is not only about knowledge production, but also about transforming the world.

Now that the literature on culture, leadership, and education has been reviewed, I will outline the main theoretical framework used in this thesis: the Political-Cultural Formation theory or PCF. Gerardo Otero's (2004a) PCF theory "refers to the process by which groups, communities or classes define their goals, build organizations to defend or promote their interest, and establish alliances with other organizations" (Otero, 2004a: 41). This theory, as Otero states, analytically "proposes regional cultures, state intervention and leadership types as the mediating determinations between class

structural processes and political-formation outcomes" (Otero, 2004a: 13). Briefly summarized, regional culture refers to the basis from which organizations articulate their demands; state intervention shapes the initial contours of the resulting organizational character; and finally, "leadership types are intimately related to the modes of grassroots participation" (Otero, 2004c: 332).

The intervention of those three determinants, in turn, produces three particular organizational outcomes, which express the character of political-cultural formation: bourgeois-hegemonic, refers to organizations that are promoted, or became co-opted by the state. Oppositional organizations are those that represent the interests of its members and that are formed independently from state institutions as a reaction to negative or repressive state interventions. Finally, there is the popular-democratic type, which is independent from the state and has the possibility of shaping state interventions in its favor. Furthermore, according to Otero, leadership types fundamentally influence the character of class organization. Otero proposes three types of leadership: 1) charismatic-authoritarian, that which is mainly interested in maintaining personal control over the movement and avoid becoming accountable to its constituency, therefore becoming easily co-opted; 2) corrupt-opportunistic, which, although interested in defending the interests of the base and accountable to its constituency at first, in the long run could compromise the autonomy of the movement; and finally 3) the democratic-participatory leadership, whose main concern is to represent the interests of the base while at the same time raising the political and ideological consciousness of the masses. This type of leadership is also interested in training new cadre who might eventually fill the leadership posts when this is suitable (Otero, 2004c: 334).

PCF theory is based on some of Antonio Gramsci's concepts on state and democracy. Gramsci viewed the state as he sum of the "political society", or the realm of domination, plus "civil society", or the realm of hegemony (cited in Otero, 2004c: 331). Therefore, the less democratic a state is the more it has to rely on force (domination) to keep control over civil society. Conversely, the more it relies on the consent (hegemony) of its people, the less need there is for the use of force. However, for Gramsci real democracy means that "every 'citizen' can 'govern' and that society places him, even if only abstractly, in a general condition to achieve this (Gramsci, 1971: 40).

Yet, an issue that derives from the political-cultural formation process refers to the question of how do "subordinate groups or classes become hegemonic or dominant, or at least gain the ability to push for state interventions in their favour?" (Otero, 2004b: 6). Following Gramsci, Otero considers that political-cultural formation of groups, communities, or classes is divided in three phases: 1) "autonomy *vis-à-vis* the enemies they had to defeat"; 2) "support from the groups which actively or passively assisted them" in their struggles; and 3) "the nature of leadership" [...] because "[t]oo often, the character of leadership does not depend on the leaders themselves, but on the state's action" (Gramsci 1971: 53, cited in Otero, 2004b: 6). As Gramsci puts it, "[b]etween consent and force stands corruption/fraud [...] this consists in procuring demoralization and paralysis of the antagonist (or antagonists) by buying its leaders [...] in order to sow disarray and confusion in its ranks" (Gramsci 1971: 80, cited in Otero, 2004b: 6). This last point is the most relevant to this thesis and the one that I will concentrate on for the analysis of neo-Zapatista education.

One of the contributions of PCF theory to peasant studies is that it offers an alternative to the traditional Marxist perspective, which considers that the peasantry does not have the structural capacity to form class organizations, hence that it has to follow the proletariat's lead. Otero also recognized that peasant culture is not homogeneous and he proposes the existence of different types of peasant cultures. On the one hand, there are peasants who are subsistence oriented, that is, their agricultural production is mainly directed to provide for household reproduction. On the other hand, there is the peasant-entrepreneurial culture, which targets its production to the market.

In conclusion, PCF theory provides an analytical framework that successfully bridges the class/culture dichotomy and hence, allows for the engagement in a better understanding of how education, culture, and leadership types within social movements affect each other. In terms of my research problem, the relationship between regional culture, education, and leadership in the conformation of democratic self-governance within neo-Zapatista communities PCF theory provides me with adequate categories to engage in determining the contributing factors that intervene in the democratization of communities, classes, and political organizations.

Hypothesis

Having outlined the theoretical framework of this thesis I will now establish the focus of my research: the interaction of, culture, leadership, and education within political-cultural formation of four neo-Zapatista communities. A hypothetical answer to the main research problem of this thesis may now be proposed: How has the neo-

Zapatista education system contributed to the development and maintenance of a democratic leadership within the movement? My hypothesis is that the role of the neo-Zapatista education system in political-cultural formation is twofold. On the one hand, it provides the children with the basic skills and knowledge needed to engage in self-governance (i.e. knowledge of Spanish, literacy, mathematical skills, etc.). On the other hand, it helps to promote and maintain the democratic leadership of the movement, and thus the conditions to develop and maintain a popular-democratic organization

New leaders and administrators have to be trained for the future if the neo-Zapatista autonomous government is going to be able to continue to engage in bottom-up and consensus-driven democracy. The schooling provided to neo-Zapatistas children is also geared to instill in them a sense of identity as Mexican citizens with rights and duties, as indigenous people with particular cultural and identity rights that need to be guaranteed by the constitution, and as part of the exploited subaltern classes, in this particular case as being part of the peasantry.

Methodology

The original purpose of this research was to asses the political impact that NGOs and the State had on democracy within neo-Zapatista communities as they interacted with local-level leadership. Gaining access to the neo-Zapatista communities, however, was not an easy task. The existence of a low-intensity conflict conducted by the state against the communities that support the EZLN (López Astrain, 1996; López y Rivas, 2004) has forced them to thoroughly screen people who are interested in conducting research on the region. Therefore, my research project had to be evaluated by a group of sociologists and anthropologists who are part of the EZLN's political journal *Rebeldía* and by the Good

Government Council members at the *Caracol* of La Realidad. Furthermore, the national and international interest that the EZLN has generated has also created an overwhelming demand on the part of social scientists and activists to conduct research on the neo-Zapatista movement. Consequently, the review of my project took one and a half months, and it was not until a very good friend of mine —whose mother knows someone at the journal— introduced me to someone who works at *Rebeldía* that I could finally get a personal interview and receive the go-ahead letter.

After I finally gained access to the communities, much of my project had to be modified. Part of the agreement with the neo-Zapatista Good Government Council at La Realidad was that I should research the education system. The authorities expressed that they had a stake in promoting their education achievements in Mexico and abroad. Unfortunately, time constraints and the fact that I had limited resources made it impossible for me to talk extensively with any of the NGOs working in the region. Consequently, my research project had to be refocused according to the communities' expressed and the information that I could obtain in the communities. Since education and leadership are intimately related and central to PCF theory, it was relatively easy to adapt my research to the new focus.

My research was based on the case study of four neo-Zapatista communities of the Lacandón jungle. Data collection was mainly gathered through field research, comprised of one and a half moths of exploratory research and two and a half months of on the ground ethnographic data gathering. The main method for gathering data consisted of a socio-economic survey, interviews, and direct observation, as well as

consulting primary and secondary sources such as documents, newspaper articles, magazines, communiqués, and some pamphlets produced by the EZLN.

Given PCF's emphasis on class structural processes, the project design called for the application of a socio-economic survey among the neo-Zapatista communities that I visited and observed. The goal was to generate data to gain a picture of the class structure within the neo-Zapatista communities. I present this data as a means of providing the backdrop in which the education system has developed. For that purpose, I needed to generate a sample of neo-Zapatista households in each community. Two of the *ejidos* where I conducted my research are divided between neo-Zapatista and non-Zapatista families. In those communities, my sample was based only on neo-Zapatista households. In Plan de Guadalupe, I surveyed 38.46% (10 out of 26) of the neo-Zapatista households, while in Champa San Agustin, I surveyed 48.14% (13 out of 27) of them. On the other hand, Rancho Nuevo and Nuevo Horizonte were small communities and a hundred percent neo-Zapatista. At Rancho Nuevo, I surveyed 80% (8 out of 10) of the households, and in Nuevo Horizonte, I surveyed 77.77% (7 out of 9) of the households.

In order to select which persons were to be interviewed, I selected them using the snowballing technique. The interviews last no more than 45 minutes and their format was that of an in-depth semi-structured interview. I went into the interview with some prepared questions, but I allowed the interview to follow whatever course seemed appropriate in light of the answers given. Furthermore, the interviews, which I conducted with community members and regional authorities, had the goal of gathering data regarding their views and opinions on the importance of education, the decision-making processes and the mechanisms of autonomous governance. I needed to understand those

mechanisms first so I could then establish if the EZLN was a truly popular-democratic organization; and secondly, if this was the case, I was to determine if the education system had any role in promoting and maintaining the democratic practices and leadership of neo-Zapatista self-governance. My main question could be rephrased as follows: Does the education system serve as a provider of the skills and knowledge necessary for community members to be able to participate in leadership roles and consequently, to control the leadership?

For the purpose of analyzing these issues, I have divided the thesis in six chapters. In this Chapter 1 I have presented the theory, literature review, and methodology which informed the research. As for Chapter 2, it provides the socio-economic background of the communities where I conducted my field research. Chapter 3 focuses on the regional culture of Lacandón Jungle communities; communities which became the heartland of the EZLN. Chapter 4 is dedicated to studying the leadership types and modes grassroots participation present in the neo-Zapatista communities. Chapter 5 is dedicated to the analysis of the neo-Zapatista education system as it is conducted in the four communities I researched. Finally, in Chapter 6 I will present a summary of my findings and suggest an agenda for possible future research on the subject of education and political-cultural formation in Neo-Zapatista communities.

2
STRUGGLING TO SURVIVE:
THE NEO-ZAPATISTA COMMUNITIES OF
PLAN DE GUADALUPE, CHAMPA SAN AGUSTÍN,
RANCHO NUEVO, AND NUEVO HORIZONTE

In this chapter, I will present the findings concerning the socio-economic composition of the communities where I conducted my field research. Neo-Zapatista communities in the Lacandón jungle are internally diverse, and depending on regional culture and history, they may have different needs and access to resources. I could confirm, however, that people in Lacandón jungle communities have in common the fact that they identify themselves as indigenous-peasants; "*somos campesinos*", "we are peasants" (Field notes, March-April 2005), was their answer when asked about their subsistence activities.

The main economic activity of the communities, as I could observe, is the attainment of food self-sufficiency through agricultures. The *milpa*[3] has been for centuries the unequivocal foundation of indigenous communities' subsistence in Mexico. Yet, whenever it is possible, peasant households also strive to produce a surplus for local markets. In the case of the neo-Zapatista communities, although the household is the basic unit of production, within the some of the *ejidos* part of the land is also worked

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[3] Plot of corn and beans for domestic consumption.

collectively. The goal of collective work, as expressed by people that I interview, is to provide resources for community expenses such as education and healthcare. In communities such as Champa San Agustin, Rancho Nuevo, and Nuevo Horizonte people pool resources by raising cattle and/or poultry communally, or by establishing retail-store cooperatives. The economic situation of neo-Zapatista communities, however, has been further complicated by the counterinsurgency campaign that the federal government has conducted against them since 1995[4]. Furthermore, neo-Zapatista communities have rejected all forms of government aid; therefore, part of their income now depends on the solidarity of civil society organizations and some national and international NGOs.

I could establish some basic facts about corn production and consumption in the communities that I visited, by means of a socio-economic survey. I based this data on the peasants' appreciation of percentages of corn that they sold and used for consumption. A more accurate measurement of production and consumption for the four communities would have taken a team of researchers and more than one agricultural cycle. Therefore, and because of resources and time constraints, I had to rely on the peasants' calculations. However, I complemented this information with the existing literature on the Lacandón jungle communities' (Xochitl Leyva & Gabriel Ascencio, 1995 & 1996; George A. Collier & Elizabeth Lowery 1999).

Plan de Guadalupe

Plan de Guadalupe —the first community I visited— is the poorest and most isolated of the four. Nestled in a small valley just outside the Montes Azules Biosphere

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[4] For further information on the counterinsurgency campaign by the Mexico's Federal government against neo-Zapatista communities see López Astrain, 1996 and López y Rivas, 2004.

Reserve (RIBMA) and bordering the ejidos of Amador Hernandez and El Guanal, one has to travel north for eight hours from the San Quintín valley to reach it. The community is comprised in its majority of Tzeltal Indians.

Plan the Guadalupe is part of the Emiliano Zapata Autonomous Municipality, which has its council offices at the town of Amador Hernandez. With no possibility to be reached by car or bus, Plan de Guadalupe had never been visited by any civil society organizations, therefore increasing its isolation. An important characteristic of the community is the fact that not all families identify themselves as neo-Zapatistas, therefore, tensions exist between households. During my stay in Plan de Guadalupe, I was constantly accompanied by a couple of neo-Zapatista youths. When I question the authorities about the need for an escort I was told that this measure was designed to protect me from possible harassment by PRI members that reside in the *ejido* (filed notes, March 2005). The neo-Zapatista authorities spoke about the fact that prior to 1994 some families in Plan the Guadalupe, who disagreed with the armed rebellion, had severed their ties with the EZLN. Even though these families were members of the Unión de Uniones-ARIC, no confrontations between the two political factions occurred and all community members continue to work together in ejido matters.

A few days before I left Plan the Guadalupe, I was fortunate enough to interview the only remaining founding member of the ejido. The elder told me that he and other four men first settled the ejido around 1961. They came from a *finca* (private agricultural estate) named "El Porvenir", which was located near Ocosingo in the Patihuitz canyon (interview with author, March 2005). The name Plan the Guadalupe was chosen in honor of the Virgin of Guadalupe. Plan the Guadalupe received official land titles from the

government on April 16, 1968; a total of 1,040 hectares were granted to forty families (De Vos, 2002: 116). By 1983, however, the population had grown to 68 families and an additional 2,878 hectares were added to the original property (De Vos, 2002: 120). Nowadays, because of the conflict with the government, there is no reliable data on population growth, but according to the community's authorities, there are twenty-six neo-Zapatistas families in the *ejido*, which represent about a third of the total population (Interview with author, March 2005).

Survival in Plan the Guadalupe and all other communities is tied to agriculture and cattle ranching. Land is scarce in the region, and the one that is still available is quickly loosing its fertility from years of slash and burn agricultural practices. Moreover, some of the people that I talked to in Plan de Guadalupe told me that in recent years rainfall had decreased (Field notes, April 2005). Consequently, corn harvests are not always sufficient to feed families year-round and some households have to buy corn from other *ejidos* before the new harvest. Other activities such as cattle ranching and coffee growing are also not enough to provide for the families' needs. I was also told that some people, mainly the teenage male sons, migrate to work on fincas or the city to earn enough cash to provide for their families. Regrettably, I could not obtain reliable figures concerning migration because people were reluctant to acknowledge the fact that the new generations are abandoning agricultural activities and moving to the cities.

Champa San Agustín

The second community I visited, Champa San Agustín, is also an *ejido* of Tzeltal speakers; however, its geographical location is more favorable to commerce than that of Plan de Guadalupe. Located between the La Colmena mountain range and the Jataté

River in the Betania sub-region of the Ocosingo canyons, Champa is accessible by the main road that goes from Ocosingo to San Quintín. The forty-one founding families originally received their *ejidal* titles on July 15 1968. Comprised of 1,040 hectares, Champa grew to and occupied an additional 282 hectares; yet, no government titles have been granted on these additional lands (De Vos, 2002: 128).

Resilience and perseverance are the words that best describe *Champeños*; comprised of twenty-seven neo-Zapatista families, ARIC members, and a small *priista* (members of the PRI) minority, Champa is one of the best-integrated communities in the Ocosingo canyons region. There I could observe that neo-Zapatistas and ARIC members had built a peaceful coexistence, which was reflected on the fact that both groups share the church and had reached agreements to introduce electricity and drinking water into the community (Field notes, April 2005). In Champa, there was no need for an escort and I was even lodged in the house of one of the community elders who was not an EZLN sympathizer.

Rancho Nuevo and Nuevo Horizonte

The other two communities that I visited, Rancho Nuevo and Nuevo Horizonte have a lot in common. Both are located near La Realidad, in the Las Margaritas canyons; both communities are small and their members recognize themselves as Tojolabal Indians, although they do not speak the language anymore; both communities where founded after the 1994 uprising. Rancho Nuevo is a small settlement comprised by ten neo-Zapatista families and it is located about a half an hour west down the road form La Realidad. The families that comprise the settlement are originally from the Vicente Guerrero ejido—a Tojolabal community farther to the west— that has been occupied by

the Mexican Federal army since 1995. The neo-Zapatista families of the Vicente Guerrero ejido, for fear of reprisals, left and took refugee in the community of La Aurora. Then, in 1996 the municipal autonomous council at San Pedro de Michoacán, and the community members of San José del Río, decided to provide the refugee families with a plot of land for them to settle and work (Field notes, April 2005).

Rancho Nuevo, unlike Plan de Guadalupe and Champa, has no river nearby; consequently, the settlement has to extract its drinking water from a well. The community, nonetheless, has been able to get two corn harvests per year along with coffee production. The land where Rancho Nuevo is located is part of the *Primero de Enero* (January First) ejido, which is now comprised by the San José del Río and the Nuevo Horizonte settlements. As people in both Rancho Nuevo and Nuevo Horizonte informed me, the land was reclaimed from a ladino rancher named Armando Cruz. Neo-Zapatista communities in most of the regions were the EZLN has influence have reclaimed the lands where they used to work long hours for almost no pay (Interview with authorities at Rancho Nuevo, April 2005).

Once the Autonomous Municipalities were created, one of the first orders of business was to implement the Agrarian Revolutionary Law by issuing land titles to landless neo-Zapatista peasants. One of the characteristics of neo-Zapatista land reform is that it was designed within the spirit of the pre-1992 twenty-seventh article of the Mexican Constitution, which protected the commons from becoming private property.

In Rancho Nuevo, every household has a plot of land to work on, and there are ten hectares set aside for the community to work collectively (Filed notes, April 2005). Yet, during my field research, I could observe that collective property and work is not

consistently extended among neo-Zapatista communities. Gemma Van der Haar (2001) also noticed this trend in the Tojolabal highlands where she conducted her field research. In that region, "[...] *ejidos* combined private rights to cultivation plots with joint ownership of forests, pastures and water sources, and shared responsibilities for overall management by the land reform beneficiaries as a collectivity" (Van der Haar, 2001: 17). She also mentions that, "Rather than full collectivization of agricultural production, the 'collectives' became an activity carried out in addition rather than instead of, people's own production activities" (Van der Haar, 2001: 200). Other examples of the collectivization efforts are the co-op stores managed by women's groups. In Rancho Nuevo, however, only a family managed the co-op store because the other members of the community privilege collective cattle ranching (Filed notes, April 2005).

The last community I visited was the recently settled Nuevo Horizonte; twelve families that emigrated from the San José del Río *ejido* founded this small hamlet in 1999. The families emigrated voluntarily with the goal of deterring the invasion of the land that had been recuperated by the EZLN. Prior to the 1994, the people of San José did not have enough agricultural land to accommodate the growing population and some of them had to work in the nearby *fincas*, in fact, the land where San José del Río stands was bought by landless Tojolabal rural workers from a rancher (Interview with community members, April 2005). Nuevo Horizonte is located in one of the La Margaritas canyons at an altitude of approximately one-thousand meters above sea level. Consequently, the settlement has access to valued forestry resources that they exploit collectively. Small hills and ravines mark Nuevo Horizonte's landscape; therefore, the pattern of settlement is more disperse. There is no electricity or running water, however,

the village is close to the highway and only about three hours away from the city of Comitán.

Crop yields in these communities are low and the subsistence of families is thus constantly threatened. There are many reasons behind the low agricultural production; among them, the quality of the soil because only a thin layer of fertile soil —about 50 cm— covers the jungle's limestone subsoil (De Vos, 2002: 26). Another reason for the low crop yields is the fact that neo-Zapatistas are reluctant to use the improved seeds that the government provides to poor peasants through PROCAMPO[5] (Programa de Apoyo Directo al Campo). The program has made over 3.3 million agricultural producers eligible for the subsidies since it came into effect (Harvey, 2000: 193).

The neo-Zapatistas explained that they are opposed to the use of improved seeds because of economic and health concerns (Filed notes March-April 2005). On the economic side, the EZLN believes that use of improved seeds creates dependency on commercial inputs that are controlled by the federal government, consequently, elevating production costs. In terms of health issues, neo-Zapatista community members expressed their concerns with regard to the possible effects of the use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides, which improved seeds require. The people in the communities prefer to use local varieties of corn; traditionally, peasants set aside the best corncobs of the harvest to be used as sowing material on subsequent agricultural cycles. Agricultural utensils are also simple, they usually consist of a sharp ax and machete, used to clear the brush, and a planting baton —normally a strong tree bough—, which in areas were the soil is too hard

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[5] The program was introduced in 1993 by president Salinas' administration and it consists in guaranteeing direct payments on a per hectare production of seven different crops. The crops were: maize, beans, sorghum, soybeans, rice, wheat, and cotton.

or rocky, is adapted with a steel tip. Labor is the main agricultural input; normally the head of the household along with the male children over the age of ten are the ones who work the land. The women are expected to work on the family gardens or tending the domestic animals, along with doing the rest of the household chores[6].

In the lowlands of Plan the Guadalupe and Champa San Agustín, the sowing of corn takes place at the end of April. In Rancho Nuevo and Nuevo Horizonte, because they are at a higher elevation, the preparation of the cultivation plots is done around the last week of April, and the sowing of corn is done on the first week of May. According to Gabriel Ascencio (1995: 370), agricultural production in the *Las Cañadas* region is higher in recently settled communities. I could attest this fact when I compared the average corn production in 2004 of Plan de Guadalupe and Champa San Agustín, settled in the 1960s, with those of Rancho Nuevo and Nuevo Horizonte, which were settled after 1994. Furthermore, in Rancho Nuevo and Nuevo Horizonte the soil fertility allowed for two harvests a year.

Table 1: Average Production of Corn for 2004 (measured in tzontes7)

Community		N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Champa San Agustín	Corn total crop1	12	2	20	13.58	5.600
Nuevo Horizonte	Corn total crop1	7	15	65	39.29	19.881
Plan de Guadalupe	Corn total crop1	10	20	50	37.00	9.487
Rancho Nuevo	Corn total crop1	8	6	75	45.75	22.651

Source: Socio-economic survey.

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[6] During my research I only ran into one household headed by a woman. In this particular case the woman was separated from her husband and with the help of her sons and daughters she did all the agricultural work. Some members of the community also did help with preparing the land for sowing.

[7] One *tzontes* is equivalent to 400 corn cobs.

From the socio-economic survey, I could establish that, for the most part higher production averages are correlated to a more extensive participation in the market. For example, in Plan de Guadalupe out of 10 heads of household surveyed, only four or of them sold a part of their corn harvest. In Champa San Agustín, on the other hand, the 13 families surveyed consumed all of the corn production. At Rancho Nuevo, 66.66% of the families sold part of their production, while in Nuevo Horizonte only 33.33% of the families surveyed sold part of the harvest. Nuevo Horizonte was the exception to the rule because even though it had a high production average, only a low percentage of the families destined their corn production to the market.

Having a surplus of corn or coffee, however, is not necessarily a sign of higher living standards. People I talked to in all four communities observed that during good harvest periods in the region, the prices of their products are significantly lower. In contrast, in a year when the corn harvest is not abundant, the farmers who produce a surplus get better prices, while the rest is forced to buy corn at inflated prices. People in these communities consider that there are contradictions within the market system that negatively affect their agricultural activities. I also learned that women often do piecework for other women in the communities. They may prepare tortillas, take care of children, raise poultry, or produce handicrafts. However, the production of handicraft for tourist consumption is not as pervasive in the Lacandón jungle region as it is in the highland communities, because the latter have better access to the tourism market. In conclusion, since piecework was an activity that I did not anticipated, in order to understand it, further research has to be conducted.

Another source of income for the communities is the work on *fincas*, the cities in an around the jungle, or in some cases even the U.S. The wage-work that men who migrate carry out is not only agriculture, but also in construction and in some cases in the services sector.

From the picture presented in this chapter, one can see that the pressure on the peasant economy in the region is mounting. The process of peasantization, which started in the 1930s with Land Reform, is being reversed slowly but surely. Consequently, the class-structure of Lacandón jungle rural communities has become more stratified. For example, in towns such as Nuevo Huixtán residents became divided "into two groups, one of poorer settlers who relied on subsistence farming and wage-work for other compatriots, and a wealthier group involved in marketing cash crops and cattle" (Collier & Lowery, 1999: 45). Authors such as Collier & Lowery (1999) also state that the tensions created by the relative economic development of some communities or community members over others, generates serious political divisions among them. However, as I could observe, this is not necessarily the case because as with the example of Champa San Agustín, political divisions have been kept at bay and relations among community members are still amicable and harmonious. An additional example is the case of the ejido La Sultana of Ocosingo, where Francisco Gómez —a better off settler and community leader— became one of the main supporters of the EZLN in the region. *Comandante* Hugo or *Señor Ik*, as he was known, sold-off all his cattle in 1993 in order to buy weapons for the uprising (filed notes, April 2005).

The social movement that the EZLN sparked in the region has clear economic goals, such as the control over the means of production —chiefly land— and the

appropriation of the production process by direct agricultural producers. The EZLN stated in the introduction to the Revolutionary Agrarian Law that they were "[...] claiming the land for those who work it" (Womack Jr., 1999: 252). Regional conflicts, therefore, arose in part from the fact that the Federal government had arbitrarily recognized legal property to some peasant settlements over others. Originally, "the only peasant holdings in 1953 were ejidos that the government had set up under 1930s agrarian reform in the higher western valleys close to the township centers of Ocosingo and Altamirano" (Collier & Lowery, 1999: 39), in the Tzeltal and Tojolabal regions respectively. Yet, these same regional conflicts are also entrenched in political and power struggles. Through out Chiapan history non-indigenous elites have been the ones in control of the regional economy and politics, and they have exercised their power from regional centers such as the cities of Palenque, Ocosingo, Altamirano, Comitán and Las Margaritas.

In the next chapter, I will show how, parallel to the economic transformations in the Lacandón jungle, there was a cultural transformation process, which influenced the political-cultural formation of the communities that would later become the constituency of the EZLN.

3

CHANEB SEBELAL (WALKING THE FOUR PATHS): REGIONAL POLITICAL CULTURE IN THE LACANDÓN JUNGLE, CHIAPAS

The purpose of this chapter is to show how the neo-Zapatista radical democratic politics of *mandar obedeciendo* (to rule by obeying) had its origins in the transformation of the Lacandón jungle's regional culture by the interaction of four social actors: the Catholic Church, left-wing urban activists, the State, and the local peasant communities. It was through the contact and interaction between local communities and external organizations that a new political orientation was born in what may now be seen as "a unique space of social construction" (Higgins, 2004: 143). Furthermore, as Subcomandante Marcos has explained in different interviews (Le Bot, 1997; Gilly et. al, 1995) such interaction resulted in the formation of the leadership of the EZLN.

The nucleus of what was to become the EZLN consisted of three urban *mestizos*[8] —all of them middle-class professionals— and a group of highly politicized indigenous peasants how had kinship ties with some of the communities in the Lacandón jungle. In this chapter, I will show how up until a year before the uprising the EZLN leadership had been simultaneously walking on "four paths". Leaders held membership in the Catholic dioceses organization *Slohp* (The Root in tzeltal); they worked in the peasant

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[8] Person of non-indigenous origin, mixed-blood Mexican.

organizations, *Quiptik ta Lecubtesel* (our strength to do better) and later in *Unión de Uniones-ARIC* (Collective Interest Rural Association); held religious responsibilities in their communities as deacons; and had military rank in the EZLN. Walking the four paths meant that the *Las Cañadas* communities where creatively combining the Christian utopia of spiritual brotherhood, the Maoist ideal of the egalitarian assembly, the indigenous tradition of the collective accord, and the armed struggle alternative proposed by the EZLN (De Vos, 2002: 256).

This chapter is a chapter about origins; therefore, its focus is mainly historical. It covers the period between 1960, when Samuel Ruiz was designated as the bishop of San Cristóbal de las Casas, and the uprising of the EZLN on January 1st 1994. The chapter is divided into three sections, in the first section I discuss the influence that the San Cristóbal diocese, led by the Bishop Samuel Ruiz, has had on indigenous political organizations. In the second section I will describe the role that the Maoist cadres of organizations such as *Union del Pueblo* (People's Unity) and *Línea Proletaria* (Proletarian Line) had in helping to develop class consciousness and democratic organizational structures within Lacandón jungle communities. In this section, I will also show how in the 1990s some of the old Proletarian Line cadres were co-opted by the state and how, in turn, some of them successfully co-opted the biggest peasant organization in the region, the *Unión de Uniones* (UU). Finally, in the third section I will outline the origins of the EZLN and it insertion among Lacandón jungle communities, and then, I will briefly summarize how each of these social actors helped shape the regional culture in the Lacandón jungle.

Searching for Liberation:
The San Cristóbal Diocese and the Indigenous Church

Indigenous communities in the jungle were, for the most part, the result of the coming together of families from different regions and from different ethnic backgrounds. If one couples that diversity with their isolated existence in the jungle and with the conscience rising work of the catechists, one may observe that a space for a new type of social organization had been created.

The Catholic Church was important in the region because it intervened in shaping the regional political culture. In the almost absolute absence of any state institutions in the jungle, the Catholic Church, apart form it religious work, took on the role of service provider. It was in 1960 when father Samuel Ruiz was designated as the new Bishop of the San Cristóbal diocese; he was 35 years old and the son of a retailer from Guanajuato —the bastion region of Mexican Catholicism. Right away, Bishop Ruiz started a catechist movement that had the goal of putting a stop to the spread of Protestantism amongst the Mayan communities of the region. Starting in the 1950s, the Presbyterian Church, through their Summer Institute of Languages, sent missionaries to the Bachajón region to convert the tzeltal Indians. According to Jan De Vos (2002: 219), some of the *principales* (indigenous traditional authorities) of Bachajón were the ones that initially requested the Bishop to help them stop the spread of Protestantism. The *principales* believed that the new faith was eroding the traditions and dividing the communities.

As of 1961, there were only a few Marist and Jesuit missionaries and thirteen priests to serve thirty-two parishes and hundreds of communities and hamlets (De Vos, 2002: 220). To solve the personnel issues, Bishop Ruiz asked the Jesuits and Marist to

create two diocesan schools in the city of San Cristóbal. The purpose of the schools was to provide the communities with more and better prepared catechists. In the new schools catechist would be trained in theology, Spanish, mathematics, and health, along with other skills such as carpentry, horticulture, cooking and tailoring. Between 1962 and 1968, seven hundred catechists from different communities graduated from these schools (De Vos, 2002: 220).

The diocese education project was designed as an instrument of Catholic evangelization; however, it also had some secular components such as an interest in the promotion and preservation of indigenous traditions and culture. In 1964 and in concordance with the renewed pastoral work, the Jesuits of Bachajón assembled a team of tzeltal catechists to translate the Bible to Spanish (Womack Jr., 1999: 131). However, and despite this new focus on indigenous culture, the missionaries were denouncing so-called "bad traditions" such as the ritual consumption of alcohol, witchcraft, and the veneration of non-catholic religious images. It soon became clear that the catechists were becoming agents of cultural change within their own communities. Most importantly, the education practices were still vertical and authoritarian.

Another issue was the fact that the indigenous catechists were also wrestling power away from the communities' traditional authorities. They were working with the Diocese to promote rural co-ops and healthcare services, further encroaching into the functions of the traditional secular authorities. There was also the issue of missionaries becoming the only intermediaries between the indigenous people and the outside world. Consequently, some communities in the jungle canyons stared to criticize the top-down

approach of the diocese and to complain about the excessive preaching from the newly formed catechists.

These authoritarian practices started to change when in 1968 the Bishop became concern with the methods of the pastoral group, this after an inquiry where he was question directly by some of the catechists in the following terms: "Does this God of yours know how to save bodies, or is he concerned only with saving souls" (Womack Jr. 1999: 23). Bishop Ruiz had just attended the Vatican II conferences and the Latin American Bishop's Council in Medellín and because of these experiences, the Bishop became a supporter of Liberation Theology.

Indigenous people had taken cognizance and had reflected on the meaning of liberation, now they were ready to take their destiny into their own hands. Consequently, the communities were asking the Diocese for an autochthonous church. The main novelty in political organizing to come out of this novel collaboration between the Catholic diocese and the communities was the revival of the general assembly as the main instrument of decision-making within the community. General assemblies had existed in some of the northern and highland indigenous communities of Chiapas, but by the 1940s, they had become co-opted by PRI-backed indigenous *caciques*. The political culture was changing within Mayan communities in the jungle, and a direct consequence of that was that the Church and the leaders were been asked not to lead, but to accompany the liberation process.

The diocese embarked on a complete overhaul of its pastoral program in order to comply with Liberation Theology, and to tend to communities requests. A major change was the disappearance of the *nopteswanej* (instructor in tzeltal), which relied on a top-

down approach to preaching the Word of God. In stead, the pastoral group replaced it with the *tijwanej* (one who activates of facilitates), an approach which called for the catechists to act only as facilitators (De Vos, 2002: 223). In the new pastoral conception the Word of God was thought to reside within the heart of the community, therefore, the job of the catechist was only to help get the word from the people. One of the new goals of the pastoral was to "[...] promote participation and decision-making power, in order for the community to take the word as their own" (Leyva, 1995: 394). This turn of events shows that a process of dialogue was taking place, and that the communities were not passive followers of either the Diocese or the catechists.

Soon after the new changes came into effect, communities started to request more autonomy from the Church. The main concern was that communities still depended on priests to perform all religious sacraments. Bishop Ruiz addressed this issue through existing canonical law and he ordained some of the catechist as deacons. The Tzeltals called this ministry *tu'unel* (the one who serves) and the community assembly, just like with the catechists before them, was in charge of selecting them.

Even though communities were gaining in autonomy, they were far from having a political structure that allowed everyone to participate in the decision-making process. For instance, women were not permitted to participate in community assemblies and the catechist and deacons, although formally free form Diocese control, were not free from its influence. Xochitl Leyva (1995) has suggested the existence of two types of religious leaders within the jungle communities, the charismatic and the bureaucratic deacons; Leyva suggests that the former were the formal leaders of their communities; they built the networks and took the initiative on creating development programs.

It was within this context that Bishop Ruiz was asked by the then governor of Chiapas –Manuel Velasco Suárez– to help organize an Indian Congress in 1974, to commemorate the 500 anniversary of Fray Bartolomé de las Casas' birthday. The Indigenous Congress would become the true catalyst of Chiapan indigenous political organization, "[i]t was like the trunk of a tree with 500 year old roots whose branches and leaves started to bloom as a myriad of peasant organizations [...]" (García de León, 2002: 169).

From the Masses to the Masses:
Maoist Activism in the Lacandón Jungle

In preparation for the Indigenous Congress, Bishop Ruiz invited students, university professors, and social activist to serve as advisors for the congress participants. The advisors' job was to help with the systematization of ideas and proposals and to provide the communities' representatives with workshops and training courses on agrarian law, history, and economics (Harvey, 2000: 96). Participants to the congress came from several ethnic groups and communities throughout Chiapas –over 327 communities were represented– and local assemblies had chosen them all.

A practical consequence of the congress was that both the community leaders and the Diocese representatives concluded that they needed advisors that could specifically help them with political organizing. Consequently, Bishop Ruiz decided to invite some of the left-wing advisors who had helped with the Indigenous Congress to the jungle. Cadres from an organization called *Unión del Pueblo* (People's Unity) were the first to respond to the Bishops request. The People's Unity (UP) organization was founded in 1968 at the Chapingo National Agrarian University after the student massacre at

Tlatelolco. With roots in Marxist-Leninist ideology, UP became divided into two factions soon after its creation. One of these factions arrived in Chiapas in 1976, just as the peasants were preparing to resist the imminent expulsion of twenty-six communities from the Lacandón rainforest. It is important t to remember that in 1972, by presidential decree; more than 660,000 hectares of the Lacandón rainforest were converted into communal property and given to 66 Lacandón Indian families. This was done regardless of the fact that the other indigenous communities had already been settled in the region since the 1960s (Harvey, 2000: 98).

By then, the Diocese's pastoral work was divided into two braches to better organize the efforts. *Skop Te Dios* (God's Word) would continue the evangelization process, while *Ach Lecubtesel* (A new better living) would concentrate, along with the Indian Mission Development Agency (DESMI), on the economic development of the communities (De Vos, 2002: 251). The first organizational achievement of the communities and the UP cadres was the creation of the *Union Ejidal* (UE) *Quiptik ta Lecubtesel* (Our strength to do better) in the Ocosingo-Altamirano canyons region. Later other UEs surfaced in the region, organization such as *Lucha Campesina* (Peasant Struggle) and the *Tierra y Libertad* (Land and Liberty) in the Las Margaritas canyons. Eventually 18 of these UE banded together to create the *Unión de Uniones* (UU) in 1980. The first challenge that the newly founded *Quiptik*-UE confronted was the eviction of the twenty-six communities established within the Lacandón Community territory. As the conflict dragged-on, some of the community leaders started to discuss the possibility of arming themselves for self-defense purposes. Some of the leaders pressured the UP cadres to help with weapons training, and at first, some of the Diocese missionaries and

the UP leader Jamie Soto agreed to help. The journalist Guiomar Rovira, in her book *¡Zapata Vive!* (1994), reproduces an interview with a neo-Zapatista insurgent and in it he confirms the involvement of UP in military training:

> One of us was a representative in Kiptik and he was given political and military training. [...] Later Jaime Soto [UP], the advisor, is assassinated. After that Kiptik ta Lebcubtesel rejects the plan to create and army. Other advisors had arrived [LP cadres] and they were the ones who derailed the idea. [...] Those advisors then moved from working on politics to working on economic issues, looking for markets for the animals, the coffee, corn, and other basic staples. (Interview in Rovira, 1994: 244-245)

The peasants, however, pressed forward with the idea and in 1977, in the context of a conflict with a local *mestizo* rancher, they finally and for the first time resorted to the use of firearms. On July 9th 1977, a group of armed peasants attacked the soldiers stationed at Nueva Providencia killing ten of them. After news of the killings reached the local ranchers, some of them decided to flee the region for good. This victory marked the *Quiptik*-UE peasants for a long time; they had now realized that the use of violence against caciques and the army could pay off.

It was in this context that the diocese decided to enlist the help of a more experienced political organization. During a trip to the northern city of Torreón, Bishop Ruiz met the leaders of an organization called *Línea Proletaria* (Proletarian Line). Founded in 1971, *Línea Proletaria* (LP) was the brainchild of the university professor Adolfo Orive and its main contribution to community organizing was the emphasis on creating non-hierarchical political organizations. LP's organizational scheme, already in place in some northern cities, regarded general assemblies and not the leaders as the main decision-making bodies. This scheme was created in the context of urban working-class neighborhoods, and as such, it had its basis in block committees. Ideas and proposal

were prepared collectively at the block level before they were presented to the general assembly. In the next level, the *Barrio* general assembly, ideas were systematized through discussion and accords agreed upon. This method was called "from the masses to the masses" (Womack Jr., 1999: 173-181), because all proposals and initiatives had to be discussed, synthesized, and accepted by all the members of the organization before any decisions could be reached.

LP introduced a new component to the politics of the jungle region, the promotion of networking among communities through the creation of information brigades. The main difference between *Union del Pueblo* and *Línea Proletaria* had to do with the fact that the latter did not support armed struggle. This attitude did not prove to be a factor of disagreement among the communities and the diocese, UP and LP; therefore, they all worked well together.

Soon after the start of the collaboration, LP gained more influence among the jungle communities and some community leaders came under attack. LP cadres were accusing catechists, deacons and peasant leaders of not following through with the assemblies' decisions. A power struggled ensued between the diocese, which saw its influence decreased, the community leaders, and the LP cadres. Adolfo Orive and his group started to come under suspicion because it was believed that behind the democratic facade there was the deliberate intention of discrediting the more radical leaders and to displace the Diocese from political work. Finally, in 1978 the Diocese and the communities decided to expel *Línea Proletaria* and *Unión del Pueblo* from the region.

The communities in *Las Cañadas* continued their work with the Diocese and on September 1980 *Quiptik, Lucha Campesina,* and *Tierra y Libertad,* along with other UE

join together to create the *Union the Uniones Ejidales y Grupos Campesinos Solidarios de Chiapas* (UU). The new organization was comprised of 180 communities in 15 municipalities and 12,000 heads of household (De Vos, 2002: 261). In addition to being a strong organizational backbone, the UU helped to consolidate the regional identity of the *Las Cañadas* peasants. As Xochitl Leyva stated, this collective identity was "[...] built through time by several factors: Liberation Theology, Maoism, the UU, the indigenous languages, and being a resident of *Las Cañadas*" (Ascencio & Leyva, 1996: 171).

The golden age of the UU, however, was short lived and by 1983 the organization irrevocably split. Part of the reasons behind the split was that by the 1980s, a faction of the UU leaders had become very distrustful of the external interventions in the communities politics, especially of the advisors and the Diocese personnel. Parallel to the creation of the UU in 1980, a select number of catechists who were still close to Bishop Ruiz and the San Cristóbal diocese created the clandestine organization *Slohp* (The Root). This clandestine organization had the goal of eliminating the influence of non-indigenous UU advisors over the indigenous communities (De Vos, 2002: 260). Then, in 1982, Adolfo Orive returned as an UU advisor to push forward the project of a credit union. In 1983, however, as the credit union started to work there was a major split in the UU; some of the *Uniones Ejidales* of the UU accused Orive of bypassing the community assemblies in order to fast-track the credit union project. Consequently, Orive's group left and retained the name of UU, while the *Quiptik, Lucha Campesina, and Tierra y Libertad* UEs took the name *Unión de Uniones y Sociedades Campesinas de Producción de Chiapas* —commonly known as *Unión-Selva* (De Vos, 2002: 264). The

Unión-Selva later became the organizational base from where the EZLN recruited its members. I will go into the history of the EZLN's insertion within the communities of the Lacandón jungle in the following section.

The Path of the Armed Struggle:
The EZLN Becomes a Peasant Army

In order to understand the successful insertion of the EZLN within the *Las Cañadas* communities and its consequent influence on the region's political culture, one has to understand the origins of armed resistance in the region. Historian Antonio García de León considers that the receptiveness to the use of arms for self-defense within the *Las Cañadas* communities can be traced to what he calls the "culture of evictions" (2002: 126). García de León has documented the history of evictions in Chiapas since the eighteen century, and in the case of the Lacandón jungle, attacks and evictions were in part the result of cattle ranchers' encroachment upon indigenous people's land. Violence or the threat of violence, consequently, has been a prevalent tool of this regional class.

Furthermore, as the revolutionary war in Central America raged-on and a steady flow of refugees moved from Guatemala into Mexico, the Mexican state intervened in order to prevent the Guatemalan guerrilla from using the Lacandón jungle as its rearguard. Consequently, the border and jungle region of Chiapas were heavily militarized during the 1980's. According to García de León (2002: 209-218) the worst regional violence transpired in the years of 1979 to 1983, and by 1981 the army was conducting military exercises with 9000 soldiers in the Las Margaritas canyons (Garcia de Leon, 2002: 213). Furthermore, as part of the general containment strategy in the

region, the Mexican government chose in 1982 a military man to be the governor of the state (Harvey, 2000: 162).

According to Subcomandante Marcos, the EZLN was founded on November 17th, 1983 (Gilly et. al, 1995; Le Bot, 1997). Even though violence was pervasive in the region and some peasant leaders were calling for armed struggle, it was not easy for the EZLN carders to gain the confidence of the communities. In fact, it would take several years of painstaking political work and a complete overhaul in original methods and strategies for the EZLN to become accepted by the communities.

The first group of EZLN cadres had the mission to establish a guerrilla training camp in the uninhabited territory of the Chiapan jungle. This group consisted of three *mestizos* and three Indians from the northern and highland regions. The indigenous cadres were very experienced and they had suggested the region because they had some family members living in the San Quintín valley *ejidos*. In a 1994 interview by Carmen Castillo and Tessa Brisac, Subcomandante Marcos would assert that:

> [...] the *compañeros* [companions] of the first group were people with a high political level, very experienced in mass movements. They knew all the conflicts within political parties because they had been in all the left-wing political parties. They had been tortured and had been in a good number of prisons around the state and the country. Yet, they also wanted to know the history of the *palabra política* [political word], the country's history, and the history of the struggle. (In Gilly et. al, 1995: 132)

The EZLN was a traditional Marxist-Leninist guerrilla organization and it had a hierarchal military structure. However, as the EZLN started to interact with the communities the orthodox views of the leadership started to change. Subcomandante Marcos has explained this change in the following terms:

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[...] the organization, still within the Marxist-Leninist framework,
suddenly confronts a reality that it cannot explain, for which it has not a
good understanding and within which it has to work. [...] This is how a
transformation process from a vanguard revolutionary army into a peasant
communities' army starts. An army that is part of an indigenous
resistance movement and that coexists with other forms of struggle.
(Le Bot, 1997: 148-149)

The family networks of the three indigenous cadres were of the utmost
importance in making contact with the communities. In terms of political-cultural
formation one can observe that the relations of reproduction, that is, "relationships among
the exploited" (Otero: 2004) played an important role in the character of the alliances
among the communities and political organizations such as the EZLN. Through the
interaction of the communities with the external political organizations, the regional
culture, the leadership, and the modes of grassroots participation, evolved and
transformed.

By 1989, the EZLN was working closely with most of the *Las Cañadas*
communities and *ejidos* and its presence was known and approved by the UU and *Slohp*
leaders (Interview with Subcomandante Marcos in Le Bot, 1997: 176-177). I suggest that
the EZLN's success can be attributed in part to the democratic political culture achieved
by the communities through all the years of struggle. For instance, before the insertion of
the EZLN in the communities only the males were allowed to participate in the
assemblies. Within the EZLN guerrilla camps there was no gender privileges; the only
legitimate authority came from military rank. Consequently, as soon as women started to
climb the hierarchy gender relations among fellow *insurgentes* (insurgency troops)
started to change. Now women were not only traveling outside of their communities and
sharing household responsibilities with their partners, but they also had authority over

men. This dynamic change within the guerrilla camps eventually influenced the women in the communities to organize and create a Women's Revolutionary Law. The new Women's Law guaranteed them "the right to be a part of the revolutionary army, to take part in any of the communities' affairs, to decide over their sexuality, to education, to health and to occupy leadership positions" (In Womack Jr., 1999: 255).

So far, I have established how the peasant-indigenous communities that inhabit the Lacandón jungle achieved a profoundly democratic political culture. I have also shown how the leadership gradually became accountable to the communities as they walked along four paths: 1) Liberation Theology, 2) grassroots peasant organizing, 3) peasant armed self-defense, and finally 4) the creation of a regional army.

Soon after peasants arrived to the jungle, they realized that their level of isolation from urban centers and the pervasive encroachment into the rainforest of cattle ranchers were the negative consequences of their new found "freedom"; consequences for which they were not prepared. The San Cristóbal diocese was the first external allied to share the concerns of the jungle communities. Eventually, the Catholic missionaries' intervened in the region with an emphasis on education that allowed for the formation of a modernized leadership, which expressed itself in the 1974 Indigenous Congress. This leadership soon started to promote the participation of the communities in the solution of their problems and in the analysis of the reasons behind their economic and political marginalization. The immediate consequence of this consciousness-rising work was the creation of the first peasant organizations in the region.

Later on, as peasant organizations spread throughout Chiapas and the Lacandón region, Maoist organizations such as People's Unity and Proletarian Line introduced the

concept of "from the masses to the masses" to the political culture of the region. This new method of political decision-making had as its main goal the transformation of the traditional community assemblies into non-hierarchical organizations. Additionally, there was the goal of creating regional political networks among the communities in order to end their traditional isolation. Before the Maoist organizations reached the jungle, political organizing and decision-making depended mostly on the leaders that had been trained by the San Cristóbal diocese. After the Maoist were expelled, new community leaders had arisen and within the community assemblies and peasant organization, all projects and initiatives had to be discussed, synthesized, and accepted by all members before any decisions could be reached. This checks and balances imposed on the leadership by the communities, however, did not eliminate the influence that some leaders —especially the LP cadres— had on the decision-making process. As a manner of summary, it can be said that by the start of the 1980s the peasant organizations in the jungle region had broken the hold of bourgeois-hegemonic politics; still they had not become fully popular-democratic. Some of the leaders were, in some instances such as in the creation of credit unions, still bypassing the assemblies in decisions.

In terms of political-cultural formation, the transformation process of the Lacandón jungle regional culture was the basis from which the EZLN launched a challenge to the regional dominant culture. The transformation of the region's political culture provided the neo-Zapatistas with a fertile ground on which to plant a class-based armed organization, one that could effectively defeat bourgeois hegemony in the region. The political work of the EZLN cadres also opened a new space for community members to become more influential in the decision-making processes without having to become

catechists, deacons, or *ejido* authorities. A more democratic political culture blossomed

within jungle communities and education, both formal an informal, had a lot to do with

its consolidation and expansion, but I will analyze this process in chapter five.

4

TO RULE BY OBEYING:
LEADERSHIP AND GRASSROOTS PARTICIPATION
IN THE NEO-ZAPATISTA COMMUNITIES

In the previous chapter, I established the nature of neo-Zapatista communities' regional culture, which is one of the elements that mediate political-cultural formation and affect education. In this chapter, I will go into the description and analysis of the education system, but before I do that, I first need to establish the nature of leadership types and the modes of grassroots participation, as they exist in the Lacandón jungle region. Therefore, I will describe the manner in which neo-Zapatista autonomy functions, and the manner in which the leadership and the grassroots constituency interact with that autonomous system.

Neo-Zapatista political culture is based on the concept of "rule by obeying" and this concept arose, as I have shown in Chapter 2, from the communities' experiences with the Catholic Church, Maoist activists, and the organization that was to become the EZLN. To rule by obeying refers to a particular understanding of what democracy should be and how the government should function. It ultimately means that the legitimacy and authority of the EZLN rests upon the consensus-driven accords of community assemblies. This is an understanding that is akin to Gramsci's understanding of democracy: "Political

democracy tends towards a coincidence of the rulers and the ruled (in the sense of government with the consent of the governed) [...]" (Gramsci, 1971: 40).

The EZLN is a military-political organization; consequently, it has military and civilian branches. These two branches in turn have their own leadership structures; the military branch is strictly hierarchal with the CCRI-CG (Clandestine Revolutionary Indigenous Committee-General Command) at the top, while the civilian branch is horizontal and rooted in the community's assemblies, which act as the deliberative arm, while the municipal and regional councils act as the executive arm. It is important to clarify that the CCRI-CG is comprise by indigenous *comandantes* who are civilians, and who are elected representatives of their communities. As Subcomandante Marcos explained on a communiqué dated, February 23rd, 1994:

> They [the CCRI-CG] want me to explain to you that their power to make decisions is set out for them by the democratic decision- making structure of the Zapatista National Liberation Army. This means that neither they nor I can take any personal initiatives with regards to any agreement worked out at the table of the Dialogue for Peace. The *compañeros* who have been named as delegates have been named by four groups of Clandestine Revolutionary Indigenous Committees, which mainly control four ethnic groups. They are the ones who command, and they in their turn have to ask the various regions their opinions, and the regions have to ask the communities theirs, and in the communities, the men, women and children meet and decide, on the basis of the information they have, how to proceed. Then comes the reverse process: The communities send their representatives to the regional meeting, the regional group tells that ethnic group's Clandestine Committee, and the Committee tell its delegate what the answer is. It's a somewhat complicated process, but ones we consider logical —one the Zapatista National Liberation Army finds logical— and in any case, it's the one that makes us invincible.
> (http://flag.blackened.net/revolt/mexico/ezln/marcos_dialogue_d3_feb94.html)

This is how the structure of the EZLN has worked since 1994; however, it has suffered some transformations in the past decade, first with the creation of the Zapatista

Autonomous Municipalities in Rebellion (MAREZ) on December 19th 1994, and then with the creation of the Juntas de Buen Gobierno (Good Government Councils) on August 9th 2003. I will talk about these events later in the chapter; meanwhile there is a need to explain the inner workings of the leadership structure within neo-Zapatista communities.

The type of leadership within an organization is important because the level of internal democracy directly affects the degree to which it will be independent for the state and the ruling class. In the case of neo-Zapatista leadership there are accountability mechanisms in place that allow for the grassroots constituency to control, and if needed, remove leaders. Community representatives to the Good Government Council (GGC) stated that, "positions in the autonomous councils are occupied in three year stints, and leadership rotation is encouraged after that (Interview with GGC representatives, March 2005). This statement is supported by the communiqués sent out on the first anniversary of the Good Government Councils, where Subcomandante Marcos points out the achievements and shortcomings of the councils.

> The plan is that the work of the JBGs should be rotated among the members of all the autonomous councils of each region. This is so that the task of governing is not exclusive to one group, so that there are no "professional" leaders, so that learning is for the greatest number of people, and so that the idea that government can only be carried out by "special people" is rejected.
>
> Almost invariably, once all the members of an autonomous council have learned the meaning of good government, there are new elections in the communities, and all the authorities change. Those who have already learned return to their fields, and new ones come in and start over again.
>
> If this is analyzed in depth, it will be seen that it is a process where entire villages are learning to govern.
> (http://flag.blackened.net/revolt/mexico/ezln/2004/marcos/flawAUG.htm)

In this sense the EZLN can be consider as possessing a democratic leadership, "[...] whose principles include concerns over raising the political and ideological consciousness of the masses and training new cadre who might succeed [them] in the leadership posts [...]" (Otero, 2004a: 48).

The Lacandón jungle regional culture has made its imprint in the way the neo-Zapatistas base communities organize politically. Indigenous people are the clear majority in the region, yet, up until 1994 they did not have any control over local or regional government. Most of the jungle territory corresponds to the constitutional municipalities of Ocosingo and Las Margaritas, and it is from these two cities that political control over the region is exerted. The municipal government offices, the agricultural ministry representatives, the courts, and most social services such as hospitals and schools are also concentrated in these two towns. Leadership types in the region developed over time, from the *mestizo* and indigenous charismatic-authoritarian leaders of the *finca* and the early days in the jungle, through the sometimes corrupt-opportunistic leaders of People's Unity, Proletarian Line, and Union de Uniones-ARIC, to the actual democratic leadership of the EZLN.

The isolation of the indigenous communities with all its negative aspects also created the conditions for an eventual flourishing of communal autonomy. In the context of the vacuum created by the departure of indigenous agricultural workers from the fincas between the 1930s and 1950s, and in the absence thereafter of the authority of the *patrón* (boss), the Lacandón jungle communities fashioned a new brand of communal authority and of decision-making methods. At first, the colonizers of the jungle organized around their traditional authorities and those emanating from the *ejido*. The traditional

authorities, the elders, were the male heads of household that had already successfully served the community in different civil and/or religious *cargos* (positions). A shift in this traditional structure occurred when the communities started to organize accordingly to the *ejidal* property structure. Thereafter, younger men who now were the *ejido* authorities displaced the elders form their leadership positions.

Then in the 1960s, the Catholic diocese started to organize the communities and as result of it, by the 1970s, in both Tojolabal and Tzeltal communities, a parallel structure of religious authorities emerged. It is important to point out that some differences did exist between the way Tojolabal and Tzeltal communities adapted those structures. In Tzeltal communities the new leaders, catechists and deacons, frequently overlapped with the civilian authorities. Xochitl Leyva (1995) emphasized the fact that the *tu'unel* (deacon in tzeltal) had become very involved in civil matters and in some cases, his authority overlapped with that of the *ejido* president. On the other hand, Gemma Van der Haar (2001) observed that within Tojolabal communities the authority of the *koltanum* (deacon in tojolabal) was clearly separate from that of civilian authorities.

This new leadership had some charismatic-authoritarian remnants; however, the new methods of participation introduced checks and balances into the communities' political structure. In terms of cultural traditions within Tojolabal and Tzeltal communities, leadership is seen as a chance to serve the community and not as a means to gain personal goals. Indigenous communities traditionally hold the concept of authority as "service to the community" (Van der Haar, 2001: 131), and are marked with continuous consultations and debates at all levels, all of them aimed at achieving a

community-based consensus. Eventually, with the arrival of the Maoist advisors from UP and LP innovations to community participation were introduced, the main one being the division of the communal assembly into discussion groups. The idea behind the proposal of discussion-groups was that, in this manner, community members would have the opportunity to further the debate and express openly their ideas and opinions concerning the leaders' propositions. These small groups would then reconvene in the open forum of the assembly to share their conclusions with the rest of the people so the process of achieving consensus could begin (Field notes, April 2005). This method was designed with the aim of encouraging more participation and of eliminating the problem of having the more outspoken members gaining control of the assemblies.

With the insertion of the EZLN in the mid-1980s, community assemblies continued to function as the main sources of political authority within the region. It was only in the context of war that the military branch of the EZLN temporarily displaced the communities' representatives in terms of leadership and authority. After the cease-fire, however, the civilian branch of the movement regained the leadership and on December 1994, twenty-eight Autonomous Zapatista Municipalities in Rebellion (MAREZ) were created as the first institutions of a nascent neo-Zapatista autonomous government. Since then further developments have happened, mainly the creation of a new level of government to coordinate neo-Zapatista autonomy regionally without having to fall back on the military structure of the movement. The EZLN announced that the autonomous government was going to be extended to the regional level by the creation of five Good Government Councils (GGCs). These new councils replaced the Aguascalientes cultural centers of the Highlands, the North, the Frontier Jungle, the Tzeltal Jungle, and the Tzots-

Choj regions. In each of the five regions a so-called *Caracol* (literally, conch shell) was established as the center of the regional GGCs. The neo-Zapatistas chose the conch shell symbol because, as an EZLN communiqué signed by Subcomandante Marcos explains:

> They say here that the most ancient say that other, earlier ones said that
> the most first of these lands held the figure of the shell in high esteem.
> They say that they say that they said that the conch represents entering
> into the heart, that is what the very first ones with knowledge said. And
> they say that they say that they said that the conch also represents leaving
> the heart in order to walk the world, which is how the first ones called life.
> And more, they say that they say that they said that they called the
> collective with the shell, so that the word would go from one to the other
> and agreement would be reached.
> (http://struggle.ws/mexico/ezln/2003/marcos/resistance13.html)

The GGCs are regional institutions in charge of the coordination of the different autonomous municipal governments and the contacts between the neo-Zapatista communities and the civil society. In a 2003 communiqué by Subcomandante Marcos, which announces the creation of the *Caracoles* and GGCs, he explains that they were created:

> In order to counteract unbalanced development in the Autonomous
> Municipalities and the communities.
>
> In order to mediate conflicts which might arise between Autonomous
> Municipalities, and between Autonomous Municipalities and government
> municipalities.
>
> In order to deal with denounces against Autonomous Councils for human
> rights violations, protests and disagreements, to investigate their veracity,
> to order Rebel Zapatista Autonomous Councils to correct these errors and
> to monitor their compliance.
>
> In order to monitor the implementation of projects and community work in
> the Rebel Zapatista Autonomous Municipalities, making sure that they are
> carried out in the time frames and methods which were agreed by the
> communities; in order to promote support for community projects in the
> Rebel Zapatista Autonomous Municipalities.

In order to monitor the fulfillment of those laws which, by common agreement with the communities, are operative in the Rebel Zapatista Municipalities.

In order to serve and guide national and international civil society so that they can visit communities, carry out productive projects, set up peace camps, carry out research (those which provide benefits for the communities) and any other activity permitted in the rebel communities.

In order to, in common accord with the CCRI-CG of the EZLN, promote and approve the participation of *compañeros* and *compañeras* of the Rebel Zapatista Autonomous Municipalities in activities or events outside the rebel communities; and in order to choose and prepare those *compañeros* and *compañeras*.
(http://struggle.ws/mexico/ezln/2003/marcos/governmentJULY.html)

In the case of the region were I conducted my fieldwork, the Frontier Jungle, the *Caracol* is located in the ejido community of La Realidad. The GGC at La Realidad coordinates the four autonomous municipalities that comprise the region, San Pedro de Michoacán, Gral. Emiliano Zapata, Libertad de los Pueblos Mayas, and Tierra y Libertad. Each of these municipalities in turn coordinates over one hundred neo-Zapatista base communities. The main decision-making body in each community, however, is still the community's general assembly. All men and women over the age of twelve have the right to participate in the assembly and the communal or ejidal authorities are the ones responsible for convoking it whenever there is a pressing matter that needs to be discussed or decided.

In interviews that I conducted with community members, concerning the question of how do the communities reach their decisions, the overwhelming answer was that they make their decisions through the community assembly. Authors such as Leyva & Ascencio (1997), Van der Haar (2001), and Harvey (2000) have also documented the political importance of community assemblies. Unfortunately, I could only attend a few

assembly meetings, those in which I presented the research project and asked the community for permission to conduct the necessary inquires. From this interviews that I conducted, the observations that I made, and the evidence provided by the aforementioned authors, I was able to confirm that the assembly is indeed the main decision-making body within the neo-Zapatista autonomous political system.

It now becomes evident that the neo-Zapatista authorities ultimately answer to the assembly and even the military leadership has to obey the people in times of peace. Yet, there are still challenges to be made in order for the neo-Zapatistas to achieve a truly direct, popular, and democratic system. The consensus decision-making process, as with any other system of this nature, has intrinsic limitations. In the consensus decision-making model, outspoken members can dominate the assembly. The process may also be slow and in some cases, where decisions need to be taken quickly, it can lead to frustration if not properly facilitated. Finally, individuals can block consensus to further their own power.

In the case of the indigenous communities, another challenge is the fact that women and younger community members continue to be marginalized from the decision-making process. Before the EZLN came along, only men and those whom owned *ejidal* plots had the right to participate in the community assembly. Nowadays, it has been stipulated in the rules and procedures that women have the right to participate in assemblies in equal terms with men, and even children as young as twelve have a right to voice their opinions (Interview with the GGC representatives, March 2005). In some instances, however, women find that their household responsibilities impede them from participating, while in other instances some men continue to oppose the full fledge

participation of women in assemblies. As I will explain in the following chapter, education and the level of political preparation are important factors that may impede women and young community members to participate with equal footing vis-à-vis the older and more educated male leaders.

If the leadership of an organization is to become truly accountable to their constituency, full participation of the constituency is a key factor; multiple channels of participation are needed, and a relative autonomy from the state along with diversified alliances (Fox, 1992). In the case of the EZLN, the internal factors that have permitted it to evolve into a popular-democratic organization are: 1) a consensus based decision-making process, 2) vigilance commissions comprised of community members, and 3) a system of representation and leadership rotation. Furthermore, if those mechanisms are to be successful, a participatory culture has to be encouraged, community members need to take on leadership roles within the organization, and they need to have the skills and knowledge necessary to perform those roles, and to make informed decisions at the assembly.

In conclusion, the concept of ruling by obeying means that the legitimacy and authority of the EZLN leadership ultimately rests in the consensus-driven accords of community assemblies. Yet, if this system of self-governance is going to work and flourish, a culture of participation needs to be stimulated and the skills and knowledge needed to administer and govern have to be provided. In the following chapter, I will discuss how the neo-Zapatistas have confronted the challenge of providing the educational tools necessary to stimulate and maintain a democratic leadership.

5

ASKING WE WALK:
NEO-ZAPATISTA AUTONOMOUS EDUCATION

In this chapter, I will present a description of the neo-Zapatista basic schooling system as it exists in the "Frontier Jungle"[9]. I will also show, from the perspective of PCF theory, how the radical democratic practices within the communities are dependant on this education system, for if community members are to be in a position to govern, they need to be provided with the necessary skills and training. Furthermore, I will show that education is also the foundation for building an alternative hegemony in the Lacandón jungle region and beyond. In fact, the neo-Zapatista movement not only challenges "hegemonic definitions of nationhood and directly opposes neoliberal globalism on the ideological terrain" (Otero, 2004b: 221), but it also challenges the definitions and practices of education in Mexico.

As I have shown in chapter 2, early on in their struggle for autonomy, indigenous communities in the Lacandón jungle became acutely aware of the importance of education and of the need to know their rights if they were to effectively protect their property and promote their interests and culture. Although some communities had access to schools, the schooling that the state provided was intended to integrate the indigenous

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[9] The "Frontier Jungle" region is comprised of four neo-Zapatista autonomous municipalities: San Pedro de Michoacán, Libertad de los Pueblos Mayas, Gral. Emiliano Zapata, and Tierra y Libertad, and it is administered by the Good Government Council located at the Caracol of La Realidad.

population to Ladino culture; therefore the curriculum did not include the history and cultural values of Mexico's indigenous communities. Ultimately, the state's strategy is to use schooling as an arena for achieving the hegemony over civil society. As I will show in this chapter, men and women in these indigenous communities worked hard to create an autonomous education system; a system that could allow them to produce capable representatives and leaders to defend their interests *vis-à-vis* the Ladino controlled municipalities.

When the EZLN launched its military offensive in 1994, along with the occupation of seven mayor towns in Chiapas, it also distributed an eleven-point list of demands; point six on the list was education. Indigenous communities of Chiapas had been historically neglected by the government and by 1993, out of the 70% of the communities where the population's mother tongue was indigenous, 55.24% were illiterate (Vargas-Cetina, 1998: 137). Most rural communities in the Lacandón jungle did not have a school, and in the communities where they did, most often teachers were absent or the children mistreated (Field notes, March-April 2005). Hence, the EZLN entertained no illusion about the Mexican government's capacity to provide for the educational needs of indigenous communities. Instead, the EZLN and its base communities reached out to other indigenous movements, left-wing political organizations, and the national and international civil society. They started to work on solving the eleven demands with the help of civil society organizations such as, *Ya Basta!* (Italy), *Solidaridad con Chiapas* (Spain), Building Bridges (Canada), International Forum (Denmark), Global Exchange (USA), *Café Libertad* (Germany) *Enlace Civil* (Mexico), and many others (Olsen, 2005: 217-218).

By 1996, the government teachers who worked in neo-Zapatista communities were expelled under suspicion that they had become government spies. The decision to expel the teachers came in the aftermath of the February 1995 invasion of indigenous communities by the Mexican army in an attempt to capture the EZLN leadership. After the expulsion, the neo-Zapatistas decided to take over education in the communities and with the help of some national and international solidarity organizations, created the first elementary level schools. These first neo-Zapatista schools were built in the communities where the Aguascalientes cultural centers were located (La Realidad, Oventik, Morelia, La Garrucha, and Roberto Barrios). Civil society volunteers staffed them at first and the resources were very limited (Field notes, April 2005). By 2004, however, the neo-Zapatista education system could boast the creation of 80 new schools and the training of 150 education promoters in the Frontier Jungle region alone (Interview with GGC, March 2005).

I have divided this chapter in two sections, in the first section I present a summary of the history of indigenous education in Mexico, its precursors and their ideologies, along with the implementation of the federal education system in the state of Chiapas. In the second section, I present my findings concerning the role of autonomous education in the political-cultural formation of the Frontier Jungle's neo-Zapatista communities.

From Cultural Genocide to Ethnic Integration:
Mexico's Education System and the Indigenous People of Mexico

The rebuilding of Mexico's education system after ten years of civil war (1910-1920) had as its main priority to educate the peasantry and working-class masses with the skills and knowledge required for national development. Mexico's post-revolutionary

government had chosen the path of capitalist development; therefore, there was the need for modern industries. The Catholic Church up until the twentieth century (Tangeman, 1995), however, had dominated education in Mexico. Hence, if the state's modernizing project was to be successful, education had to come under the state's monopoly. The establishment of the National Ministry of Education (SEP) in 1921, meant that now the state was the only actor responsible for designing and implementing the country's education policies (Vaughan, 1997). As this new education project moved forward, the state recruited intellectuals into the political class, men like the philosopher José Vasconcelos, who would later become the first head of the new Ministry of Education (1921). Men such as Vasconcelos were now responsible for the development of the state's education policies, and consequently they became organically linked to the nation-building project that had bourgeois interests at the helm.

By the 1920s, only 34 percent of the country's population was literate; consequently, in order to produce the technicians and skilled workers needed for the modernization of the country the Education Ministry launched a nation wide "teacher-training and alphabetization campaign, especially in rural communities" (Tangeman, 1995: 3). Post-revolutionary governments were very concerned with the indoctrination of the working-class and the peasantry, with instilling in the subaltern classes the idea of class harmony and cooperation instead of confrontation. The Mexican state presented itself as the "neutral" mediator of class antagonisms. To achieve class harmony, Vasconcelos stressed the need for a common national identity. He believed that in order to rise above Mexico's cultural and geographic differences this new identity had to be based on the culture of the *mestizo* national majority. In his 1923 book, The Cosmic

Race, Vasconcelos expressed his believe in the superiority of mestizo culture, because, as he stated, it is: "[...] the fifth great race of humanity, forming a universal synthesis, a final blend of the peoples of Europe, Africa, Asia and America" (Vasconcelos, 1997: 76). Within this particular ideology, Aztec and Mayan civilizations were idealized and romanticized in history books, paintings, and poems, while contemporary indigenous populations were considered as the most backward sector of the nation, as the degenerate remnants of the once great pre-Hispanic civilizations. The question then became what to do with the Indian ethnic minorities? The answer was: to integrate them to the national culture through education. Consequently, *Indigenismo* was born as the main ideology informing the government's education policies towards indigenous communities.

Although akin with Vasconcelos' ideas on national identity, *indigenismo* was based on the work of the Mexican anthropologist Manuel Gamio. He had studied under Franz Boas in the United States and therefore had developed a culturalist view of what he called the "Indian problem" (Gamio, 1960). Gamio believed that some of the cultural aspects of the Indian population, such as handicrafts, traditional garments, and folk tales, should be integrated as part of the national culture. On the other hand, any traditions considered as an obstacle for national development and modernization, such as indigenous languages or communal forms of political and economic organization, should be eliminated.

It was during the administration of President Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1940) that the first corporatist institutions affiliated to the PRM (Mexican Revolutionary Party) such as the National Peasant Confederation (CNC) and the Mexican Workers Confederation (CTM) were created. It also was during president Cárdenas' administration that some

social demands were integrated to the education project. In 1934, president Cárdenas ordered the creation of a socialist education project. This project had a strong anticlerical and community oriented ideology, which emphasized the need for Agrarian Reform and for the defense of the Constitutional rights of the working-class and the peasantry. The goal of this type of education was to incorporate the subaltern classes into the hegemonic discourse, as the victors of the Revolution and the state as the true guardian of their interests. It was during this period that teachers became not just educators, but political organizers who promoted production cooperatives based on the ejido all over Mexico (Vaughan, 1997).

It was also during president Cárdenas administration that the first rural schools in Chiapas were created. These rural schools, however, were restricted only to a few Highland hamlets such as Zinacantan and Amatenango (Modiano, 1973). In these boarding schools, children were taught exclusively in Spanish and the use of their mother languages was prohibited, in some cases, even physical punishments were used to enforce that prohibition. In order to further rural education, *La Casa del Estudiante Indígena* was created in Mexico City, as an institution where boys ages twelve to fifteen were trained as teachers. The goal of the *Casa* was to transform these youths into agents of cultural change for their communities of origin.

In 1948, the National Indian Institute (INI) was created to encompass all indigenous education into one single institution, to coordinate development programs, and to conduct ethnographic research. From the beginning, the INI recruited the Summer

Institute of Linguistics[10] (SIL) as technical advisor. In addition, by 1951 the literacy method for indigenous languages of the Institute was adopted by the INI. Although integration was still considered a main concern of indigenous education, it took the backstage to economic development. The INI was also involved in an attempt to integrate the use of indigenous languages in some areas of education. With the help of SEP, indigenous men started to be trained to become rural teachers. Most of the times, however, the teachers were not assigned to their communities of origin or even to a community where people spoke the language of the teachers. Consequently, schooling continued to be carried out in Spanish.

By the 1970s, some of the indigenous teachers participating in the government education programs, along with some young anthropologists (Díaz-Polanco, 1979; Warman, 1970; Medina, 1983; and Bonfil Batalla, 1987), started to criticize the government policies of acculturation towards indigenous people. It was through this criticism that a program for a bicultural and bilingual education was fostered. Bicultural education was marginally successful, and only in the cases where local teachers and the communities had had some participation in the design and implementation of the education programs. A relevant example of a marginally successful project was the *Programa de Educación Integral para Campesinos de la Selva Lacandona* (PEICASEL).

As I have shown in Chapter 2, in the case of the Lacandón jungle communities rural schools did not reach the region until the 1970s, more than twenty years after the first communities settled there. Another consequence of the relative isolation of the

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[10] The Summer Institute of Linguistics was an arm of the evangelical protestant church, which was primarily designed to research indigenous languages with the goal of translating the bible into such languages for facilitating the work of evangelical missionaries.

jungle communities was that other social actors, such as the Catholic Church and left-wing class-based organizations, filed the vacuum left by the state, and in some cases they influenced indigenous education in the region. The PEICASEL project began in 1989 and ran until 1996 (Vargas-Cetina, 1998: 145). The project came about as a joint effort between sixty communities organized through the Unión de Uniones-ARIC, UNESCO and SEP. The program was based on the training of community teachers and in the design of education programs which took into consideration the needs and demands of the targeted communities (Vargas-Cetina, 1998 & 2001). Plan de Guadalupe, Champa San Agustín and San José del Río, communities where I conducted field research, were among the ones that originally joined the program.

Our Words, Our Weapons: Grassroots Autonomous Education in Four Communities of the Lacandón Jungle

The EZLN is a guerilla organization that has privileged dialogue over armed struggle, and the strengthening of civil society over the conquest of state power. Words and dialogue, more than weapons, have been the essential elements of the EZLN's political arsenal. The neo-Zapatistas have engaged in a direct dialogue with Mexico's civil society since 1994 and through dialogue, they have demonstrated that their struggle is driven by the desire of indigenous communities to become autonomous. Words and the ability to express them freely are part of the neo-Zapatista struggle and they have made sure that their words are heard. Furthermore, they consider such words to be *la palabra verdadera* (the true word). Tzeltales, Tzotziles, Tojolabales, and Choles tuned into a method of presenting their struggle through traditional symbols. Subcomandante

Marcos has served as a translator or spokesperson that has incorporated those symbols into the EZLN discourse.

> As a result, our army became scandalously Indian [...] we made the adjustment from our orthodox way of seeing the world in terms of bourgeois and proletarians, to the communities collective democratic conceptions and their world view. (Subcomandante Marcos in Guillermoprieto, cited in Bruhn, 1999: 42-43)

Hence, the neo-Zapatista discourse may be seen as an expression of "a unifying consciousness and ultimately a weapon" (Bruhn, 1999: 33). The EZLN leadership has even expressed that without the word, the indigenous people would not exist in a political sense; the word "gave birth to us" (EZLN communiqué cited in Bruhn, 1999: 33). Yet, this form of communicating with the civil society is not a one-way process because dialogue is at the center of the neo-Zapatista conception of democracy. Democracy for the EZLN is, fundamentally, "the right to speak and be listened to, the duty to listen to what comes in the word of others" (EZLN, 1995: 389-98). The key issue of the neo-Zapatistas' *palabra verdadera* is that it disputes "the government's version of reality" (Bruhn, 1999: 17) and like most social movements, the neo-Zapatistas are engaged in the construction of an alternative map of reality (Holst, 2002: 87). Gramsci attributed to this debunking of common sense a key role in the undermining of the dominant class hegemony.

Beyond the mere expression of words, the neo-Zapatista struggle has combined identity and cultural demands, such as indigenous self-governance and autonomous education, with class-based demands such as land, housing, food, and health care and political demands such as independence, liberty, democracy, justice, and peace. Hence, the neo-Zapatistas have posed a challenge to the Mexican state, a challenge regarding

who has control over material production and cultural reproduction. However, before the EZLN arrived at this moment in its political-cultural formation process, it first had to go through a transformation in which the leadership had to revaluate its ideology and political strategies. The challenge for the EZLN was how to insert itself, and be accepted by the indigenous communities. The EZLN leadership, consequently, had to build bridges towards the indigenous world. It was in this process where the relationship between Subcomandante Marcos and Old Antonio became crucial. As Marcos himself stated in an interview with French sociologist Yvon Le Bot, "[…] that old man [became] the bridge with the communities, with their world and with its most indigenous part" (Le Bot, 1997: 147).

The development of the relationship between the mestizo and indigenous leadership of the EZLN had a significant educational component. This empirical fact is supported by the theoretical propositions of critical education authors such as John Holst, who suggest that "social movements [may be seen] as education forces" (Holst, 2002: 87). I will add that, although education is not explicitly mentioned within PCF theory, if one considers social movements as being educational forces, then one has to ask how education relates to the shaping of cultural-political formation.

One has to remember that between the class structural processes and the political-cultural formation outcomes there are three mediating determinants: 1) regional culture, 2) state intervention, and 3) the leadership types and modes of grassroots participation. The issues of regional culture and leadership have already been presented in the second and fourth chapters, however, the issue of state intervention was only tangentially touched upon, because one of the characteristics of neo-Zapatista communities' political-

cultural formation was that this mediating determinant was almost absent up until 1994, especially in the Lacandón jungle region. As I have shown in the second chapter, this absence allowed for the flourishing of an autonomous regional culture. In terms of PCF, education and schooling may then be seen as shaped by regional culture and state intervention. In turn, education and schooling can be seen as one of the vehicles that shapes the leadership and the modes of grassroots participation of groups, communities, classes, or organizations. Education in itself, however, does not lead to social transformation (Holst, 2002: 79).

The EZLN had its own education structures since before 1994; however, they were restricted to the formation of political cadres among the ranks of the Zapatista army. The political training of cadres took two months, it was done outside of the jungle, and access to these courses was only possible by an officer's recommendation (Imaz, 2003: 65). In addition, within the guerrilla camps in the jungle the EZLN troops had daily meetings after military training and as a member of the EZLN explained, "...the cell meeting, [is] the time when the company gets together to study or discuss the main issues of the organization" (Imaz, 2003: 154). Consequently, community members only had access to this type of education if they decided to join the ranks of the military structure of the movement. For their part, children within the base communities continued to attend government or ARIC-PEICASEL schools. It was only after the cease-fire, and with the creation of the neo-Zapatista autonomous municipalities, that the communities discussed a plan to create an autonomous education system for the children.

In terms of what I could observe in the jungle communities, people who recognize themselves as neo-Zapatistas have been involved in an education process, both formal

and informal, that has involved many actors (the Catholic Church, Maoist groups, and the EZLN). Nowadays, with the *de facto* autonomy that communities are exerting, they have become empowered to create a new world, an alternative hegemony to that of the state. One example of such empowerment is expressed through the communities' exercise in democratic self-government as described in the previous chapter. Yet, an important challenge to that democratic self-governance is the fact that not everyone has the skills or knowledge required to work as community representatives, to occupy positions of responsibility in the regional and municipal government structure, or to effectively control those who govern. As I will show in this section, an important step towards overcoming that challenge was the establishment of an education system.

The neo-Zapatista school system was an initiative of the communities and they relied on the municipal autonomous government and on some civil society organizations, mainly *Enlace Civil*, for help in determining how to set up the system. The process started in a Tojolabal jungle town, where in April of 1995 a group of volunteers from the Peace Camps created a handicraft workshop for the community's children. Soon after that, the project —*Semillitas de Sol* was the name— grew to encompass a literacy campaign (http://www.laneta.apc.org/enlacecivil/pr_e_semillita.html, September 1995). By 1997 and with the decided involvement of the region's communities, an extensive consultation process got underway at the town of La Realidad. With the help of *Enlace Civil* and the advice of teachers from Mexico City, an education proposal for the communities was elaborated. Then this proposal was given back to the communities for discussion in their assemblies. After the discussion was over and the communities reached their agreements, the comments and suggestions were gathered by the municipal

representatives and sent back to *Enlace Civil*. Relevant changes based on the communities' comments were made and then the proposal was given back to the communities for approval; the overall process took a year to complete (Interview with GGC at La Realidad, March 2005).

With the approval of the education program some changes were introduce into the organizational conformation of the communities and municipalities. Each community would now have an education committee that would also be a liaison between the community and the municipal council (Interview with education committee at Nuevo Horizonte, April 2005). There would also be a permanent position responsible for regional education at the Good Government Councils. The next step was the training of the education promoters, which were selected at community assemblies. Mexico City teachers trained the first generation of men and women that would become the first local education promoters. The training consisted of familiarizing them with the four subjects to be taught: 1) mathematics, 2) languages, 3) life and environment, and 4) histories. The training lasted for six months and, after it, the newly graduated education promoters returned to their communities to start teaching at the local schools (Interview with GGC at La Realidad, March 2005).

I met and had the opportunity to interview a group of experienced education promoters at La Realidad. These four young men are now in charge of training new education promoters and they agreed that education is important because, as one of them stated, "there are different jobs within the organization that one may perform if one knows how to read and write [...] one may also accept a *cargo*" (Interview at La Realidad, April 2005). Therefore, one may say that the overarching goal of the schooling

system is to provide the children with the basic skills and knowledge needed to hold positions of responsibility within the autonomous government structure.

In terms of the design of the educational materials, I observed that urban intellectuals had created most of the manuals and reading materials that were being used for the training of the education promoters. Most of them were readers on social movements or on the history of Mexico and of the EZLN. The training program, as I was told and could attest, is also flexible enough to allow for the adaptation of the courses to reflect the local interests and needs of each community. As a mater of fact, education promoters are at liberty to use the methods or additional materials that they consider pertinent to achieve their educational goals (Interview with education promoters at La Realidad, April 2005).

The lack of adequate resources has always been an obstacle to comprehensive education in Mexico's rural and urban communities. Teachers have been chronically under paid and, especially in rural schools, under trained. Therefore, the Good Government Councils have also provided resources to develop the infrastructure. The main investments have gone to the construction of schools and library buildings, and the acquisition of education materials (notebooks, pens, pencils, etc). During the field research, I could attest the recent construction of two school and library buildings, one at Rancho Nuevo and one at Nuevo Horizonte, along with the construction of a second classroom at Plan de Guadalupe. These constructions were financed with resources provided by the Good Government Council at La Realidad and with the communities' labor (Field notes, April 2005). The neo-Zapatistas have also been able to overcome these disadvantages by organizing themselves in order to provide for the needs of the

educator promoters so they can devout their time to teaching. In each of the four communities that I visited, the community had agreed upon the manner in which they would provide for their education promoters.

In Plan the Guadalupe, each parent contributed four hundred corncobs per harvest to the family of the promoter. They also provided beans and squash, coffee, salt, and soap. In the other three communities, the assembly had agreed for each parent to donate a day's work a month to the promoter's family. Therefore, the parents distributed among themselves the work of cleaning the plot, preparing the earth for cultivation, tending the crops while they grow, and of harvesting. In an interview I conducted with a senior member of Nuevo Horizonte, he explained the way in which they provided for the education promoter's needs:

> If he goes away for a month, we contribute work for the number of days
> he is gone, however, he is doing work for the community. We also take
> care of his house, if he has one, and provide for any animal he may posses.
> If during the time that he is away on training he needs work done on his
> milpa, he does not have to worry about it because by the time he gets back
> the work would already be done just as If he were here. (Interview with
> author, April 2005)

Furthermore, civil society organizations such as Denmark's *Internationalt Forum* and *Operation Dagsvoerk* have provided money —1,000,000 dollars in 2001— for the construction of schools and libraries in all neo-Zapatista regions, and for the resources needed to conduct the everyday educational activities (Field notes, March 2005).

As I mentioned before, the first generation of young men and women that studied under the neo-Zapatista education system are now taking over the training of new education promoters. According to information provided by the Good Government Council of the Frontier Jungle region (Interview, March 2005), there are 150 education

promoters working in 80 communities throughout the four autonomous municipalities which comprise the region. Only 30 communities in the region have no education promoters and out of 80 schools 42 are brand new (*Rebeldía* No. 23, 2004: 6-7).

The educational progress is palpable if one compares it with data from a 1990 census conducted by ARIC. The ARIC census shows that half the population in Las Cañadas did not know how to read or write, and one in six children ages six to fifteen did not attend school (Leyva, 1995: 394). In the following tables, I present the data that was collected on the subject of educational progress in the four communities. The tables present the difference in average schooling years between the heads of household (the older generation) and their children. It is important to mention that most of these children studied in neo-Zapatista schools and only Plan de Guadalupe presents an exception to the trend towards better average in schooling years.

Table 2: Avg. Schooling of Head of Household

Champa San Agustin	N	Valid	13
		Missing	0
	Mean		2.31
Nuevo Horizonte	N	Valid	7
		Missing	0
	Mean		1.71
Plan de Guadalupe	N	Valid	8
		Missing	2
	Mean		2.50
Rancho Nuevo	N	Valid	8
		Missing	0
	Mean		2.25

Source: Socio-economic survey.

Table 3: Avg. Schooling of Children above the age of 12

Champa San Agustin	N	Valid	45
		Missing	2
	Mean		4.22
Nuevo Horizonte	N	Valid	30
		Missing	0
	Mean		3.23
Plan de Guadalupe	N	Valid	39
		Missing	1
	Mean		2.38
Rancho Nuevo	N	Valid	33
		Missing	0
	Mean		3.39

Source: Socio-economic survey.

The tables reflect an amazing improvement if one considers the level of economic marginalization to which these communities are subjected. In the recently published Sixth Declaration of the Lacandón Jungle, educational improvements in neo-Zapatista communities were stressed by the CCRI-CG in the following terms:

> [...] And those who were children in that January of '94 are now young people who have grown up in the resistance, and they have been trained in the rebel dignity lifted up by their elders throughout these 12 years of war. These young people have a political, technical and cultural training that we who began the Zapatista movement did not have. This youth is now, more and more, sustaining our troops as well as leadership positions in the organization.
> (http://www.anarkismo.net/newswire.php?story_id=805 November 29th, 2005)

Gradually, local men and women have replaced all external teachers and more schools have been built, yet, there are still challenges that need to be addressed. I also learned that there is a proposal by the GGC at La Realidad to introduce a secondary level school in the region just as it is the case in the Highlands and the Tzeltal jungle regions.

Secondary education for teenagers, however, tends to be obstructed by agricultural activities. Therefore, in some communities there are programs geared at teaching trade skills such as carpentry, electricity, and accounting (Earle and Simonelli, 2005). These programs, however, are not part of the overall education system and are directed specifically to teenagers and adults.

In the neo-Zapatista education system there are no grades, therefore competition to gain cultural capital does not exist. Children are encouraged to study collectively and to cooperate with each other. Neo-Zapatista schooling, also teaches children about their own culture and their local history, and its manifest goal is to provide them with the skills necessary for serving the community in the future. Given that the neo-Zapatista communities are integrated into the capitalist mode of production, however, some contradictions do exist. For example, some families may be better off than others; therefore, those families are able to send all their children to school. In other cases, some families may have to sacrifice the education of one or more of their kids to contribute in the reproduction of the domestic unit.

I had the opportunity to observe the daily routine at the school in three of the four communities where I conducted the field research. Along with observations in the classroom, I also conducted interviews with education promoters, education committees, parents of students, and community leaders. A normal school day in a neo-Zapatista community starts at 7:00 a.m. with the education promoter blowing on a whistle to call the community children to class. Each day is devoted to one of four subjects, mathematics, languages, histories, or life and the environment. Discipline is more lax than in urban schools and kids can go in an out of the classroom as they please, however,

most stay inside. In some communities, kids are divided into groups of literate and illiterate. Girls and boys attend school together and classrooms are traditionally laid-out, with rows of desks facing the blackboard and the teacher. Whenever there is only one education promoter available, the older kids help the younger with the work. Talking among classmates is not prohibited; in fact, collaboration and cooperation are encouraged.

The biggest class I observed had thirty-seven students, and the smaller only fourteen. Although most houses in the region have dirt floors, the classrooms have cement floors, the walls are built from timber and roofs form zinc sheet. Each community agrees on the school hours and breaks depending on their activities and the time of year. On Mondays, children sing the Mexican and Zapatista anthems before the start of the class. In most places, classes start at 7:00 am and go until 1:00 pm with a one-hour break at 10:00 am. In some communities, the education promoters even check the children's hygiene. Finally, when the end of the school day comes children stay and sweep the floor of the classroom.

In communities were people speak an indigenous language, classes are conducted in that language and literacy conducted in Spanish. Literacy in Spanish is considered important because, as the community authorities told me at Champa San Agustin:

> It is very useful because or grandparents did not know anything, not a word. That is why, when people wanted to bother them or take advantage of them they could not defend themselves. Now we are learning trough education and if they come to bother us, we can defend ourselves [...].
> (Interview with author, April 2005)

One of the consequences of the education promoters' freedom to choose their own teaching methods is that, in some cases, the pedagogy used is very traditional. For example, I could observe education promoters disciplining the children by reprehending them. However, no yelling or fiscal punishments were ever used, and children were in no way coerced or humiliated. Repetition and memory are also very prevalent and children are required to concentrate for long periods —up to two and a half hours—consequently they become distracted and some eventually leave the classroom.

With regard to the issue of pedagogy methods, while I was visiting one of the communities I met an Education graduate student who was going to pitch to the Good Government Council a pedagogy advisory project for community promoters. He told me that pedagogy methods could be improved to provide for a more enjoyable and effective learning environment (Field notes, April 2005). Nonetheless, some education promoters do come up with original ideas to transform the classes into a more dialogical experience. For example, in Nuevo Horizonte the education promoter staged games with the children. He had them playing the roles of healthcare promoters or municipal councilpersons as a way of teaching them the importance of having those services in the community.

Although the education promoters that I interviewed never mentioned Freire, the teaching methods of some of them are akin to Paulo Freire's views on education, which considers it as a dialogue that gives voice to the voiceless and awakens consciousness, creating what he called the "dialogical man".

> The "dialogical man" is critical and knows that although it is within the
> power of men to create and transform, in a concrete situation of alienation
> men may be impaired to use that power. (Freire, 1970: 79)

Furthermore, Freire believed that a dialogical relationship should also be established between the teacher and student. Freire talked about a "banking method" of education, where the teacher deposits a narrative that the student memorizes through repetition. On the other hand, the dialogical method transforms this relationship and the teacher becomes a facilitator who helps the student generate the knowledge through a critical engagement with the world that surrounds him (Freire, 1970: 80-118). Freire's educational model, however, was designed for adults and, as Gramsci points out:

> In education one is dealing with children in whom one has to inculcate
> certain habits of diligence, precision, poise (even physical poise), ability to
> concentrate on specific subjects, which cannot be acquired without the
> mechanical repetition of disciplined and methodical acts. (Gramsci, 1971:
> 37)

This tension was also transferred to the neo-Zapatista education system, at least to the communities that I observed. In the day to day educational work, education promoters precariously balance the need for the children to be inculcated with the discipline and habits that Gramsci refers to —which they do through traditional "banking methods"—, with the need to cultivate the habit of critical thinking through dialogue.

The use of dialogue, however, is also important in the relationship between political leaders and its constituency. In fact, the case of the EZLN is very relevant because, as I have shown in this chapter, democracy for the neo-Zapatistas is based on sharing *la palabra verdadera* (the true word), on dialogue. As Otero points out "the EZLN leadership has excelled in promoting a 'dialogical' relationship with its constituencies, in the sense given by Paulo Freire to this term" (2004a: 226-227). Furthermore, as I have stated, this dialogical relationship is also starting to be reproduced among children through the education system.

It was also very interesting to observe that neo-Zapatista education also emphasizes the dialectical unity of theory and practice in education. Children are taught the eleven demands of the EZLN and the reasons behind them, but the method used to do it is innovative because education promoters relate these demands with the satisfaction of local needs and problems. Furtermore, those local needs and problems are integrated to the courses, mathematics, ecology, or history by using them as examples that help explain the relevance of the courses. The goal, as I was told by most of the education promoters I interviewed, is to give the children knowledge that is to relate and be relevant to the achievement of those demands.

Freire considered that education was not separate form organizing because it is impossible to organize without educating and becoming educated is achieved by the very process of organizing. This is very close to the way Subcomandante Marcos describes the process by which they were able to establish contact and work with the indigenous communities in the Lacandón jungle.

> Then when the moment of making contact with the communities came, the indigenous members in the political-military organization are the majority, although this was not yet reflected in the leadership. In the internal life of the organization, however, this was clear because there had been an initial culture shock that had to be assimilated in order to get resolved: learn the language, but also more than the language, the symbols, how things are represented, the meaning of symbols and their uses when communicating. Therefore, when we made contact with the communities, there was already an indigenous factor inside the guerrilla, which helped to translate. These indigenous people already had political foundations, a national consciousness, and a long-term perspective of the struggle [...] and they had somehow already assimilated the cultural-political baggage that the organization had produced beforehand; they had digested it and produced something new. (Interview in Le Bot, 1997: 145)

Neo-Zapatista education with it emphasis on praxis has an indirect impact on promoting democratic leadership-base relations. With the establishment of a dialogical relationship between educator and student combined with the emphasis on praxis and on knowledge that is directly relevant to the life of the children, it encourages them to become more socially conscious and more involved in their communities. As Holst states, "...only when [an] organic and co-educative relationship [is] established between leaders and masses [does] the philosophy of praxis come alive" (2002: 114). In order to keep the popular-democratic character of any organization, education is not only needed in the genesis of the social movement but throughout its history. If the leadership is to regenerate itself, and not become ossified, the movement or organization needs to be able to constantly alternate and replace leaders and produce new ones among the new generations.

Another area where education contributes to the strengthening of the popular-democratic character of the EZLN is more practical. Some of the adults in the communities I visited were illiterate and for that reason could not perform some of the tasks of self-governance; some even rejected positions because they felt unqualified or undeserving. This situation poses a challenge to the internal democracy of the movement because, as Gramsci said, if no citizens are in the position to govern, at least abstractly, then leadership may become ossified and indispensable (Gramsci, 1971: 40). As a woman in Nuevo Horizonte told me, "education is important because then, when our children grow up they can perform any work in our organization" (Interview with author, April 2005).

According to the EZLN, in the best of worlds and under ideal circumstances, every base-community member should at least once work or hold a post in the autonomous government. In this sense, the autonomous schools are the starting point for political education. Education, however, continues after graduation because as I was told by a community leader in Champa San Agustín, "once kids leave school at age twelve their education continues at community assemblies" (Field notes April 2005). Although it may seem that the basic goal of neo-Zapatista education is to provide literacy and basic math skills, the goals go beyond that. From my observations, I could conclude that autonomous education helps socialize children into the democratic leadership/base relations of the EZLN. It can be said that neo-Zapatista autonomous education has as its main goal to provide children with the knowledge and skills needed to understand the oppression and exploitation to which they have been subject; to make them capable of representing and governing themselves autonomously; and to be able to defend their rights as indigenous people and Mexican citizens.

Finally, through their own struggles and effort the neo-Zapatista communities have started to realize some of the dreams that subcomandante Marcos related to us in his essay, The Southeast in Two Winds: A Storm and a Prophecy (2001: 21). However, if the EZLN and the Lacandón jungle communities are going to make the totality of Young and Old Antonio's dreams come true, there is the need to deepen the level, quality, and extension of the schooling system. Who knows, if this endeavor is successful maybe one day the neo-Zapatistas will be inaugurating a University campus of their own.

6
CONCLUSION

This final chapter is about conclusions and as such, it is here where I will summarize the main findings concerning education in the neo-Zapatista communities. Furthermore, I will point out some of the research problems that derived form my findings and that have yet to be solved.

As it has been shown throughout this thesis, neo-Zapatista communities have gone beyond dreaming of a new world and have actually empowered themselves to create that world. The Lacandón jungle communities are now exercising autonomy through their own brand of democratic self-government; however, a challenge to this democratic self-governance lingers. The main challenge that the communities face is the tangible fact that not all community members have the skills or knowledge required to act as community representatives, to occupy positions of leadership within the regional and municipal government, or to formally control thoes who govern. Part of the solution to this challenge, as I have shown, has been the creation of a basic education system which provides community members with the basic skills and knowledge needed to work and serve their communities.

I also showed that regional culture more than state intervention had a lot to do with the political characteristics of the EZLN as an organization. Furthermore, regional

culture had a direct impact on the democratic leadership and modes of grassroots participation that the EZLN promotes. By this, I mean the diffusion and practice of the democratic concept of "rule by obeying" throughout neo-Zapatista communities, and self-governance structures. These democratic values, as I showed in chapters three and four, were instilled through the direct participation of community members in the different levels of self-governance starting at the community assembly. It is within those institutions that non-democratic authoritarian relations and practices are subverted into dialogical ones. Most importantly, I showed that neo-Zapatista basic education has an important role in the diffusion and maintenance of those democratic values.

The main empirical findings about neo-Zapatista education were: 1) in most cases it provides children with the basic skills that they will need to participate in the self-governance of their communities. 2) There is a strong emphasis on learning and producing knowledge that is relevant to local needs and interests. 3) There is also a conscious effort to instill in the children a sense of identity as Mexican citizens with rights and duties and as indigenous people who possess a valuable culture that should be respected and preserved. Furthermore, children are taught that the EZLN is an organization that provides them with an alternative discourse and practice to that of the governments who exploit and oppress them. 4) Education promoters encourage dialogue and cooperation among the pupils while, in most of the cases that I observed, they stride to establish a dialogical relationship with their pupils.

Consequently, those empirical findings support the hypothesis that I presented in the introductory chapter: the role of the neo-Zapatista education system in political-cultural formation is twofold. On the one hand, it provides the children with the basic

skills and knowledge needed to engage in self-governance (i.e. knowledge of Spanish, literacy, mathematical skills, etc.). On the other hand, it helps to promote and maintain the democratic leadership of the movement.

The neo-Zapatista education system does provide children with the skills and knowledge needed to, if desired, engage in the communities' self-governance system. It also helps to promote and maintain the democratic leadership of the movement and an additional finding that was unexpected is that the diffusion of the democratic values attached to the popular-democratic character of the EZLN does not happen just at school, but continues on once the children grow-up and they start to participate in the communities' assemblies. It is also through that participation in the different self-governance institutions how authoritarian non-democratic relations are finally subverted into dialogical ones.

My research, however, had its limitations because, although I tried to evaluate the level of educational improvement in communities, the limitations of time and resources and the size and extension of the sample, did not allow for the generation of sufficient data to compare the before and after of neo-Zapatista education. I consider that an interesting research inquiry would be the diagnosis of the actual impact of neo-Zapatista schooling on the level of historical, cultural, and class-consciousness of the communities' children as compared to that of the children in non-Zapatista communities. Other pertinent research problem derives from the fact that the promotion and maintenance of the democratic leadership of the movement also depends, it seems, on the participation of community members —once they have finished their basic education— in the communities' assemblies. Furthermore, it would be interesting to observe more closely

the day-to-day practices of the Autonomous Municipal and Good Government councils to see how much they reflect the level of democracy found in the communities.

Old Antonio is now dead, but young Antonio has woken up to the dream that his ancestors held close to their hearts and minds for the past 500 years. Consequently, children and teenagers all over the jungle Cañadas are now sharpening their pencils instead of their machetes.

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