

Getting New Bearings in the Labyrinth: The Transformation of the Mexican State and the Real Chiapas¹

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Everywhere the exercise of public power is being challenged by rising claims of privatization, not only of property and service provision but also of means of violence. In many areas, armies are attempting to expand their economic and political influence, while paramilitary formations, private armies and security forces proliferate. Not infrequently, such groups enter into connections with “mafias,” able to employ extralegal force in operations that can range from supplying the drug trade to clearing people off land to make it available for alternative uses. All such violence-prone situations favor the emergence of armed entrepreneurs who attract followers and build group solidarity through quasi-military styles of cohesion, preparedness and discipline. For such groups, the National Socialist syndrome continues to furnish a ready prototype of ideas and modes of action, to be copied wholesale or varied according to circumstance. (Wolf, 1999: 273)

Some members of your cabinet and associates say that the EZLN has to understand that the country has changed, that the Zapatistas have no option by to accept that, surrender, take off their ski masks and make their application for credit to set up a shop, buy a tele and pay for a compact car on installments. They're wrong ...The defeat of the PRI was a necessary condition for the country to change but not a sufficient one. (Letter from *subcomandante* Marcos to President Vicente Fox, 2nd December, 2000)

Introduction

For more than sixty years, Mexico was the exception to the rule in Latin American politics. Despite a considerable amount of conflict, the country experienced stable, institutionalised civilian rule in an era in which many others succumbed to military dictatorships. Economic development in Mexico created one of the most polarised and unequal societies in the world. Yet when Carlos Salinas de Gortari, president from 1988 to 1994, promised the middle classes that neoliberal reform would bring the country into the ‘First World’, his words did not ring entirely hollow to their audience. Although many commentators noted that Mexican neoliberalism put ‘economic reform’ before ‘political reform’, to debate the longer term prospects for ‘democratisation’ also seemed a worthwhile activity, even to many of those who remained sceptical. This view seemed to be vindicated by the general election results of 2000. The new millennium saw the end of the seventy-one year rule of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), with the

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accession to the presidency of Vicente Fox, candidate of the right-wing National Action Party (PAN) but backed by a team that included some figures of social-democratic 'Third Way' persuasion.

The fall of the PRI must, to some extent at least, reflect the way 'crisis' in one form or another has become a sustained and deepening condition for a majority of Mexicans since the political and economic shocks of 1994. A recent study by Boltvinik and Hernández Laos (2000) on the movement of national income distribution and poverty indicators in Mexico during the period of neoliberal transition makes depressing reading. Noting that all studies demonstrate that poverty levels diminished rapidly in the period 1968 to 1981, to half of their 1968 level by the end of the period of renewed state intervention, these authors argue that the macro-picture from 1981 to 1996 is one of virtually continuous 'social retrocession'. What is striking about these results is that, Tijuana aside, the growth of poverty has been just as characteristic of the more dynamic cities associated with the export boom as more marginalised areas. Worse, the period since 1996 brought further deterioration before a levelling off which leaves the incoming administration of Fox with a severe problem. If the new government seeks to embark on a new Latin American 'Third Way' premised on devoting a higher level of GDP to poverty alleviation and social development spending, it faces severe constraints given the much increased dependence of the Mexican economy on the health of the US economy post-NAFTA, not to mention the substantial fiscal resources already mortgaged to debt-relief for the rich under the Instituto para la Protección al Ahorro Bancario (IPAB) scheme.² Above all, there remains the question of whether the new government's continuing commitment to the particular kind of neoliberal development model enshrined in the NAFTA is consistent with satisfying the demands embodied in the platform of the Zapatista movement with which it is seeking to negotiate at the time of writing.

My purpose in this paper is to analyse what still seems a difficult 'transition' to a relatively uncertain destination. In the first part, I explore the changing shape of power relations and the growing contradictions between the 'formal' structures of official national state institutions and the 'shadow state' that lies behind that formal structure in the final years of PRI rule. The argument I offer runs against the grain of anthropological emphasis on the importance of a regional level of analysis, by highlighting senses in which it is important to look at larger processes, networks and relationships. In the final section of the paper, I do, however, turn to explore some the complexity of a particular regional situation, that of Chiapas. Part of my analysis does indeed emphasise the specificity of regional history, society and culture. Yet here too wider perspectives seem important. Although the problems of Chiapas are often presented as a consequence of 'backwardness' and 'isolation', I argue that this perspective is false historically, and became especially pernicious when the Zedillo government used it to cover up its own failures and, all too frequently, cynicism. The dilemmas of Chiapas not only reflect the relationships between regional and national structures of power, but also illustrate the pervasive global trends that Wolf identifies, trends that reflect the effects of international and transnational power relations. At one level this legitimates the EZLN³ rebels' efforts to launch a campaign against global neoliberalism. Yet at another level it enjoins us to be realistic about the difficulties faced by such a political project.

² For further discussion of the latter, see Gledhill (1999).

³ Zapatista Army of National Liberation.

The starting point of my analysis is the transformation of the state and the new forms of power that emerged in the neoliberal era, since many of the demands of the popular movement in Chiapas — in particular those that concern indigenous rights and autonomy — can only be realised through negotiation with the government. Since my objective is to highlight what tends to be left out of academic accounts of Mexican politics or is misconstrued as a ‘pathology of the periphery’, I will frame this discussion by contrasting alternative possible narratives of Mexican political history.

The People, Elite Power Networks and the Official State

During the 1970s, the Mexican state embarked on a massive effort to secure ‘development’ through the expansion of public enterprise, subsidisation of private enterprise and direct state investment, financed by borrowing against oil revenues. In 1982, the model collapsed as the external debt reached unmanageable levels and the government was forced to nationalise the domestic banking system. The sexennial of Miguel de la Madrid (1982-1988) saw a slow shift towards withdrawal of subsidies, limited privatisation of public enterprises and economic opening. This was, of course, simply a reflection of the general imposition of structural adjustment by the IMF and the World Bank. In Mexico, however, it had specific consequences, since the country had a specific kind of state.

The armed revolution of 1910 to 1920 was brought to an end by the victory of a group of petty-bourgeois, urban military *caudillos* from the more ‘developed’ North and Centre-West of the country. This ‘constitutionalist’ faction annihilated the popular movements of Villa and Zapata and set about completing the political project of the Jacobin wing of 19th century liberalism, a movement with popular roots whose leaders came from a similar social background to their twentieth century successors. As anti-clerical nation-builders, the constitutionalists faced an uphill struggle creating a new hegemony, since they faced a continuing challenge from the social power of the Catholic Church, strongly expressed in the *Cristero* rebellion of 1926–1929, and their principle popular base was the still quite small organised urban working class. Even after the massive land reform under President Lázaro Cárdenas in the 1930s, substantial sectors of the peasantry and the artisan classes of provincial towns were drawn towards the political right, in the form of the *sinarquista* movement and its less clandestine political party successor, the PDM (Aguilar Valenzuela and Zermeño Padilla, 1989), as well as the more respectable PAN. Although Cárdenas moved militarily against some revolutionary *caudillos* in the regions who sought to maintain their autonomy, when he left office in 1940 there were many regions of the country over which the Mexico City government was still struggling to achieve control against entrenched local oligarchies (Rubin, 1996).

The first priority of the post-revolutionary state was, therefore, the consolidation and perpetuation of the rule of the *caudillos*. To this end, they created a party of the state, whose third incarnation was the PRI. This took on its modern form under Cárdenas, and the project it embodied was corporatist. Although this aim was imperfectly achieved, it did provide the framework for establishing a hegemony in which substantial sectors of the peasantry and working class became allies of the regime, whilst the military were brought under civilian control. Cárdenas laid the foundations for

drawing 'the people' into a sense of national belonging and identity in which the state and its institutions were, at last, a central element, although mass media (cinema, the popular press, cartoons and radio) also played an important role alongside public education in forging this new imaginary of the *mestizo* nation. Popular forms of nationalism had already been important elements in the 19th century political cultures of some regions, notably the strategic North and Centre-West. Yet they were not linked to strong identification with the national state and its institutions in this period. Indeed, the *raison d'être* of a popular liberalism in the 19th century was precisely that liberal principles were ranged against the arbitrary forms of rule associated with the elite actors controlling public administration. Securing a greater, if always sceptical, popular identification with state institutions was the achievement of the post-revolutionary regime. It went along with a new kind of social contract. The post-revolutionary state remained committed to a model of development that left vast multitudes in poverty and outside the framework that provided guarantees of employment, social benefits and inter-generational social mobility. It did, however, respond flexibly to mounting pressures from below, extending further concessions to the peasant sector, including more land reform, in the 1970s. The 'statisation' of the economy in that period could thus also be seen as a means of restabilising the hegemony of the PRI state through a massive expansion of the networks and beneficiaries of state clientalism, funded by oil revenues. For many Mexicans this now looks like a golden age in which a better future finally seemed to be arriving.

The full transition to a neoliberal model was consummated by Carlos Salinas. Salinas took office in a disputed election in which he was opposed by the son of Lázaro Cárdenas, Cuauhtémoc, who defected from the PRI and subsequently founded his own party, the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD). Salinas embarked on a massive privatisation programme, completed the process of economic opening begun with Mexico's entry into the GATT with the negotiation of NAFTA, and changed the constitution to remove the legal basis for land reform. Although Salinas tried to use the political control mechanisms of the old order to push through this radical change of economic course, the final outcome was to prove a destruction of one hegemony without its replacement by another stable configuration of power relations.

As an anthropologist, I have spent much of my career trying to understand how rule works in Mexico by looking at the complexities of the process in particular regional settings, first in Western Mexico and more recently Chiapas. Since anthropologists try to get to grips with the complexities and ambiguities of concrete situations, we spend most of our time trying to nuance simple kinds of models of the kind I have just outlined. Yet, in carrying out this necessary and useful work, we are in some danger of failing to see the wood for the trees. It is true that Mexico is a highly regionalised country, and that a national history must be written in a way that recognises the influence of the 'Many Mexicos' on the configuration of the whole (Pansters, 1997). We also need to recognise that hegemonies are constructed from the bottom up as well as the top down (Roseberry, 1994). Yet there is a danger of going too far and failing to see connections. It is, for example, important that people in Northern and Central Mexico construct Chiapas as a place full of exotic 'Indians' brutalised by an elite that never really experienced the force of the revolution. As a statement about history this is false, but the idea that some Mexicans are fundamentally different from other Mexicans *is* important for

understanding the politics of social movement alliances that exist on paper rather than in practice. Furthermore, the idea that Chiapas is a ‘backward’ place is also extremely important for government rhetoric as it is a means of both denying responsibility and legitimating repression. With all due deference to postmodern sensibilities, there is, however, a real rather than imaginary Chiapas. It is a place where, for example, many people now like to listen to *norteño* songs about drug traffickers living, loving and dying well in the US-Mexico borderlands. It is a place where many kinds of connections exist between the local exercise of power and larger networks and structures.

As a preliminary window onto those structures, we might consider a second kind of account of how the Mexican state worked between 1940 and 1988. Formally, the political system was a multi-party democracy, in which a right-wing, pro-Catholic and pro-business party, the National Action Party, was actually a *real* political party. So were the old Mexican communist party and some other left-wing parties, though there were also ‘parastatal’ left parties, created by the groups that controlled the PRI. Although municipal governments sometimes passed into the hands of the opposition, the PRI was able to declare itself elected in all the contests that mattered, for national president and state governorships. It had a permanent majority in national and state legislatures. This system was, as Mario Vargas Llosa put it, ‘The Perfect Dictatorship’. Behind the facade, access to high office was regulated by a structure of cliques or *camarillas* (Camp, 1996). All modern *camarillas* can be traced back to two prototypes, one formed by Lázaro Cárdenas and the other by Miguel Alemán Valdés, who was president from 1946 to 1952. The Cárdenas *camarilla* recruited people with a background in the army and the revolution. Alemán was the son of a revolutionary general, but had not fought in the revolution himself. He was the first university educated civilian ‘político’ to rule post-revolutionary Mexico. His *camarilla* is thus frequently described as the *camarilla* of the ‘technocrats’. These kinds of labels are, however, misleading. A graduate of the Economics Department of the National University such as Angel Heladio Aguirre Rivero, the interim governor who replaced the disgraced Rubén Figuerora Alcocer in Guerrero state, still found it convenient to adopt the cultural mask of the rudely provincial, hyper-masculine, ‘boss of bosses’ when dealing with pistol-packing local *caciques* (bosses) terrorising indigenous communities (Gledhill, 1998a). Where ‘technocracy’ becomes structurally significant was in the two most recent presidencies: both Salinas and Zedillo entered office relatively young, and had correspondingly less opportunity to develop *camarillas* centred on themselves. Zedillo was particularly weak in this respect, and relatively isolated from the mainstream of the traditional PRI.

This is important, since the *camarilla* structures were central historically in regulating and organising division of public spoils and competition for high office. Over time these practices of power created ramifying chains of social solidarity that made the political class more unitary and less truly ‘regional’, even if particular families continued to dominate the politics of their home states. Indeed, these elite networks transcend party barriers. Many of the leading figures of the Partido de Acción Nacional are the protégés of former PRI presidents and business associates of PRI politicians. This reflects the way that the *neopanista* businessmen who consolidated their grip on the party are not really the same kind of people as ran a more ideological, pro-Church, but also more ‘popular’ PAN, twenty years ago. The Centre-Left PRD was originally formed as a

fusion of dissident *priistas* and left wing parties, including the communists. Yet it became increasingly dominated by former *priistas* since many more leading PRI politicians jumped ship after the PRD's fortunes revived in 1997 and it began, at last, to win governorships. So these processes also have implications for the 'Left', which has continued to reproduce many of the traditional practices of the PRI in its way of doing politics, internally and in the electoral arena. Since the PRI was created simply as an electoral machine to perpetuate the rule of the *caudillos* and their chosen successors, the *camarillas* were central to determining which actors occupied high office. It is quite conceivable, however, that these mechanisms may continue to operate even with alternation of party government.

For many people, the ending of the rule of Mexico's PRI in this year's presidential elections was a necessary condition for the country's democratisation. Whether it will prove a sufficient condition is, as *subcomandante* Marcos suggests, still open to debate. Many of those who voted for Vicente Fox as president and for the National Action Party in the Congress did so in order to get the PRI out rather than from deep commitment to the platform of their preferred candidates. Voting for an opposition party in Mexico has often not been an ideological matter, especially at the local level. The PAN itself has often been a vehicle for factions to compete for power with the groups that captured the PRI candidacy, and there are quite a number of cases where *panista* administrations actually reverted to the PRI after securing office. At one level, then, ideology is not necessarily at the heart of Mexican politics.

Yet at other levels ideology is important, because, as I noted earlier, the PAN is the respectable successor of a series of Catholic political movements in Mexico. If we look at grassroots *panistas* in the regions that spawned the Cristero rebellion against the post-revolutionary state in the 1920s, in conjunction with clandestine organisational networks centred on Guadalajara and the Bajío cities (Purnell, 1999), we find plenty of organic intellectuals dreaming of an organicist state that would put an end to both liberalism and socialism. These kinds of people do not much like the *neopanista* businessmen represented by Vicente Fox, and some of them hold views that even the more traditional PAN leaders find rather disturbing. Fox himself faces something of a dilemma, because the more ideological elements of his party are eager to reassert the moral authority of the Catholic Church in Mexican society. The issue that has attracted most attention is abortion, on which Mexican legislation was already deeply conservative. But there are even more important issues in the field of education, which has been a bone of political contention since the early confrontations between Church and State over 'socialist', i.e. secular, education in Mexico's schools. Fox took early steps to dissociate himself from some of the more aggressive expressions of this desire to put Catholic policies back into the mainstream of politics. His position was that a President had to govern according to the will of all Mexicans, rather than that of the supporters of the party that nominated him. One consequence of this position would be to cast doubt on the idea that a Fox government would further undermine the presidentialist character of the Mexican political system. Traditionally the strong powers assigned to the executive and the rule of 'no re-election' had given presidents tremendous power during their terms of office while guarding against dictatorial rule in the long term. Fox is unlikely to want to become the prisoner of the PAN in the Congress. So he may well be interested in reaching certain compromises with the rump of the PRI in the legislature, and would be severely

hampered by any tactical alliance between the PRI and the PRD. This might go some way towards explaining his hands-off attitude towards the hotly disputed PRI victory in the Tabasco elections in the run-up to his inauguration. This was matter of some moment since PRI retention of power in Tabasco would benefit one of the most notorious backstage power blocs of the Salinas period, described in more detail below.⁴

Here an analysis of political pragmatics—the business of governing as seen from the corridors of power — seems to lead us back towards elite social networks and at how these networks both constituted a ‘political class’ and transcended older kinds of regionalism as the post-revolutionary state was consolidated. Most leading national politicians have been born and raised in the Federal District, returning to their ‘regions’ as governors at some point in their careers. Yet the basic thrust of the old system was inclusionary, keeping political competition within set limits. The political class also forged social connections across party political boundaries. This helped to make rule highly negotiable until the 1990s.

Crisis and the Powers in the Shadows

Let me now offer another account of events since 1988, one in which a concept of ‘informal structures of power’ will begin to resonate with the idea of a ‘shadow state’. Although there has always been a ‘shadow state’ in a sense, what was new about the situation in the Nineties was a mounting contradiction between the power relations that constituted the shadow state and the institutionalised power embodied in the ‘official state’. As I noted earlier, Salinas tried to use the control mechanisms of the old order to give birth to a new one. He created large social development programmes, deploying them either in a positively clientelistic manner, to regain support, or in a punitive manner, to detach supporters from the PRD by denying them access to such funds. The strategy was highly selective, targeting key social movements that had supported Cárdenas in 1988. It was combined with the outright repression of recalcitrant areas of continuing *cardenista* loyalism, notably in Michoacán. Salinas was helped by the tactical mistakes of his opponents and by the fact that the PAN was also benefiting from disaffection with the regime, but broadly supportive of the neoliberal agenda. By the end of 1992, the PRD’s electoral star had waned, and Salinas was able to present himself as a bold reformer, taking Mexico into the First World.

Mexicans are not noted for naiveté about their rulers: ever since the days when the first *caudillos* transformed themselves into ‘revolutionary capitalists’, it has been assumed that strong presidents enrich themselves. They may even be admired for doing so, providing they also provide benefits for the nation. Rumours that the privatisations favoured friends of Salinas circulated widely, as did the idea that the purchasers of state-owned enterprises were surrogates (*prestanombres*) for the President himself. Even rumours about the links between cabinet members and the *narcos* were taken as par for the course and hardly worthy of comment, given the pervasive corruption of the administrations of the Seventies and Eighties. The idea that a new role for private enterprise would reduce the tributary load of the political superstructure was quite

⁴ See also the report ‘Auspiciados por Madrazo, los viejos vínculos de Cabal se tienden hacia Fox’ by Álvaro Delgado and Armando Guzmán in *Proceso* 1249, 8th October, 2000.

widely accepted, even though people remembered that Mexico's capitalist class had enjoyed relatively cosy relations with the state in the past, with the exception of the Monterrey elite, which asserted its autonomy in the Cárdenas era (Saragoza, 1988).

1994 began with the EZLN rebellion and three months later, Salinas's chosen successor as presidential candidate, Luis Donaldo Colosio, was assassinated, to be followed by the President's brother-in-law, José Francisco Ruíz Massieu. The economy wobbled. At first sight, however, these shocks all redounded to the advantage of the PRI. Zedillo won a handsome victory in the 1994 elections and Cárdenas came a poor third, backed only by the poorest and most marginalised sectors of Mexican society. The explanations for this outcome have mainly concentrated on the idea of a 'politics of fear' in which shocking intimations of instability caused people to vote for the devil they knew (McDonald, 1997). What people have been less interested in investigating was how Salinas's ideological project was faring. The post-revolutionary state was only partly based on liberal premises. Its imaginary was a sectoral society, not a fully individualistic one, and capitalists had been deliberately left outside the structure. Salinas's attempt to replace this with the model of 'social liberalism' only resonated with limited sectors of Mexican society. It also had a shallow institutional base. Salinas had depended on the residual corporatist features of the old regime to push forward an economic reform that would eventually force the political class itself to depend increasingly on the sources of wealth provided by the (legal and illegal⁵) circuits of the global economy. Even before the economic crash of 1994, one of the vital conditions for Mexico's relative political stability since 1940 had been undermined: the solidarity of its political class.

This was not simply a matter of the defection of Cárdenas and his allies, though with hindsight this appears to have been more significant than it appeared when this faction was at its lowest ebb in 1994. It was also a matter of the way the partial dismantling of the old corporate structures had excluded too many elements of the old guard and of Salinas's own ambitions. In seeking to perpetuate his power beyond the end of his sexennial, Salinas disturbed the delicate balances of the power relations behind the facade of the state. It is not for nothing that many Mexicans believe that Salinas himself ordered the assassination of Luis Donaldo Colosio. At first sight, the cupola of power in Mexico seems to be the presidency: for six years the incumbent enjoyed untrammelled power, but non-reelection set limits to despotism. Frank Brandenburg (1964) argued, however, that the real summit was 'the head of the revolutionary family', a small network of leaders, including ex-presidents, who ran both the country in general and the PRI in particular. The revolutionary family entered terminal disarray under the relatively weak leadership of Zedillo, whose government increasingly resorted to the national security apparatus to tackle a mounting series of challenges.

⁵ As Janet MacGaffey has argued for Zaire, the growth of the 'second economy' must be related to political dynamics, rather than simply to the need for people to construct 'survival strategies' in the face of the collapse of commodity prices and IMF-imposed structural adjustment. 'Second economies' are not simply concerned with evading state controls. Nor are they based only on the illegal use of positions within the state apparatus. They depend on the role of states, locally and internationally, in classifying certain kinds of commodity flows and transactions as 'illegal' in the first place (MacGaffey et al, 1991: 9–10). Evading the official state can, of course, be a way of expressing resistance to the state, and to the class or historical bloc which controls it at any moment of time. The wealth generated in the second economy can lead to social mobility, class formation and the replacement or recomposition of elites. Nevertheless, as the case of Mexico's 'narco-politicians' demonstrates, existing political elites can also consolidate their power by seizing the commanding heights of the illegal economy.

In 1995, Zedillo broke with Salinas, and the ex-president's brother was arrested on the charge of being the 'intellectual author' of the murder of Ruíz Massieu, to be followed by further charges of corruption and money laundering. Both the Colosio assassination and the Raúl affairs were investigated in ways that confused, rather than clarified, the facts, suggesting that a large number of people inside and outside government had a strong interest in obscuring a wider chain of complicities. When his brother's murder trial came to judgement in January 1999, however, Carlos Salinas moved from his exile in Ireland to Cuba, in evident anticipation of a triumphant return after the expected acquittal. Raúl was in fact sentenced to fifty years, an outcome that confirmed the deep divisions within 'the revolutionary family'.

From the point of view of middle and lower class Mexicans, neoliberal economics have so far proved an unmitigated disaster. This is in part a consequence of the peculiarly unsatisfactory nature of the NAFTA, which I have discussed elsewhere (Gledhill, 1998b; 2000). Under the old regime, big business lay outside the official party framework. One of the effects of the statification of the economy in the 1970s was to draw a broader spectrum of the Mexican business class into the political arena, since state enterprises and the powerful political bosses who ran them began to pose a direct threat to private interests (Bensabet Kleinberg, 1999). Until the Salinas period, politicised business tended to align with the PAN. Salinas broke with tradition and encouraged businessmen into the PRI, offering them governorships and other high offices. The new order did not prove attractive to all business interests: small and medium sized national business suffered as a result of economic policies which favoured a small number of transnationally organised business groups and their foreign allies. Yet under Zedillo this alliance remained at the helm, and the role of the state increasingly became one of trying to administrate the conditions required by for a model of capitalist development increasingly dictated by US corporate interests.

The appearance of party alternation in the electoral arena under Zedillo reflected the way the power of both the executive and the national state to broker results declined after 1994. Regional spaces re-emerged strongly as political arenas where new alliances could be constructed, and this gave opposition groups of the Left and Right an opportunity to try their luck at governing. Yet the pitfalls were substantial for those who administrated localities in a country in deep economic crisis, with diminishing fiscal resources, and multiple sources of public disorder, including flourishing criminal organisations which enjoyed protection from other instances of power (civil, military and police). There *were* positive possibilities in the present, more open, political environment for local alliances and for compromises to ameliorate the social effects of constant economic shocks. Ordinary Mexicans displayed resilience in devising coping strategies, including strategies that depended on cross-border movement, some of which provided opportunities for moderating the repressive capacities of the regional and national security apparatus (Smith, 1997). Yet the tendencies seemed contradictory. On the one hand, there was an undoubted flowering of pro-democracy movements and civic and human rights movements. On the other hand, despite the existence of this type of public culture, powers rooted in regions defended staggering spaces of impunity and

repression, even in the face of major popular mobilisation.⁶ This reflects the fact that regional spaces of power are not ‘regional’ in the old sense.

Figures such as the PRI governors of Guerrero or the governor of Tabasco, Roberto Madrazo Pintado, were members of widely ramifying clique structures commanding enormous wealth. Madrazo Pintado spent more money in his election campaign than Clinton spent getting into the White House. If one looks at where that money came from, the name of Carlos Cabal Peniche rapidly comes into the frame (*Proceso*, 12th April, 1998, and 6th September, 1998). Cabal Peniche is an exemplar of the new rich of the Salinas era. He invested in a range of industries that had the common characteristic of using the precursor chemicals used to separate cocaine, and he bought banks and currency exchange houses for equally obvious reasons. He received the patronage of the Salinas brothers and, interestingly enough, several members of the clergy (another of the major scandals of the Salinas period was the drug-related murder of Cardinal Posadas of Guadalajara). Cabal Peniche connects us to Carlos Hank González and his family. A former school-teacher turned millionaire, Hank González was (unelected) mayor of Mexico City under José López Portillo (1976–1982), and minister of agriculture under Salinas. He was, however, principally a king-maker, with a network spreading out from his base in the state of Mexico to politicians throughout the country. Many of Zedillo’s cabinet appointees were ‘Hank men’. The Hanks and Salinas brothers were close, and Carlos Hank has, like many Mexican politicians, been mentioned in cases concerned with drug-trafficking and money laundering operations in US courts.⁷

What we are looking at here is a small part of the ‘shadow state’ that emerged behind the crumbling facade of what was once ‘The Perfect Dictatorship’: a series of elite networks with long histories and great flexibility took on a new role as the opportunities to extract tribute from the Mexican people through the state agencies and public enterprises declined. They were always there, from the time of Alemán onwards, but in the Nineties they cast off the dignified masks that the old regime and its political rituals once provided.

Narcopolitics and Hidden Agendas: The Transnational Connection

It may be tempting to see these developments as phenomena rooted in Mexican history, a reflection of a ‘Third World’ political culture premised on a long history of authoritarianism, of Mexico’s continuing status as a ‘periphery’ of North Atlantic capitalism, or of the ‘exclusion’ of large sectors of the Mexican population from the benefits of economic globalisation. Yet such views should be avoided, not only because they paint an invidious comparison with a ‘North’ that is not itself immune from

⁶ The PRI governor of Quintana Roo, Mario Villanueva Madrid, fled to Cuba in April 1999, after being accused of links with the Cali and Ciudad Juárez cocaine cartels. Although, at first sight, this appears to signal a decline in the impunity enjoyed by the powerful, it would be better understood as a reflection of the intensification of conflict within the elite. Associated with the group that includes Manuel Bartlett and Roberto Madrazo Pintado, Villanueva had been incautious in making strong political enemies both of President Zedillo and rival factions within state politics (*Proceso* 1171, 11th April, 1999). Given his exposed political position, and interest in his case from north of the border, it would not have repaid his allies to defend him. Furthermore, the fact that he was able to flee the country, rather than being forced to face justice, suggests deliberate negligence on the part of the authorities in ensuring his detention.

⁷ For further discussion, see Gledhill (1999b).

criticism, but also because they obscure the role of global power relations in shaping the apparent ‘pathologies’ of the South.

The unmasking of the ‘narco-políticos’ was technically an embarrassment to the governments of both Mexico and the United States. Zedillo’s interior minister, and defeated PRI candidate in the 2000 elections, Francisco Labastida Ochoa, invested a considerable amount of energy in arguing that Mexico should not be ‘decertified’ for its apparently limited success in the ‘war against drugs’ when the issue was again presented to the US Congress in the Spring of 1999. This campaign was successful, though not without reproof for the government’s failure to do more than scratch the surface of corruption in the country’s political life. At first sight, a favourable outcome on ‘certification’ might appear perplexing. But it is less so if we see the ‘War Against Drugs’ as providing the US side with a convenient lever for continuing to extract concessions from Mexico over NAFTA implementation issues and its increasingly scandalous manipulation of immigration policy (Gledhill, 1998b). Even more significantly, the drugs trade provides a pretext for bolstering Mexico’s counter-insurgency apparatus to cope with the mounting tensions created by the economic model, as well as for insisting on further reductions of Mexico’s national sovereignty. It is ironic, but significant, that whereas the estimated area under drug cultivation in the Chihuahua-Durango-Sinaloa *Triángulo Dorado* in Northern Mexico is three times that the five central and southern states where drug production is concentrated — Jalisco, Michoacán, Guerrero, Oaxaca and Chiapas — the number of army and justice ministry helicopters are stationed in the South is exactly inverse to this ratio (Weinberg, 2000: 332). The main impact of US policy on the drugs trade itself under Zedillo was to influence the course of competition between specific cartels and their political backers, and, Raúl Salinas aside, the political backers continued to emerge unscathed. The most interesting case was perhaps that of Manuel Bartlett, former governor of Puebla, and the first candidate to throw his hat into the ring for the PRI nomination in the 2000 presidential elections.

Bartlett, a former minister of education and interior minister, was named in a US court as one of those present at the meeting of the Guadalajara cartel that authorised the murder of DEA agent Enrique Camarena.⁸ Bartlett put himself forward for the PRI candidacy in the 2000 elections as an anti-neoliberal intent on returning the ruling party to its traditional concern for social justice and equality. Bartlett was the consummate exponent of old-style PRI politics through his career. He knew how to practice strategic clientalism, harvest votes, stuff ballots, and apply violence when absolutely necessary but never in circumstances that would let matters get out of hand. Yet he became arch exponent of the need to democratise the internal constitution of the PRI. In the past, presidential candidates were ‘fingered’ by their predecessor: Bartlett hoped that the individual votes of party militants would either enable him to beat any technocrat rival or, as a more realistic possibility, frustrated in the event, that the prize would pass to Madrazo Pintado, representing the Salinas-Hank faction. Clinton refrained from blocking a Bartlett candidacy, and despite the rancour that developed within the PRI’s first ever primary, Zedillo presided over a public rapprochement between Madrazo and Labastida

⁸ He is also accused of intellectual authorship of the murder of the Mexican journalist Manuel Buendía.

that enabled the former to return to his governorship and entertain hopes of emerging as a future party leader.

Despite their political differences, ‘dinosaurs’ and ‘technocrats’ alike shared a commitment to the model of global free trade. That model relegates Mexico to the role of a cheap manufacturing location, supplier of tourist and leisure services for a post-modern metropolitan consumers and, in the rebellious Southeast, a supplier of industrialisable tropical products and patentable genetic materials as well as of oil, gas and mineral resources such as uranium, all of strategic interest to US-based corporations and the US government. Drugs fit nicely into this model for two reasons. They share a common financial infrastructure with tourism, real estate, transport, casino and race-track development and drug profits can easily be laundered through these activities. Intensified control of a border that is non-existent for capital but still critical for labour creates new kinds of synergies between drugs and migration that are advantageous to actors on both sides. Associating migrants with drugs reinforces the social, economic and political incapacitation of Latinos in the USA. The infrastructures of clandestine movements of people and legitimate commodity export are also used for drug transshipment. Both border policing and the classificatory regimes that go with it help to keep the drugs trade profitable, and encourage its diversification. There are also direct relationships between the devastating impacts of the NAFTA on Mexican rural regions and the way the drugs trade, which now includes opium poppy cultivation and domestic production of metamphetamines, has spread to more and more regions of the country, including Chiapas. From all these points of view, drugs and narco-politics are not a product of a ‘peripheral situation’, nor pathologies of global exclusion, but the reverse. They are the dark side of neoliberal economics and what happens to the official state when its principle priority becomes managing the political conditions for the advance of economic globalisation hegemonised by the United States, whose own interests in stopping the flow of drugs are overridden by ‘national security’ considerations and the defence of a revitalised economic imperialism (Gledhill, 1999; Weinberg, 2000).

Within Mexico itself, national security concerns might seem to be justified by the severe deterioration in personal security experienced in recent years, particularly in the cities. It is, however, striking that only the Mexico City government under Cárdenas and the PRD actually secured any real improvements in the security situation, prompting the PRI and the PAN to conspire together to cut its budget at the end of 1998. Militarisation of security seemed much more to do with preemptive strikes against powerful popular movements and counter-insurgency strategies (Gledhill, 1998a). This is also the way most citizens saw things, given that they had little confidence on the basis of experience in the incorruptibility of security agencies. Mexicans were not shocked to discover that their rulers were criminals because they always knew that the powerful enrich themselves. What they came to fear was that they were now nothing but criminals and that their egotism would be unrestrained as they completed the transfer of their country and its human and natural resources to the *gringos*. In voting to rid themselves of the PRI, they have given democracy a chance. If Fox fails to deliver greater prosperity to the majority, and compromises with still economically potent shadow powers congealed in the old regime — by allowing the Madrazo group a free reign in expanding their enterprises in southern Mexico and Central America, for example — further popular

disengagement from politics is likely. The kind of society this would produce would not be attractive.

The 'Colombianisation' of Mexico?

In 1975, a worker in the Ford plant in Mexico City earned 23% of the hourly rate of his or her US counterpart. Twenty years later, Mexican wages were only 9% of their US equivalents, a pattern that contrasts strongly with the movement of wages in the Asian Tiger countries. The decline of relative wages in Mexico is only surpassed in other Latin American countries in which violence uprooted vast numbers of rural people, notably Guatemala and Colombia. What is remarkable about Mexico is the limited amount of violence that has accompanied a brutal reduction in living standards and the relative smoothness of the transition in political terms given this background, despite the appearance of an increasing number of armed groups in the countryside over the past decade and the drug-related violence of the Northern cities.

Mexico was already a predominantly urban society by the 1970s, and today only 20% of the population still live in places classified as rural. Even this type of statistic needs to be qualified by the fact that rural households are heavily involved in two-way flows of rural and urban migration both within Mexico and between Mexico and the United States. So a sharp distinction between urban and rural society often distorts social and political realities in significant ways. The future of Mexican rural society is, however, still a major issue because one of the main victims of the NAFTA was Mexican agriculture. Even capitalist agriculture has done poorly out of the new regime. Cheaper labour does not compensate for the protectionist concessions afforded to the US and concentration of power in the hands of the transnational brokerage companies that control the export trade. The US side has not even been willing to honour the agreements it signed up to in the NAFTA in some cases. For example, Mexico should have been able to export the whole of its surplus of sugar to the United States from October 2000. But the US government sought a quota of less than half the actual surplus, which had grown beyond expectations because Mexican sugar producers lost most of their domestic market with soft drink companies as a result of competition from imported and heavily subsidised corn syrup from the USA. Peasant agriculture has at best stagnated, and in most regions it has declined (Wiggins *et al.*, 1998). Many rural households are not, however, solely dependent on income from farming, since migration has long been built into the way of life of many rural areas.

In the Centre-West of the country, migration has predominantly meant movement North across the international border for most people who retained ties with rural places. The 1980s crisis produced a new flood of migrants to the US from families that had previously left rural communities to settle in metropolitan cities like Mexico City itself and Guadalajara (Gledhill, 1998b). International migration was predominantly migration of mestizo Mexicans historically — Michoacán state is something of an exception because of the early 20th century international migration from some of its indigenous communities. But by the 1980s, there were also important transnational ties between some indigenous areas of Southern Mexico, notably Oaxaca, and the United States. These were generally developments from earlier movements either to the northern border states

or to Mexico City. One of the factors that distinguishes most of Chiapas from other regions with large indigenous populations is the small scale of its international migration in comparison with other areas.⁹ It is, nevertheless, very important not to see indigenous communities in general as closed and isolated, even where only small proportions of village populations migrate. Migration does not only have social and economic consequences: it is also politically significant. One striking example is the Huasteca region of Hidalgo and San Luis Potosí. In the mid-1970s an indigenous leadership composed almost entirely of returned migrants who had been politicised in the urban popular movements of Mexico City led a major uprising against the local rancher elite that provoked the last major act of land reform in Mexico (Schryer, 1990). Although there are few other examples that are this dramatic, it is important to see that a substantial amount of social change was taking place in rural Mexico through the 1960s and 1970s. It prompted a variety of new forms of rural mobilisation against the effects of the increasing internationalisation of the rural economy. These included struggles against the effects of the development of commercial ranching at the expense of the peasant subsistence economy, and mobilisation against the growth of commercial and often illegal logging of community forests.

There is a certain historical irony in these developments, as anthropologists such as Michael Kearney (1996) have pointed out. From a strictly economic, livelihood-focused perspective, most rural people in Mexico are no longer ‘peasants’ in a classical sense. Some members of rural households that continue farming may be involved in local domestic outworking producing cheap clothes or shoes for a major transnational company headquartered in a metropolitan city. Others may be running micro-businesses in California or working in urban sweatshops or the *maquiladoras* that are locating ever deeper inside Mexico. Individual men and women often pursue different occupations through their lives in a way that only makes sense in terms of the overall cycle of family development and economic strategising in this specific type of economic environment. This makes any mechanical model of class positions rather hard to construct, but it does suggest ways in which rural livelihood strategies are integrated in complex ways into the wider class *processes* of contemporary global capitalism. What remains of the ‘peasant economy’ is largely a form of subsidy to wage income. But it is still possible to contest those class processes in ways that advance alternative models of rural livelihood and involve demands for control over resources. Global transformations have, in effect, made it possible for certain kinds of peasants to reassert themselves at the very moment when their final historical extinction seemed inevitable. There are three possible banners under which these new kinds of rural struggles can be fought: environmentalism, the rights of indigenous people, and the more diffuse but also more inclusive banner of ‘rurality’ as a way of life (as represented, for example, by the *Sem Terra* movement in Brazil).

The point about these first two types of struggles is clearly that they evoke a certain amount of sympathy from middle-class people in Northern capitalist countries. Although we should not romanticise these developments, it is increasingly possible to campaign meaningfully around issues such as fair trade, the predatory nature of the activities of some transnational companies, and the right to self-determination of the West’s colonised ‘others’. People who scrupulously buy fair trade coffee and give money

⁹ I refer here to out-migration. Despite efforts to increase the policing of the border, Chiapas has received substantial in-migration from Guatemala.

to Oxfam development projects may fail to react enthusiastically when migrant kith and kin of the Latin American peasants who grow the coffee get too close to the suburbs where they live. There are also serious limitations to the construction of alliances between social movements in a country such as Mexico where only a minority of people can successfully play the indigenous identity card thanks to the historical processes that defined mainstream Mexican national identity as that of the *mestizo* (Gledhill, 1997). But the fact that this is an extremely contradictory situation does not alter the fact that transnational migration has itself altered the conditions under which some rural Latin Americans have been able to contest the power of the national state and transnational capital within their home territories. And even the problematic notion of *mestizaje* takes on a different significance when it shifts from the Mexican national context to the transnational one, and into the shifting politics of identity in the United States (Besserer, 1999).

History has therefore opened up new possibilities, and the Zapatista movement in Chiapas is one example of these possibilities. So are the transnational indigenous movements in Oaxaca state, which have tried to break with a past pattern of ethnic exclusivity among indigenous groups and build more inclusive movements which have had some interesting impacts on both the labour politics and the ethnic politics of California (Stephen, 1997). Having said that, I should, however, emphasise the downside of the last six or seven years. Firstly, these new movements have not succeeded in halting what are little noticed but extremely serious expropriations of peasant lands by transnational conglomerates. Because these have wedded together respectable corporate interests and Mexican businessmen with shadowy involvements in the drug economy but massive backstage political influence, they have generally been able to defeat any efforts at legal challenge. This situation is most unlikely to change under Fox. Secondly, the devastating effects of the NAFTA on Mexican agriculture have had widespread repercussions. One of these has been a significant new wave of outmigration from rural communities of a more permanent kind. Another has been the replacement of legal forms of agro-export activity by an expanded drug economy and the appearance of heavily armed bands run by 'narco-caciques' linked to the civil and military authorities. Early in 1999, President Zedillo was confronted with new demands for action on the part of the organisations represented in the Permanent Agrarian Congress (CAP). Their leaders reported that the official peasant organisations now had little control over rural populations, that *campesinos* were likely to embrace 'radical and violent options' and that these would be 'highly permeable' to drug traffickers (*La Jornada*, February 12th, 1999). Zedillo's response was a repetition of homilies about aid to peasant farmers being distributed in a politically neutral manner.

The Zedillo government did continue with the anti-poverty programs launched by Salinas, and added new packages that were supposed to help small farmers cope with the NAFTA. Yet none of these had any significant effect on declining incomes, forcing rural households to curtail consumption or seek additional income in poorly paid off-farm employment, much of it targeted at women (Wiggins *et al.*, 1999). With factional in-fighting at the top of the system and the decay of the official unions and other traditional organs of PRI control, a variety of urban and rural social movements were seen as an increasing threat. As noted earlier, Zedillo's response was an increasing use of the national security apparatus to deal with emerging problems. Chiapas was the zone where

this approach was most obvious, but not the only one. The Zapatista movement provided a pretext for constructing indigenous people as special targets for human rights abuse (Stephen, 1999), but the abuses were equally serious in other states, including the Tarahumara territory in Northern Mexico as well as states such as Oaxaca, Tabasco and Guerrero (Weinberg, 2000). As new forces, such as the Revolutionary Army of the Insurgent People (EPRI),¹⁰ emerge in zones that have long histories of insurgency and confrontation, the prospects for intensified conflicts between armed popular movements and paramilitaries acting as proxies for a state that cannot deal with the problem openly intensify. Fox plans to replace military occupation with social development programmes and micro-credit schemes that could mollify and demobilise the bases of such insurgent forces. Yet even if he can succeed in creating the major reform of the tax system that will be needed to make such plans a reality, we are still left with a major question mark over what, if anything, the new government will do to reverse the various senses in which Mexico might be said to be becoming yet more of a neo-colony of the United States. Fox has already tried to float the idea of a new deal for migrants north of the border, and met with very little sympathy. He is interested in extending Mexican economic leadership over Central America. But Mexican capital is now mostly tied into business partnerships with US capital, and the sectors that have greatest apparent autonomy are the shadier ones. A still more 'pro-business' Mexico could readily bifurcate into a relatively prosperous North tied to the US economy and a poverty-stricken South combining resource extraction and tourism by transnational capital with a growing illegal economy which could be tolerated in the interests of political expediency.

This is the context in which Chiapas and its neighbouring states might be seen as strategic in shaping the future. They are important to the national economy as suppliers of energy resources and as regions of high tropical biodiversity, but they are also the regions where the majority of Mexico's indigenous people live. The question that the Zapatista movement in Chiapas posed was whether a local social movement could galvanise a broader national coalition against the whole of the Mexican neoliberal development model. The Zapatista movement also sought to persuade Mexicans who would not normally think of themselves as having anything in common with Indians to think again about their identities and the nationalist ideology created by the Mexican revolution. In the rest of this paper I discuss some of the limitations of this political project, but this is not intended to belittle or devalue the movement's goals. My purpose is rather to draw some lessons that might be useful for the future.

With its combination of agrarian and indigenous rights demands, its focus on grassroots democracy and a new deal for rural women, and its calls for a global struggle against neoliberalism, the Zapatista movement in Chiapas still seems to embody all the arguments that might offer an alternative to capitalist globalisation. It is not simply a

¹⁰ The EPRI has a distinct orientation from the more vanguardist EPR (Popular Revolutionary Army), which split in 1999, after a number of incidents in which defectors were eliminated by their own side. For one of the few first-hand journalistic reports on the EPRI, see Weinberg, (2000: 291–296). Some of the armed groups that appeared during the Zedillo period may well have been priísta provocations. But others are clearly embedded in local contexts of conflict of long duration that have intensified as younger people have despaired of the possibilities of pursuing more peaceful options or led a movement for armed self-defence. The military have a clear policy of attempting to conceal armed clashes (and, where they come to public attention, of depicting them as the work of drug-traffickers) and the security forces have persecuted some provincial journalists for attempting to report them.

project for rural areas, since the EZLN has always sought to build a coalition with diverse urban social movements representing a broad spectrum of Mexican society. This is integral to its novel political project of rejecting the capture of state power in favour of promoting democratic and egalitarian impulses in ‘civil society’. So is its indigenous leadership’s embrace of the principle of ‘governing by obeying’ as an alternative to the caudillistic political style that infects the upper echelons of the PRD (Harvey, 1998; Weinberg, 2000). Furthermore, if we consider the number of migrants to Mexico City and other large urban centres who have moved from rural communities that retain indigenous identities in recent years, the language of respect for indigenous identities may be one that is equally meaningful for the poorest members of Mexican urban society as they join their many mestizo counterparts on the margins of the neoliberal economic revolution in occupations such as street trading.¹¹ There are, however, many practical difficulties in building a politics of this kind, and the difficulties begin in Chiapas itself.

Chiapas: From Utopian Fantasies to Difficult Issues

When it comes to Chiapas, the bulk of the intellectual left seem to have taken refuge in utopian fantasies. Chiapas is often presented as a place where the role of the national state has been negligible and where the agrarian reform never really happened. It is true that Chiapas has a relatively well-organised and self-conscious elite, but it is difficult to understand Chiapaneco history through the ‘flattened’ perspective that reduces regional society to a simple polarised structure of big landowners (*finqueros*) versus poor indigenous peasants and rural proletarians. The major issue in the late 19th century was how an emerging planter class could unlock the labour of the highland Indian communities around San Cristóbal de Las Casas and force them to supply workers to the lowland plantation economy. This created a conflict between the elites of San Cristóbal de Las Casas and Tuxtla Gutiérrez, revolving around the issue of the location of the state capital and which way of exploiting the lower classes would be dominant. As Jan Rus has shown, the celebrated ‘War of the Castes’ in Chiapas was not so much a rebellion as a massacre. It was a massacre of people whose ‘project’ was simply a desire to be allowed to practice their own religion autonomously and to cultivate their lands and control their own markets in peace. *Ladino* aggression and the creation of a myth of Indian rebelliousness had the convenient consequence of creating the conditions of intervention and repression under which the mechanisms needed to ‘release’ labour could be imposed on the communities (Rus, 1983). Yet the revolutionary process did eventually produce significant social change.

In 1914, when the rebellions of Villa and Zapata forced the Constitutionalist President Carranza to abandon Mexico City, Chiapas also rose in arms against Carranza under the ‘Mapaches’.¹² The *carrancista* Military Governor, Jesús Agustín Castro, had authorised agrarian reform, promulgated anti-clerical decrees and most importantly,

¹¹ For a discussion of the role of street trading as a response to crisis in non-indigenous regions that were previously centres of industrial growth and rising living standards, see Keren (1994). In the case of Mexico City, the Zedillo years saw substantial conflict over efforts to clear street traders from the historic centre of the capital.

¹² The name, whose literal meaning is ‘racoons’, refers to people who move at night and eat raw maize from the fields.

imposed a new Labour Law which proscribed debt peonage, child labour and company stores. The ‘Mapache’ rebels were not, however, representatives of the big proprietor class, but marginal ranchers and smaller proprietors from areas far from the Central Valley. The upper strata of the Chiapaneco mercantile and land-owning elite actually collaborated with the Carranza regime (Benjamin, 1995). The long-term effects of the Mapache uprising were ‘reactionary’. Yet the reaction was triggered not so much by the centralising efforts of the Carranza government and its allies, but by the abuses committed by the military units seeking to ‘pacify’ the state and by the immediate practical effects of the labour laws on middle strata whose economic position was precarious — the groups left behind by the willingness of more prosperous elites to buy into national projects and embrace ‘modernisation’. To some extent, history has been repeating itself, as much of the grassroots backing for the paramilitary organisations deployed against the Zapatistas comes from very similar kinds of socio-economic groups. I will come back to the paramilitaries in more detail later.

The upper echelons of the Chiapaneco elite have not, therefore, been isolated from larger elite networks in the twentieth century. Nor is it the case that interventions by the centre have had negligible effects on the region’s social history. Cárdenas used land reform to build a clientele in the state. Famous anthropological communities such as Zinacantán only became communities of corn farmers thanks to agrarian reform, and their subsequent patterns of development reflect the way some groups within them gained membership of extra-community economic and political networks (Cancian, 1992; Rus, 1994). The *priista* bosses of highland villages in Chiapas today are, in fact, the descendants of a new generation of young village leaders and bilingual school teachers whom Cárdenas backed as the instrument of his new round of ‘modernisation’. The plantation owners of Soconusco responded to the Cardenista impulse towards agrarian reform by ‘nationalising’ migrant workers from Guatemala and obtaining them *ejido* plots in the least productive parts of their *fincas* (Villafuerte Solis *et al.*, 1999: 21–22). But the indigenous communities of Northern Chiapas and Los Altos rapidly adopted the tactics urged on them by Cardenista agrarian *promotores*: chose the land, determine the number of beneficiaries, arrive at the farm with an armed multitude, invade it and then enter legal proceedings for a restitution, grant or amplification (*ibid.*: 23). The land invasions that followed the EZLN uprising in many parts of the state therefore corresponded to a long, and in many regions, continuous, tradition. In the case of the Tojolabal region, for example, the post-1994 invasions might be considered simply the ‘finishing off’ of a process that had already virtually eliminated the private tenure of land decades earlier, a definitive ‘peasantization’ of the zone (van der Haar, 1998).

In San Cristóbal de Las Casas, the combined effects of the revolution and Cardenismo produced a massive emigration of the heirs of the *finqueros* and merchants of the Porfirian era by mid-century. This allowed smaller businessmen who stayed behind to convert themselves into a new entrepreneurial elite exploiting the new opportunities offered by the tourist trade. In Ocosingo, the nearest major town to the Zapatista core area in the Selva Lacandona, a younger generation of university educated ‘progressive’ livestock producers, professionals and agroforestry entrepreneurs is progressively displacing the ‘traditional’ rancher elite (Ascencio, 1998: 5). Here, as in Comitán, where the sub-regional elite now consists of urban functionaries and businessmen (Escalante, 1995: 30), part of the strength of these new elite groups lay precisely in their closer

relationships with the Federal government and its agencies. This, in turn, also increased their influence in state political circles.

Most of the agrarian problems of Chiapas are a reflection of the fact that national policies, such as promotion of extensive cattle raising, were pursued in the state under *priista* governments whose members frequently entered the federal cabinet (Viqueira, 1999). The interior minister at the time of the Zapatista rebellion, Patrocinio González, had, in fact, been governor of Chiapas from 1988, when he succeeded General Absalón Castellanos,¹³ until 1992. The role of the national centre in the state's affairs became evident when the governor in post at the time of the rebellion was replaced by an interim successor dispatched from Mexico City. The president's office also insisted that next PRI candidate for the governorship should be a person who had pursued a national political career, not the local figure favoured by the Chiapas elite. When the validity of his election was disputed, not only was a substitute governor dispatched from the capital, but the executive ordered its special representative to take charge of state as well as federally funded projects (Ascencio, *ibid.*) The 2000 elections did finally bring a change of state government, which is now in the hands of Pablo Salazar, a former *priista* representing an opposition coalition. Salazar firmly placed solving the problems of Chiapas in the hands of Vicente Fox, arguing precisely that the EZLN and the situation that created it is an issue of national importance and not a 'local difficulty'.

Yet there is a sense in which the EZLN rebellion was a 'local difficulty' at the beginning, because it was the product of a peculiar regional situation. A group of Maoist guerrillas were transformed by contact with a series of communities whose leaderships had themselves been transformed by Liberation Theology (Leyva Solano, 1995). The communities in question were formed over an extended period through colonisation of the Selva Lacandona by people who were predominantly former plantation workers (Leyva Solano and Ascencio Franco, 1996).¹⁴ Although they mostly still spoke and speak indigenous languages, the result was a multi-ethnic fusion which displayed considerable 'inventiveness' in reconstituting secular communal institutions. The new communities

¹³ Absalón Castellanos was chosen as governor principally because of his military experience. He had been director of the Military College as well as a zone commander in Chiapas. His period began in 1983, a time when the sensitivity of the southern frontier with Guatemala was heightened by the flood of Maya refugees fleeing the genocidal violence of the Ríos Montt regime in Guatemala, and by the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua. This is more significant for understanding his political career than the fact that his family, natives of Comitán, were also major commercial landowners. They are known as 'los caciques de la selva' for their interests in that region, whilst one of the General's brothers was also infamous for his logging operations in both Chiapas and Oaxaca (Tello Díaz, 1995: 89–90). Class as well as national security interests are, however, relevant for understanding why the Castellanos administration was especially ruthless in its persecution of peasant organisations. It is noteworthy that the most the ex-Governor could complain about following his capture and release by the Zapatistas was being compelled to share a peasant diet of beans and tortillas without what was, for him, the customary accompaniment of meat.

¹⁴ Some of the inhabitants of the Selva Lacandona had been *peones acasillados* as late as the 1970s, and the importance of this history of work as *peones* is expressed in the distinction conventionally drawn by the people of La Selva between themselves as 'los de adentro' and others as *caxlanes/ricos/finqueros/ganaderos*, 'los de afuera' (Leyva Solano, 1995: 379). 'Caxlán' is the term used locally for non-Indians or *ladinos*. The implications of this mode of expressing identity are discussed later in my argument. Some of the inhabitants of the Selva Lacandona are mestizos rather than Indians, and more than 8,000 of the total population of 63, 209 inhabitants recorded in the 1990 census were born outside the state of Chiapas (Leyva Solano and Ascencio Franco, 1996: 56–57). Since the 1980s, a substantial number of Guatemalteco refugees and undocumented migrants have also established residence in the area, and these remain largely unrecorded in the census.

lacked the 'traditional' structures of *cofradías* and *fiesta-cargo* systems associated with the highland zone villages (Nash, 1994; Stephen, 1997; Leyva Solano and Ascencio Franco, 1996). A quarter of the population of the Selva Lacandona professed Protestant or Evangelical religious affiliation by 1990, in contrast to 16% for the state as a whole (Leyva Solano and Ascencio Franco, 1996: 66). Furthermore, although several aspects of the developments in Chiapas, such as the role of lay catechists, had parallels in Guatemala (and elsewhere), the special problem of Las Cañadas was that the region offered few possibilities for 'exit' through migration.

The colonists' resource base was ecologically fragile, since the soils cleared of forest for cultivation and cattle raising are thin. Matters were made worse by the fact that the amount of land available was reduced for coming generations by the Mexican government's creation of bio-reserves. Although ecological conservation appeared to be a defensible policy in this context, it was manipulated in a cynical way. A gigantic reserve was assigned to the tiny group of Lacandón Indians, as a cover for the state itself, or rather a select group of politicians behind it, to develop logging operations (Tello Díaz, 1995).

The special advantage of Las Cañadas from the point of view of creating a novel rural social movement was therefore the multi-ethnic character of the communities and the fact that local social and political organisation did not embody the full institutional panoply of indigenous highland adaptations to a situation of domination. The most extreme case of the latter is San Juan Chamula. Here 'community autonomy' has been defended through the tyrannical rule of a small oligarchy of wealthy *cacique* families which firmly embedded themselves in the state PRI machine and exchanged unconditional loyalism for non-interference in the internal affairs of the municipio (Rus, 1994; Gossen, 1999). San Juan Chamula is characterised by a rigid centralism, which extends to the ritual sphere, since no Church or civic structure can be built in outlying hamlets (Gossen, op.cit.: 110). Its oligarchy is infamous for the armed expulsion of three thousand Protestant converts in the 1970s, and there have been further expulsions in the 1990s. At the same time, however, Chamula is one of the few indigenous municipalities that has prevented non-Chamulas from owning land within its boundaries and even regulates the terms under which non-Chamulas enter its territory on a day-to-day basis quite effectively. Its central annual ritual event, the Festival of Games, both expresses and defies Chamula's historical subordination to colonialism and the modern Mexican state, restoring the moral community and dignity of Chamula in angry rejection of the ways of others. Noting that the community's overpopulation and general poverty has created a Chamula diaspora scattered over thirty municipios, which is as large as that which resides in the home municipio and largely retains its ties with the parent community and sense of Chamula identity, Gossen argues that Chamula is the most successful Indian community in Chiapas (op.cit: 152; 196). Yet Chamula combines this ethnic separatism and contempt for the *ladino* with a strong dependence on the *ladino* economy for work and trade, whilst its authoritarian leadership is unconditionally loyal to, and dependent on, the PRI.¹⁵ Although there are Chamulas living in the Selva, it is clear that the pattern of

¹⁵ The Chamula *caciques* were, of course, quick to denounce the EZLN rebellion, despite their own community's past centrality in the rebellions of 1868–70 and 1910–11 (Bricker, 1981). For an example in which hamlets revolt against the dominance of the municipal centre, and a discourse of 'defending cultural tradition' is used by both sides in battles between *caciques* and their opponents, see the analyses of the

continuing linkage with the Chamula centre associated with the non-Protestant components of its diaspora, and the kind of organisational structures established within the Chamula centre itself, are not characteristic of the Selva Lacandona.

It should, however, be noted that expulsions of dissident elements were a feature of the Zapatista communities as well as of their highland neighbours, and could be considered an intrinsic feature of indigenous models of community governance based on the ultimate achievement of consensus. Furthermore, Chamula is simply one, rather particular, example of a general pattern that should encourage us to see Chiapaneco indigenous peasant communities as sites of organisation with their own internal power relations. Expressions of growing indigenous assertiveness often took the form of intense factionalism, often in its turn related to the establishment of links with wider regional and national peasant organisations, and the embracing of new, government-sponsored models for peasant organisation by aspirant leaderships (Harvey, 1998). Although I have stressed the way the community organisations in the Selva Lacandona were of a novel kind and represented a combination of local adaptations with outside influences, these village organisations were linked together before the rebellion in a framework that adopted the form of a union of land reform communities, *ejidos*. This coalesced into a regional organisation called the Unión de Uniones. The organisational prototype for this was promoted by the neo-populist national government of Luis Echeverría in the 1970s. The government's aim had been to damp down a rising tide of peasant mobilisation by separating peasants seeking land redistribution from peasants who already had land and would benefit from state subsidies as producers. Peasants all over Chiapas participated in the new rural organisations of the 1970s. Some groups aligned with the radical groups still seeking land reform that formed loosely structured national federations of regional organisations. Others developed the producer union and rural credit association models. In the Selva, the organisation that linked communities received very little in the way of actual state aid, and since the communities faced increasing shortages of land, it turned in an increasingly radical direction. Nevertheless, it is also important to see that some of these statewide struggles for 'communal hegemony' (Mallon, 1995) in a changing national context were also at the expense of mestizos who had bought land in indigenous communities. In some cases, the mestizo families simply left, while in others they stayed as socially marginalised elements expressing a profound antagonism towards their indigenous neighbours (Moguel Viveiros and Parra Vásquez, 1998). Thus, while many indigenous communities, including some Zapatista base communities in the Selva, continue to aspire to reclaim valley lands from Ladino usurpers from a position of marginalisation on the upper slopes of the surrounding hills, others have already secured this objective. The EZLN is therefore only one expression of a growing indigenous

twists and turns of developments in nearby Zinacantán offered by Collier (1994; 1997). In the case of Zinacantán, *priista* trucker caciques displaced from power by a reformist coalition returned to the political stage as a *perredista* group that also claimed Zapatista sympathies and support (Collier 1997: 24–25). They also reversed their previous position of insisting on the expulsion of Protestants. Yet the mainstream, including the main PRD leaders, now withdrew from participation in the wider regional movement to focus more strongly on Zinacanteco ethnic particularity and 'tradition', which also prompted a renewal of calls to expel religious dissenters. Although this case suggests that the logic of factionalism in local level politics has an autonomous dynamic, its other ingredient was in fact the appropriation and misappropriation of social development funds strategically targeted at the municipio.

combativity, some of which has promoted a much deeper local ethnic polarisation than the Zapatistas' more inclusive programme sets out to create.

The EZLN began by positioning its local agrarian and justice demands in the context of a general movement for democracy and against neoliberalism. It did so by articulating indigenous demands with the core symbols of the popular revolutionary and revolutionary nationalist traditions in a way that won it broad popular support throughout Mexico (Stephen, 1998). Yet this was never universal support. There was little identification with this movement of Indians from the Southeast in Northern Mexico, even in the early days. The movement also combined its nationally rooted appeal with more universal demands, such as those for women's rights. This aspect has not disappeared as the core of the Zapatista position has gravitated towards the politics of indigenous rights and autonomy in terms of emphasis. Yet the increasing identification of the movement with indigenous demands, together with a series of political miscalculations about the extent to which peasants in other regions would support the PRD, complicated the issue of building alliances. The EZLN leadership decided to pursue a politics of forming part of a hoped for rainbow coalition of social movements representing distinct social bases on a platform of mutual respect for 'difference', without entering the formal political field as a party. This strategy could not be said to have prospered beyond the point of assuring the Zapatistas some public support against outright repression. Members of organisations such as the *El Barzón* ('The Yoke') debtors' movement simply do not see themselves as having anything in common socially with Indians from the South-East. Even in the complicated mosaic of indigenous politics in Mexico, the Zapatistas have been unable to take a hegemonic position. Within the state itself, the Zapatistas did not succeed in hegemonising all the pre-existing peasant organisations. Many of these were orientated to production issues rather than agrarian demands (Harvey, 1994), and both the PRI and the PRD have intervened in struggles to control the splinters formed by reluctance to commit fully to the EZLN's uncompromising position.

The result was a truly complex pattern, in which the EZLN gained many passive sympathisers outside its core region, but did not hegemonise oppositional politics. Much of the latter was concerned with issues of municipal government and resistance to entrenched *caciques* rather than simple opposition to the state and its neoliberal policies. Indeed, as the historian Juan Pedro Viqueira has argued (Viqueira, 1999), the EZLN's strategy could be said to have actually impeded the struggles against the *caciques*. In doing so, it unintentionally contributed to the growth of the kind of violence that produced the 1997 massacre of nine men, twenty-one women (four of them pregnant) and fifteen children women and children by the Red Mask paramilitaries in the hamlet of Acteal, in the municipio of San Pedro Chenalhó (to the north of Chamula). In the 1994 state elections, the PRD came first in the polls in eleven out of Chiapas's twenty-six predominantly indigenous municipios (Viqueira, op.cit.: 96). The municipal elections of 1995 were expected to produce a massive shift of power to anti-caciquial groups fighting under the PRD banner. At this stage, however, the EZLN, through the voice of Marcos, launched a vigorous attack on the PRD by arguing that it simply reproduced the vices of the PRI, and called on its base to abstain from voting. As a result of high rates of abstentionism, the PRD only won four municipios in 1995 and *priistas* retained power in municipios such as Chenalhó, despite having only obtained 22% of the vote to the

PRD's 63% in the previous year's poll. These results provoked violent reactions on the part of some of the *cardenistas* and a number of *priistas* were assassinated in the ensuing months. The situation also opened up a space for the PRI factions to take steps to reconsolidate their positions by violence, including violence against groups associated with the EZLN. The people who died in the Acteal massacre were, ironically, from a group known as 'Las Abejas' (The Bees) associated with the Diocese of San Cristóbal and Bishop Ruíz, which had not been involved in earlier intra-communal violence.

The EZLN pursued a persistent strategy of seeking to detach the popular movement from the PRD in 1995, which was equally evident in their efforts to create a broad social movement coalition through the National Democratic Convention (Stephen, 1995). Although Marcos made a public gesture of reconciliation with Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas in 1996, the EZLN continued to encourage abstentionism. As Viqueira points out, history might have been very different if the groups aligned with the PRD had succeeded in taking control of a larger number of rural municipios, as they did in Michoacán. This would have forced the state and federal governments towards more serious negotiations and even more importantly, have impeded the *priista* groups' organisation of paramilitary bands and the counter-violence of frustrated political opponents. Such violence served to legitimate intervention by state and federal forces and the strengthening of paramilitary 'public security' forces in the communities.

The context created by the EZLN's political strategy is not, however, the only factor in the escalation of paramilitary violence. Again we see how important it is to reject the popular misconception that Chiapas is entirely dominated by unreformed large landed estates. The 1994 rebellion and the report of the first presidentially appointed special negotiator, Manuel Camacho Solís, triggered a large number of spontaneous land seizures. Many of these related to very long-standing land disputes, and many were disputes with small and medium-sized ranchers. Where large landholdings belonging to powerful members of the regional or national elite were affected, invaders were generally expelled by state troopers.¹⁶ Less effort was made to help smaller farmers who had their land invaded in the north of the state, beyond the Zapatista core. Such smaller *mestizo* ranchers did not naturally associate themselves with the Chiapaneco regional elite. Yet they now considered themselves victimised and became strong supporters of the counter-insurgency campaign, if not the social base for a new Mexican fascism reminiscent of the *sinarquista* movement of the 1940s, or a successor movement to the *Mapaches*. The recruitment of small ranchers seems to have been the conscious intent of the military and political planners of the counter-insurgency strategy.

That strategy, as we now know thanks to official army documents leaked to the press, was planned from the beginning to include the development of a paramilitary 'third force' (*Proceso* 1105, 4th January, 1998). In a pattern that is now only too familiar from around the world, the paramilitaries are an agency of repression that has the necessary quality of official 'deniability'. The best known organisations such as *Paz y Justicia* were led by *priista* politicians and registered as 'social development' organisations, entitling them to use funds from federal programmes (Craske *et al.*, 1998; Weinberg, 2000: 168–175). The footsoldiers were recruited from poor and landless families. The role of gunman offers young men an alternative means of achieving a kind of

¹⁶ The protection afforded to the politically connected even extended to the already disgraced Carlos Cabal Peniche (Gledhill, 1998a).

‘social dignity’ and feeling of ‘empowerment’. In a perverse, but intelligible way, they could almost be described as a ‘social movement’, once again reminding us of the *sinarquista* backlash against the Cardenista agrarian reform in the rural communities of Western Mexico. Paramilitary bands are now present within the Zapatista heartland of Las Cañadas itself. Even without committing acts of violence, they contributed to a climate of inter- and intra-communal tension that was heightened by the deliberate encouragement of religious divisions between Catholics and Protestants and a generalised breakdown in everyday personal security. Buses that once travelled peacefully at night between Las Cañadas and Ocosingo became subject to armed assault, despite the presence of large numbers of troops in posts along the road and regular patrols. None of this seemed accidental. The military completely encircled the Zapatista base communities and their strategists worked hard on promoting factionalism and the collapse of a will to resist.

The effects of the military occupation are striking in other ways. The army constructed a huge permanent base in San Quintín, a village transformed into a maze of cheap restaurants (*comedores*), small shops selling over-priced goods to soldiers, and with a horde of itinerant sex-workers, some *mestizas* from Central America, offering services to suit all ranks. The place acquired the surreal quality of *Apocalypse Now*. The army presence created a bizarre enclave economy of consumerism. Yet most of the people who live in the communities around San Quintín get on with their lives as normally as they can. What they want is land, schools, medical services, irrigation pumps and cheap credits, very ordinary *campesino* demands, which they themselves quite often name as ‘development’. This is not to deny that the cultural politics of indigenous identity has salience in the Selva. What needs to be stressed, however, is that it is a new cultural politics that is reappraising culture history and identity in the light of discourses on human rights.

At times, it is a quite self-consciously pragmatic politics when it comes to presenting ‘the cause’ to the outside world: Zapatista communities have claimed ‘culture traits’ they do not in fact possess when it became clear that this helped reinforce their credentials to being prototypical indigenous communities (Xochitl Leyva Solano, personal communication). Yet there is something that is less pragmatic and instrumental about it, which has a genuine emancipatory and democratising potential. The strength of the Zapatista version of indigenous rights politics lies in its creative qualities and ability to engage universal values. Although it has a historical basis in lived realities, the contemporary use of ethnic identifiers by indigenous communities is itself a twentieth-century innovation. The 19th century language of the political relations between Indian communities and non-Indians was generally that of the socio-racial hierarchy of *castas* (Roseberry, 1998). In many respects, the distinction that the communities of the Selva habitually make between themselves as ‘those of the inside’ and ‘those of the outside’ (as *caxlanes*, *ricos*, *finqueros* and *ganaderos*) pertains to the old discourse of the *castas* rather than the modern discourse of pan-Mayanism. Nevertheless, by focusing the political demands of their base around the creation of ‘indigenous autonomous regions’, the leadership of the EZLN have drawn the people of the Selva into an identification with the broader indigenous movement, nationally and internationally. Given the ethnically mixed nature of the Zapatista base communities, a pan-Maya or even broader perspective is the only feasible one in this context. This provides a sharp contrast to the

model of ethnic separatism that characterises San Juan Chamula and many other highland communities. Indeed, the mixed nature of the communities extends to the inclusion of poor mestizos, prompting Lynn Stephen to argue that the situation lends itself to development of new forms of devolved local government in which the social divisions between Indians and poor mestizos found elsewhere would not exist (Stephen, 1998). There is, however, another level at which understanding the politics of the EZLN may depend on understanding an indigenous point of view.

Gary Gossen has argued that the organisation of the EZLN reflects Maya ideas about the self and destiny, ideas manifest in the puzzling aspects of EZLN organisation and self-presentation (Gossen, *op.cit.*: 260). The indigenous leadership of the EZLN remains anonymous and collective: the ski masks are worn not merely on public occasions for security reasons, but in settings that do not involve any interaction with outsiders (Gossen, *op.cit.*: 258). Gossen argues that this, and the use of the conspicuously non-Indian Subcomandante Marcos as the movement's public 'face'¹⁷ are consistent with longstanding Maya ideas about political legitimacy. Marcos's value lies precisely in his 'otherness': by associating themselves with the alien, Maya can situate themselves in an ever evolving present and draw support from the acknowledged power of others in affirming themselves and their place in the world. The masking of the members of the Indigenous Clandestine Revolutionary Committee (CCRI) homogenises them and protects them from both overt accusations of self-aggrandisement or self-interest, and more covert supernatural attack (Gossen, *op.cit.*: 261). Although these observations are drawn from Gossen's long experience of work in Chamula, they relate to aspects of indigenous culture that do seem common to a diversity of indigenous communities. They could be transmitted by low-level processes of socialisation and within the 'public sphere' of communities lacking the centralisation and authoritarian cast of San Juan Chamula itself.

Nevertheless, there is still a residual danger of essentialism in Gossen's argument. We still need to explain why people have the kinds of attitudes to community leadership that he identifies. This means that we need to understand why witchcraft accusations are still central to everyday community life, and relate ideas about community leadership to other facets of Maya culture as a system of meanings. Once we ask those sorts of questions, we see, as Eric Wolf pointed out decades ago, that the idea of homogenous cultural patterns 'programming behavior' is an illusion. Maya communities are almost perfect places to illustrate the constant tensions and battles involved in the reproduction of culture and sociality: they are places that expel people, where people get killed and from which people pass to and fro into the ladino world.

Noting the multi-ethnic character of the Zapatista base communities, and their religious diversity, Gossen also sees the core of Zapatista politics as a pan-Indian one. He argues that this form of 'postcolonial ethnic affirmation' transcends political and economic goals in the sense that it is a demand for cultural acknowledgement (Gossen, *op.cit.*: 262–263). Yet if this is so, then cultural claims in the Selva Lacandona cannot be anchored in a simple linkage with the past of a particular 'ethnic community'. It must be constructed in terms of a hybrid that is not only pan-Maya but transcends the boundary

¹⁷ Marcos is also masked, but not anonymous in the way that the Indian leaders are, since even behind his ski mask, he can be seen as a mestizo, whilst his voice reveals him as an educated speaker with an urban background.

that the post-revolutionary state's assimilationist 'indigenista' policy sought to draw between an indigenous Mexico to be left in the past and a mestizo Mexico of the future based on 'whitening' as 'progress' (Gledhill, 1997). In other words, the EZLN reflects the creative potential of a *mestizaje* redefined from the bottom-up, in which indigenous roots and living indigenous cultures can dignify the future of all Mexicans.

This seems to have been precisely the symbolic intent of the EZLN in constructing the sites at which the rest of Mexican society was invited to dialogue with the Zapatistas. Roughly modelled after Maya ceremonial centres, with pavilions made of plastic sheeting raised on platform mounds constructed without modern mechanical technology, the EZLN named the sites 'Aguascalientes' in memory of the fateful meeting in 1914 at which the 'constitutionalist' revolutionary faction led by Carranza broke with the popular (and in the case of the North, in no sense 'indigenous') movements led by Villa and Zapata. Gossen discusses the Aguascalientes sites in his refutation of the argument that today's Zapatista movement embodies nothing more than conventional peasant demands. He also notes the way in which the Mexican army destroyed the first site and blocked off access to the four new ones constructed afterwards, contrasting the officially acceptable forums established for discussing cultural issues in San Andrés Larráinzar with these genuine expressions of an 'autonomous' (if syncretic) demand for cultural recognition (Gossen, op.cit.: 253). Yet the lesson of history is surely that the Mexican state welcomes demands for cultural recognition provided that these can be coopted and controlled. What was subversive about the Aguascalientes sites was the idea that a dialogue about culture might take place between Indians and non-Indians outside the control of official mediators, and that it might make connections between 'culture' and issues of democracy and social inequality. If it is myopic not to see that 'cultural identity' and 'ethnicity' matter, it would surely be equally myopic to ignore the Zapatistas' insistence on keeping questions of social justice and distribution of resources on the agenda. The government negotiating team was quite happy to concede principles of 'cultural recognition' that did not invoke those issues.

The issue of social justice and democracy is, however, not simply at the root of government intransigence, but of the limits of Zapatista politics. The Zapatista base communities in Las Cañadas are only a part of a bigger picture, which is socially and politically much more complex. A political elite that is willing to spend far more on a military base than it would need to spend to alleviate the economic situation of these communities knows that. That is why Mexico's rulers closed down the space filled by Zapatismo in the most literal of senses by isolating the communities in a grid of military roads. They understood that they could play the smaller *rancheros* off against the Indians, and different peasant organisations and leaderships off against each other. They understood how to exploit discriminatory notions of 'difference' that are still deeply sedimented in everyday social practice to their own advantage on a national scale, and they knew that classical agrarian solutions are not relevant to the lives of most Mexicans today. They are arguably *particularly irrelevant* to Las Cañadas, which does present ecological barriers to further development with its existing population, official cynicism over conservation notwithstanding. Mexico's rulers also knew that allowing a symbolic opening to Zapatismo would encourage other movements, with other goals, and begin to pose a more serious challenge to Mexico's chosen path of capitalist development. They even understood that posing a serious alternative to that path involved profoundly

difficult policy dilemmas in a largely urbanised society that was already deeply integrated into the US economic system even before the NAFTA. Despite the growing political conflicts within the Mexican elite, it did still possess a degree of *class* unity and may continue to maintain that degree of unity, just as it did during the 19th century battles between Liberals and Conservatives, especially when it came to indigenous rebellions.

Conclusion: From Utopias Through Analysis to a Politics for the World as it is

A politics of gesture based on celebrating the vision and creativity of our favourite ‘grassroots movement’ is not a responsible alternative to being serious about highly complex situations. One of the things that makes them complex is that a variety of interests — such as those of the *rancheros* and landed and landless people in a variety of peasant communities — have reasonable claims to be reconciled and taken into account. This is not to deny the claims of the Zapatista base communities to enjoy a better quality of life and social respect. Given the history of Chiapas and Mexico as a whole, the achievement of social respect does indeed depend on a new appreciation for, and toleration of, cultural distinctiveness, providing that cultural and ethnic boundaries are of the flexible and permeable kind that seem central to the Zapatista concept of multi-ethnic regions. However much ‘antagonism to the dominant’ might lie beneath the surface, it is hard to evince great enthusiasm for the kind of ethnic separatism that reduced the majority of Chamulas to a rural proletariat dominated by tyrannical and wealthy caciques allied to the PRI establishment. Nor is it my intention to disparage a struggle that is genuinely heroic, conducted by people who are warm, hospitable and dignified. It is simply to affirm that there are many Mexicans who deserve a better future, and that it is necessary to find solutions to particular problems that have long-term value, within a wider framework that addresses the situations of all those Mexicans.

The counter-insurgency war in Chiapas has not completely destroyed the autonomous communities created by the Zapatistas. These communities have adopted collective work patterns and produced new models of the dignity of indigenous people that are based on revalorising indigenous culture. Efforts to evict colonists from the biosphere reserve on the grounds that they are ecological vandals have not yet proved successful, and some of the groups that moved voluntarily are now regretting their decision and trying to move back. But the counter-insurgency war has produced many deeply factionalised and conflictive communities. In some cases Zapatistas have remained dominant, in others they have agreed to a form of co-government with those that oppose them. Some of the original Zapatista militants have formed new relationships with NGOs and human rights organisations and now spend much of their time outside their communities: this has in some ways strengthened the movement’s ability to survive, but it has also provoked a degree of social estrangement between those who leave and those who stay behind. The presence of peace monitors helped to secure some protection for Zapatista base communities, but it has also been a cause of occasional offence to local moral sensibilities. Zapatista efforts to prohibit alcohol, drug use and ‘licentious behaviour’ on the part of young people have encountered various

kinds of resistances, as have their efforts to promote female equality. There have also been a number of squabbles over the installation of development projects and public works by NGOs, especially when foreign activists are pursuing their own utopias and agendas. There have been disagreements over future strategy within the EZLN, with some factions advocating greater compromise with the new government and others eager to seize the opportunities available through the NGOs to promote development projects rather than embrace new promises of public investment.

In December 2000, the EZLN expressed itself willing to reopen the dialogue with the Fox government, subject to the full implementation of the San Andrés Accords. Their response to the initial offer of a settlement, which was followed by some troop withdrawals and a symbolic return of the land occupied by a military base to the community of Amador Hernández, was characteristically inventive. Since experience gave them few reasons to take the Mexican State at its word, even under new management, a delegation would travel to Mexico City to speak directly to the Congress. Seven years of attrition had not diminished the Zapatistas' mastery of political theatre. Fox originally spoke of Chiapas as a local problem that would have a local solution, but once in office, began to talk about the need for a more comprehensive approach to the problems of the state, promising jobs and a new budget for social development. It is indeed necessary to adopt a more comprehensive approach for the reasons I have given. The leaders of the *Paz y Justicia* paramilitaries have now been arrested, and this is an encouraging development in the sense that it delegitimises actors who were, in effect, agents of state terror. But the paramilitaries do have a social base, and many indigenous peasants in Chiapas belong to organisations that make different kinds of demands from the EZLN. Much will depend on what Fox means by a comprehensive solution. If he simply means trying to buy off more of the peasant opposition with social development funding and job creation schemes while allowing the forces of transnational capital to restructure the regional economy on the predatory pattern that has characterised Mexico as a whole, the outcome is likely to be further disorder and violence. If he sees the indigenous rights and empowerment movement as a secondary issue, he is also likely to leave major social aspirations untouched. Vicente Fox is not known for his progressive views on gender issues, and one of the EZLN's undoubted achievements was to problematise age and gender inequalities within indigenous communities. The military occupation and NGO interventions have produced a considerable amount of low-level social change, not least because it is now much easier for people to leave their communities. Many communities controlled by the EZLN with a strong influence from the Catholic diocese are now facing problems of youth rebellion against efforts to regulate community life and morals. This is now a zone of conflict in many senses. The presence of the army has been accompanied by an increase in drug trafficking and various other kinds of contraband trading. When we put that alongside the promotion of paramilitary groups and encouragement of religious divisions, it becomes clear that there is another possible scenario for Chiapas: that the network of roads used to pacify the region will become the arteries for a new kind of exploitation of a fragmented and divided rural population.

What stands in the way of such a scenario is a relatively clean state government and the possibility of bringing together a range of democratic forces in a new order that would leave the old networks of power marginalised and impotent. That is unlikely to happen unless the new government is willing to do three things that would address the wider

problems of which the situation in Chiapas is simply a part. The first is to make fundamental modifications to the existing economic model that would enable domestic incomes to rise. The second is to embark on a process of income redistribution by ending Mexico's regressive tax system and introducing controls on the export of capital. The third is to allow popular social movements the space to rebuild Mexican nationalism from the bottom-up and to reformulate the models of social identity and dignity that would enable Mexico to be a genuinely pluri-cultural society in which all citizens felt they had a place again. If Fox chooses to play the *caudillo* and makes the compromises that will make his life easier politically, none of these things are likely to happen. Injections of private capital and new state funding for buying off more EZLN support might yet provide the basis for a pacification of Chiapas based on the exploitation of the contradictions that have developed over seven years of conflict. Even worse is the possibility that the security net might be restored by stealth, with special police taking over from the army and incorporating elements of the former paramilitaries. But no solution limited to Chiapas alone is capable of solving the more pervasive problems of rural Mexico or entirely extinguishing the new forms of politics that the Chiapas rebellion has promoted among Mexico's indigenous communities. What 'quick fix' scenarios that assume that nothing has really changed at the grassroots in Mexico would be more likely to produce is a long-term escalation of the various forms of violence in social life.

I will conclude by noting the ironies that my argument has sought to bring out. In the final years of PRI rule, elite actors in Mexican politics dropped their dignified masks. In a sense this made them transparent to analysis. Yet the process of change was actually far from transparent, since we need to understand both the intentional and unintentional consequences of transnational power relations and a far from self-explanatory *variety* of popular reactions to the transformation of state forms. Not all Mexicans have joined social movements, and still fewer have embraced violence. Many responses to crisis have been silent, individualistic, and ultimately depoliticising. Marcos is masked, but his mask too is transparent. His eyes, face and words betrayed him, and it was only a matter of months before the security services could reveal his individual identity. Yet the indigenous Zapatista leaders' masks are not transparent, and knowing their personal biographies might not help us much in understanding the movement that they lead. These are all issues on which anthropological research and analytical perspectives — scrupulous in its attention to regional particularities but not hamstrung by them — can still hope to shed more light.

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