

PRO-ZAPATISTA AND PRO-PRI:
Resolving the Contradictions of
Zapatismo in Rural Oaxaca*

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Emiliano Zapata could well be named “man of the decade” for the 1990s in Mexico, despite the fact that he has been dead for more than seventy years. His legacy, along with the revolution he represents, has been writ large in Mexican political culture. But whose version of Zapata has been enshrined? Is he the figure inspiring the agrarian reforms introduced by President Carlos Salinas de Gortari to end the government’s obligation to redistribute land to the rural poor? Or is he the sacred symbol of the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional’s armed rebellion calling for elimination of those same reforms? How can Zapata be all these things to all these groups simultaneously? Conversely, how can any single person or group endorse both sets of cultural-political meanings that have attached to Zapata when they appear to contradict one another directly?

This article will outline the process by which men and women from three *ejidos* in Oaxaca have succeeded in integrating seemingly contradictory representations of Emiliano Zapata by the government and the PRI on the one hand and by the EZLN on the other.¹ This convergence of historical symbolism conflating Zapata and the Mexican Revolution as employed by state agencies, the historical consciousness of *ejidatarios* of their own agrarian struggles, and the emergence of the Zapatista move-

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1. *Ejido* refers to agrarian reform communities granted land taken from large landowners as a result of the agrarian struggles during the Mexican Revolution (1910–1917). Most ejido land was actually distributed during the presidency of Lázaro Cardenas (1934–1940). Such land is held corporately by the persons who make up the ejido. Originally, the ejido bestowed use rights on a list of recipients, while the state retained ultimate property rights. Ejido land could not be sold or rented, but holders could pass their use rights on to relatives. As a result, many families have worked the same parcels of land for several generations. In 1992, changes amending Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution made it possible to privatize ejido land following a complex process of land measurement, certification, and individual titling.

ment have created a complex set of discourses and behavior concerning Mexican agrarian politics, political ideology, and voting. I have loosely categorized this complex perspective as “pro-Zapatista and pro-PRI.” Local histories of ejidos offer a selective tradition that has supported the state for its help in forming the ejido system while condemning it for ignoring peasants and Indians for decades. This dual tradition provides a framework for incorporating, reworking, and sympathizing with both the state’s and the Zapatistas’ versions of Zapata and the Mexican Revolution. My discussion will also focus on the way in which generational differences within ejidos affect individual interpretations of government reforms. Zapata remains a central figure in many older ejidatarios’ versions of ejido history.

Multiple discourses concerning land, government, reform, and Zapata in Mexico form competing components in an unstable hegemony. Raymond Williams has defined hegemony as “a lived system of meanings and values—constitutive and constituting—which as they are experienced as practices appear as reciprocally confirming” (1994, 596). If social scientists accept the idea that the state possesses a certain degree of power in establishing hegemonic discourses that influence civil society and are in turn shaped by it, then one can easily agree that the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), in power for seven decades, has certainly tried to establish official versions of the Mexican Revolution. To this end, it has utilized the images of major figures of the revolution like Zapata at various points in time.

Hegemony is not absolute, however, and as a lived process is profoundly changed by competing discourses that emerge in response to it (Williams 1994, 598). Thus whatever attempts are made at establishing hegemonic meanings are always subject to competing interpretations, including those of previous regimes that may counteract the current ones. In Mexico from 1992 to 1994, this kind of effort was evident in the state’s attempt to maintain its ties to the Mexican Revolution via its agrarian programs while breaking with the political culture of the past by setting forth program objectives that called for ending paternalism and encouraging autonomous decision making in ejidos and communities. Despite these new projections, however, many rural men and women continued to view the state in a paternalistic manner.

New hegemonic discourses also exist in relation to and as part of counterhegemonies and alternative hegemonies. The reality of hegemony is that “while by definition it is always dominant, it is never either total or exclusive. At any time, forms of alternative or directly oppositional politics and culture exist as significant elements in the society” (Williams 1994, 599). For example, the EZLN in the state of Chiapas has created a counterhegemonic discourse in Mexican national culture that draws on the past hegemonic culture of the revolution but radically reinvents it by

invoking the mediating figure of Zapata as a bridge to current social issues that include indigenous rights, conflict over land, and democratization. As will be shown, the saintly figure of Zapata resonates far beyond Chiapas.

All the discourses on Zapata and the Mexican Revolution—state, local, and Zapatista—draw on what Williams calls “selective tradition”: “an intentionally selective version of a shaping past and pre-shaped present, which is then powerfully operative in the process of social and cultural definition and identification” (1994, 601). The Mexican state (and the various perspectives it represents), the Zapatistas, and local ejido histories all offer selective interpretations of the Mexican Revolution and of Zapata. Each discourse seeks to capture the past and connect it to a particular version of the present.

My discussion seeks to show how selective use of tradition and projection of the past into the present allow the rural men and women I interviewed in Oaxaca to integrate the hegemonic version of revolutionary history generated by the state with the counterhegemonic vision created by the Zapatistas for the present. I will begin by presenting the context for my research in three ejidos in Oaxaca, noting Zapata’s importance as a cultural hero associated with tangible improvements in people’s lives after they were granted ejido lands in the 1920s and 1930s. I will then describe how the figure of Zapata was used by the state in brokering two programs aimed at carrying out neoliberal economic reforms in the countryside—*Procede* (Programa de Certificación de Derechos Ejidales y Titulación de Solares Urbanos) and *PROCAMPO* (Programa de Apoyos Directos al Campo)—and their reception in Oaxaca. Finally, I will discuss the Zapatista rebellion and how it was experienced and interpreted by men and women in Oaxaca. The article will conclude by returning to the mechanism of selective tradition and local histories as a means of understanding how contested hegemony functions in the lived agrarian experiences of rural men and women in Mexico.

METHODS AND CONTEXT

From 1992 to 1995, I conducted periodic fieldwork in three ejidos in the state of Oaxaca, for a total of five and a half months of investigation. My methods included in-depth interviews with more than 100 men and women, a random sample survey administered to 126 male and female ejidatarios in two communities, research in community archives and those of the Secretaría de Reforma Agraria, observation of ejido assemblies, convocation of discussion groups, and the classical anthropological technique known as participant observation. A major component was interviewing of the original ejidatarios still living in each community, those who witnessed first-hand the founding of their ejidos. The average age of

ejidatarios in the three communities is about fifty-seven, which makes them significantly older than the general population of the communities they live in. This factor is significant in analyzing their relationship to the Mexican Revolution and its symbols, such as Emiliano Zapata.

During the summer of 1994, I spent two months in Oaxaca to monitor individual receptions of Procede and PROCAMPO programs, observe national presidential elections and people's responses to them, and find out what, if anything, they thought about the Zapatista rebellion. I was particularly interested in assessing whether the Zapatista movement had influenced Oaxacans' opinions of the government and its agrarian reform and farm-subsidy programs. I thought that observing their participation during national elections would provide a good context for evaluating whether they continued to be dissatisfied with the government and suspicious of its programs.

What emerged from this period of fieldwork was intriguing. Many men and women whom I interviewed supported and even identified with the Zapatistas and their demands, yet a majority still voted for the PRI. In the polling places representing the ejido in Santa María del Tule, the PRI received 413 votes for its presidential candidate, the PAN (Partido Acción Nacional) 219, and the PRD (Partido de la Revolución Democrática) 160. In the community of Unión Zapata, the PRI got 175, the PRD 13, and the PAN 13 in the presidential vote. In San Dionisio, the PRI presidential candidate got 336 votes, the PAN 71, and the PRD 45. Ejidatarios also expressed some satisfaction with Procede and PROCAMPO programs. They were less enthusiastic about the PROCAMPO program as a long-term rural-development strategy, but many clearly stated that they appreciated receiving the farm subsidy checks and would vote for the PRI to guarantee future receipt of more checks. Some also considered the PROCAMPO program to be welcome evidence of the state's continuing support of campesinos, a legacy that they associate with the Mexican Revolution. The state's use of Zapata's image in marketing the Procede and PROCAMPO programs influenced some ejidatarios to support the PRI in the elections, even while they were expressing sympathy for the Zapatistas.

Ejididos from the communities of Santa María del Tule, Unión Zapata, and San Dionisio Ocotlán were chosen as research sites because of their participation in the Procede program and their contrasting economic and ethnic profiles. All three are part of the region known as the *valles centrales* of Oaxaca, within two hours of the state capital, Oaxaca de Juárez. Santa María del Tule is a pre-Hispanic population site of Zapotec origin. During the colonial period, its villagers apparently lost much of their communal land. By the 1700s, most were working as *peones* (landless day laborers paid in corn or cash) on the neighboring Guendulain hacienda or mining lime to sell in local markets (Stephen 1995a; Taylor 1972,

104n). Oral histories in El Tule recall landlessness, intense poverty, and exploitation by *hacendados* (Stephen 1995a, 1994a). The creation of the ejido substantially improved the lives of those in El Tule who received access to land after centuries of marginal existence. The ejido of Santa María del Tule was formally created by presidential resolution in 1917 but was not fully realized until 1935.

In the 1990s, El Tule is being absorbed into the urban economy of Oaxaca. Only a fifth of the economically active population work in agriculture (INEGI 1991, Oaxaca 7:5767). In a survey of 64 ejidatarios from El Tule (31 men and 33 women), about a third of male respondents indicated that they had worked in occupations other than subsistence farming for most of their lives. The commonest kinds of work for nonfarmers were driving trucks, working in offices in Oaxaca, and working for small businesses that cater to tourists. A third of women respondents similarly indicated that they had spent most of their lives in nonagricultural work, working mainly in small businesses that cater to tourists by selling food or crafts, in private homes as domestic servants, and in offices in Oaxaca.²

San Dionisio Ocotlán and Unión Zapata are communities of mixed ethnic origin with populations that include some persons of Zapotec ancestry. Few in either community are eager to claim any indigenous ethnicity, however, pointing instead to their ties to mestizo workers and Spanish miners. San Dionisio was founded during the colonial period by individuals from nearby Zapotec communities as well as families from several Spanish-run mining centers in the Ocotlán valley. Unión Zapata was created as a population center in the 1930s by settlers from as many as ten other communities and haciendas to reach the minimum of twenty families needed to form an ejido. A small rancho known as Loma Larga existed in the same place before Unión Zapata was formed. All the original inhabitants of Unión Zapata had worked as sharecroppers or peones on haciendas. Many of those in San Dionisio had also worked as peones and sharecroppers, but a small strata of wealthy families in the community employed others as seasonal agricultural laborers. The ejido of San Dionisio was created in 1927 and that of Unión Zapata in 1936.

San Dionisio Ocotlán has a mixed economy in the 1990s, with 43 percent of the economically active population working in agriculture, 15 percent in construction, 7 percent in nearby manufacturing industries, and the rest scattered in the service sector, small businesses, and transportation (INEGI 1991, Oaxaca 7:5512). In more agricultural Unión Zapata, most of the male ejidatarios surveyed (88 percent) indicated that subsistence farming had been their primary source of employment for

2. In Santa María del Tule, as in other communities in the Tlacolula Valley, women engage in a variety of agricultural tasks that include planting, weeding, harvesting, and grazing animals (see Stephen 1991, 76–80). Some women have also plowed fields when necessary.

most of their lives. The other 13 percent made their living as wage laborers in construction or as truck drivers. Nearly all of the 30 women surveyed (3 ejidatarías and the others the wives of ejidatarios) indicated that they had worked in subsistence agriculture and in related tasks for most of their lives (93 percent). The remainder indicated that they had worked in commercial activity, selling cheese to neighboring communities. In comparison with the two other communities included in the research, Unión Zapata is more homogeneous economically and more closely tied to subsistence farming.³

The awarding of ejido lands by presidential resolution to El Tule in 1917 was intended to return to indigenous communities primordial lands usurped by the Spanish during colonization.⁴ The language that framed the awarding of lands to indigenous communities emphasized exploitative labor and ethnic relations and is echoed in the oral accounts retelling how the ejido lands were won. In nonindigenous communities like Unión Zapata, the themes of freedom from exploitation, empowering the poor at the expense of the rich, and a revolutionary reversal of power are central to local discourses about the way ejidos were won. For example, while the historical memories of residents of El Tule include bitter poverty and exploitation at the hands of the Guendulain family who owned the big hacienda, they also recall conflict and violence with the neighboring community of Tlalixtac. Even after El Tule was granted ejido lands, the community of Tlalixtac challenged the ruling in 1918 and prevented El Tule villagers from occupying half of their ejido for another seventeen years. Officials from the Comisión Nacional Agraria (which later became the Secretaría de Reforma Agraria) were crucial in helping the El Tule ejido win back its land from neighboring Tlalixtac and enjoy the benefits of ejido land. Of all the original ejidatarios who witnessed the establishment of the ejido and many others interviewed who had heard the story from their parents, aunts, uncles, and grandparents, no one spoke against officials from the Comisión Nacional Agraria—they were “the good guys.” The “enemies of the people” were their Zapotec neighbors from Tlalixtac, who had subjugated them since before the Spanish arrived, along with the Guendulain family, who exploited generations of townspeople and refused to turn their land over to the poor of El Tule. Four of the elderly people I interviewed remembered the full names of the Oaxaca state delegates of the National Agrarian Commission who worked with the community and could describe what they looked like, what they wore, and what the meetings they conducted were like.

3. Because Unión Zapata is not a municipio or country seat, unaggregated census data are unavailable.

4. Archive of the Secretaría de Reforma Agraria, Delegación de Oaxaca, file for Santa María del Tule, 14 Aug. 1917, “Dictamen relativo al expediente del pueblo de Santa María del Tule, Centro, Oaxaca,” copy dated 15 Sept. 1922. Written by Juan Olivera, Secretario de la Comisión Local Agraria en el Estado de Oaxaca.

This history must be considered in attempting to comprehend the meaning of the El Tule ejidatarios' current cooperation with government officials from the Procuraduría Agraria. Given their historic struggle with Tlalixtac and the fact that most residents were landless until 1917, it is consistent for them to view agrarian officials as a means of defending their land rights against an encroaching neighbor. The positive role of Mexican government officials as agents enforcing the program of Zapata is reflected in stories of ejido origin told by the oldest ejidatarios. Despite the historical differences among the ejidos, some common discursive elements can be found in ejidatarios' telling of their own history in all three communities.

THE LEGACY OF ZAPATA AND THE REVOLUTION IN THREE MEXICAN EJIDOS

The story of the founding of the ejido in Santa María del Tule offers perhaps the clearest example of the positive role ascribed to both Emiliano Zapata and government officials from the National Agrarian Commission in local land histories. After almost three hundred years of landlessness for many, inhabitants of Santa María del Tule were awarded six hundred hectares of land for their ejido in 1917. The land was to be expropriated primarily from the neighboring Guendulain hacienda, where families from El Tule had labored for centuries.⁵ But on the eve of the day they were to take possession, authorities from the neighboring community of Tlalixtac de Cabrera imposed a court injunction on the process and prevented ejidatarios from occupying half of their promised land. Authorities from Tlalixtac claimed that the land belonged to them and therefore could not be awarded to El Tule (Stephen 1995a).⁶ During the 1920s, a local military general and cacique named Isaac Ibarra forced El Tule into a settlement with Tlalixtac in which they agreed to give up permanently half of the six hundred hectares they were awarded. Descendants of the Guendulain family also tried repeatedly to block the community from taking possession of the ejido land, refusing to vacate their hacienda.⁷ El Tule residents finally took full possession of the land they had been granted only with the help of national and state agrarian

5. *Ibid.*

6. Archive of Secretaría de Reforma Agraria, Delegación de Oaxaca, file for Santa María del Tule, 25 Aug. 1926, "Memorandum del Oficio Mayor de la Comisión Nacional Agraria al C. Delegado de la Comisión Nacional Agraria en el Estado de Oaxaca, Ordenándole remita datos é informes con justificación acerca de la situación de hecho o de derecho guarde asunto agrario del pueblo de Santa María del Tule, Oax." Also, file for Santa María del Tule, 20 Sept. 1926, "Memorandum del Oficio Mayor de la Comisión Nacional Agraria para el C. Vocal Ing. Ignacio M. Cabañas Flores, relativo al estado de tramitación que guarda el expediente de dotación de ejidos promovidos por los vecinos del pueblo de Santa María del Tule."

7. File for Santa María del Tule, 20 Sept. 1926, "Memorandum del Oficio Mayor de la Comisión Nacional Agraria para el C. Vocal Ing. Ignacio M. Cabañas Flores."

officials in 1935, eighteen years later. By the time the community members took full possession of their ejido lands, they had waged long and bitter battles with their Zapotec neighbors from Tlalixtac and with the hacendados. Many residents viewed agrarian officials as instrumental in winning the fight, despite the long delay. Under the administration of Lázaro Cárdenas, the promises of the revolution they had first read about in a local circular in 1917 were finally realized.

In oral histories told to me by the remaining original ejidatarios of El Tule, Lázaro Cárdenas and Emiliano Zapata were perceived as heroes. The following narrative, related to me in the summer of 1993 by ninety-two-year-old Mario González, describes Cárdenas as the standard bearer for the ideology of Zapata. "When Cárdenas came here, he said, 'Down with the rich and up with the poor.' He was with Emiliano Zapata. He and Zapata were for the poor people. Zapata was the one who had the idea of taking land away from the hacendados. Zapata suffered for us. He gave his blood so that the campesinos would have some land to work." By the end of González's story, Zapata had taken on a Christ-like image in sacrificing his blood for the good of poor campesinos.

In an earlier part of his narrative, González identified the community as made up of "pure Indians" who lived in extreme poverty. Cárdenas and Zapata by implication are credited with lifting the community out of poverty. Cárdenas spent an afternoon in El Tule in 1934, while campaigning for the presidency. According to González, "When Cárdenas came here, he fed us. His servants brought us food there below the Tule tree as he spoke to us. We were '*puros indios*' then. We didn't speak Spanish, only Zapotec. We were all really poor. We wore white cotton pants and didn't have any shoes. All we had were little cane houses that could blow right over in the wind."

Other historical accounts I heard in Santa María del Tule had a similar tone. All the original ejidatarios I spoke with in El Tule and in the other two ejidos repeated the refrain that Zapata was on the side of the poor. The hacendados were with the rich. This belief was cited almost as a mantra as part of the origin story of each ejido. Younger ejidatarios in El Tule also praised the role of Zapata. Although it is not clear how Zapata assumed such importance in many of the origin stories of ejidos, his image remains a forceful presence.⁸

Juan Ramírez, a forty-year-old ejidatario from El Tule, described the hacienda in strong terms. His account focused on the exploitative nature of labor relations and pronounced them as "over" with the arrival of Emiliano Zapata, the Mexican Revolution, and the formation of the ejido.

8. Another important factor to consider in analyzing local histories is the way in which data on the revolution were packaged by the state after 1917 in the public education system and elsewhere in attempting to create a national cultural identity.

The hacienda belonged to the Guendulain family and was created a long time ago, not that long after the Spaniards got here. I'm not sure exactly when. It was created from lands that belonged to other communities around here. My father, who was the *síndico* [community trustee] when the ejido was formed in El Tule, told me that those people from here and Tlalixtac who worked as peones for the hacendado were treated like slaves. They would go to work at four in the morning, and if they arrived late, they weren't even allowed to work. They left late at night after they finished their day's work. One of my uncles, José Dolores, was what they called a *mandador*. He was in charge of the peones. He and others would ride around on horseback beating the peones if they didn't work fast enough.

Almost everyone was really poor. Those who had teams of oxen could be sharecroppers with the hacendados. But most people didn't have oxen. They would go to the hacendado and ask, "Can I have some land to sharecrop?" The hacendado would say, "You don't have anything to work the land with. You should just work as a *peón*." Nobody had anything except the hacendados. The only other work was to mine lime from the mountain in front here. After Zapata and the revolution came, all that ended. We got our ejido, and it's a different place now.

The positive role of government officials is another important element in local ejido histories. In many cases, hacendados resorted to violence to discourage ejidatarios from taking over and planting their newly acquired land (Stephen 1994a, 19). Government officials and occasionally troops were requested by communities to ensure peaceful occupation of the lands they had been granted. In the case of El Tule, national agrarian officials were crucial in helping the community finally occupy their ejido land. Genaro Vásquez, a ninety-one-year-old ejidatario from El Tule, described the process the community went through to take possession of their lands. He began by referring to the deal forced on the community by interim governor of Oaxaca Isaac Ibarra in 1924.

. . . so after Ibarra intervened, half of our ejido went to Tlalixtac. They took possession and worked the land. This kept going on for eleven years until we went to Mexico City, and an agrarian congress was called by the Oaxaca delegate of the Comisión Nacional Agraria. It was held in a place called Ixcotel, near the city of Oaxaca. The authorities of all of the ejidos in the state were invited.

The authorities of El Tule presented their case against Tlalixtac in that congress to get support. After the congress, we got some kind of notification from the government. It said that the community of Tlalixtac had never sent a formal application to the government requesting the lands that they took away from El Tule. So the federal government said that our ejido had to be reconstituted. The government said that Tlalixtac had to give back the lands. They didn't resist.

After we heard this, we held a big meeting. We said, "We have to demand full restitution of our lands." We formed a commission and sent them to Mexico City. In 1935 the order for the restitution of our lands came. On the day that we were to take possession of our lands, we went to see a battalion of soldiers stationed nearby in Rojas de Cuauhtémoc. We took an official letter with us asking the soldiers to come and protect us. They came, but nothing happened. . . . Finally, we got our land.

In Genaro's story, delegates from the Comisión Nacional Agraria

under Cárdenas played an important role in helping the community take possession of its land. Ejidatarios even requested the presence of army troops to protect them. This same story was repeated to me by eight or nine individuals. In the historical narratives I was told in all three ejidos, state agrarian officials were usually portrayed in a favorable light, along with Cárdenas and Zapata as cultural heroes in the origin stories of most ejidos. In the 1990s, Zapata's image surfaced once again as a central icon in the state's promotion of neoliberal reforms in the Mexican countryside.

**REFORMING AGRARIAN REFORM: ZAPATA, PROCEDE,
AND PROCAMPO IN OAXACA**

In the spring of 1993, a young agronomist and his two assistants visited the ejido office in Santa María del Tule. They held an informal meeting at dusk with the president of the ejido commission and the president of the vigilance committee, who were holding their daily office hours to meet with ejidatarios. The agronomist and his assistants told them about an exciting new program that would provide them with security for their ejido land and help them gain access to increased government assistance. Two weeks later, a sociologist and her two assistants arrived in Unión Zapata with a similar proposal. Another team arrived in San Dionisio Ocotlán later that year. All of them represented a newly created office called the Procuraduría Agraria, charged with carrying out a program designed to measure and certify vast amounts of Mexican territory currently held as ejido and communal land.

In November 1992, the Mexican government issued reforms to Article 27 of the constitution that ended the government's constitutional obligation to redistribute land to those who joined together to form an ejido. The Constitution of 1917 had included Article 27 to make land available to a majority of the landless population of Mexico. According to the 1910 census, 96.6 percent of rural households held no land (Cockcroft 1983, 91). Until 1992, receiving land through an ejido land grant was the primary (although not the only) avenue for Mexico's landless to lay claims to latifundios that exceeded the legal maximum size allowed on private ranches and fallow government land. The recent reforms also permit, but do not require, the privatization of previously inalienable ejido land held by communities. The new law also allows foreign firms to buy, rent, or lease land for agriculture and forest use (see Harvey 1994b).

These reforms became law after what many felt was little consultation with the country's autonomous peasant organizations. A new office and set of procedures were created to implement the reforms of Article 27 of the constitution. The Procuraduría Agraria was created in late 1992, and it now employs more than 4,300 staff members to help Mexico's 28,058 ejidos and indigenous communities participate in programs de-

signed to carry out the reforms. The primary program is called *Procede* (Programa de Certificación de Derechos Ejidales y Titulación de Solares Urbanos). Ejidos are supposed to vote in assemblies on whether to enter the program or not. In some instances, the circumstances surrounding such votes were clearly coercive, while traditional ejido voting mechanisms that permitted a neutral stance were disregarded (Baitenmann 1995).⁹

To receive an individual certificate for their piece of land (which can be converted to a title under a separate process), ejidatarios must go through a formal series of meetings, measuring procedures, and dispute resolutions with officials from the Procuraduría, the Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Informática (INEGI), and the Registro Agrario Nacional (RAN).¹⁰ Community boundaries are mapped as are individual plots, communal lands, and urban house lots. If all parties agree on all the boundaries and can present appropriate documentation concerning their use rights, certificates can be issued for individual parcels and titles for urban house lots (see Stephen 1994a).

After they voted to enter the program, the ejidos of Santa María del Tule, Unión Zapata, and San Dionisio Ocotlán spent most of 1993 and 1994 in a seemingly endless series of meetings with officials from the Procuraduría Agraria. They were flooded with information, brochures, booklets, and workshops on how to complete the procedure and what it could mean for them. Proximity to the state capital of Oaxaca undoubtedly facilitated their rapid incorporation into the land regularization. "Defensa de los derechos de los ejidatarios" was the rallying cry of the program, and in its textual, rhetorical, and visual representations of the reforms to Article 27, the state invoked the legacy of the Mexican Revolution and indirectly that of Emiliano Zapata.

At the end of 1991, when President Salinas de Gortari initiated a legislative process to change Article 27 of the constitution, he introduced the theme "Libertad y justicia al campo mexicano," in view of the fact that ending the state's obligation to redistribute land rendered the old slogan of "Tierra y libertad" obsolete. "Libertad" was redefined by state publications to mean the freedom of ejidatarios to make their own decisions and have individual control over their land. Brochures passed out to ejidatarios in places like Santa María del Tule stated that the reforms were designed to "strengthen the rights of the ejidatario over his individual parcel, guarantee his liberty, and establish procedures to give the ejidatario use of his land and the right to pass it on to others" (Procuraduría Agraria 1993a, 2). Thus this kind of liberty is aimed at disman-

9. See also Baitenmann, "Las irregularidades en el programa de certificación ejidal," *La Jornada del Campo*, 6 Sept. 1994, pp. 7–8; and "La procuraduría agraria: Juez y parte del *Procede*," *La Jornada del Campo*, 31 Oct. 1994, pp. 4–6.

10. For a detailed description of *Procede* rules and procedures, see Baitenmann (1995).

ting collective decision-making rights held by the corporate unit of the ejido and emphasizing instead the property rights of individuals.

Two other publications were made available to ejidatarios in Oaxaca. The initial brochure describing the Procuraduría Agraria featured a five-color cover showing a barefoot peasant bent over in the dirt, wearing white *calzones* (cotton trousers associated with indigenous peasants of the revolutionary era).¹¹ Under the heading "Procuraduría Agraria" ran the slogan "Libertad y justicia al campo mexicano." The brochure explains that the Procuraduría Agraria "is a new social-service institution in charge of the defense of the rights of ejidatarios, communal landholders and their successors, and ejidos, agrarian communities, small property holders, residential property owners, and rural workers" (Procuraduría Agraria 1993b). One might ask, who is the Procuraduría not in charge of defending in the countryside?

A second widely disseminated publication of the Procuraduría Agraria describes the certification process by highlighting a case study in Yecapixtla, Morelos. As the home of Emiliano Zapata and the base of his guerrilla movement during the Mexican Revolution, Morelos holds obvious symbolic importance for getting ejidatarios to participate. It is also the state where anthropologist Arturo Warman (head of the Procuraduría Agraria from 1992 to 1994) carried out extensive fieldwork. The forty-three-page booklet actually chronicles two stories. Its title, *Yecapixtla, Morelos: Crónica*, predicts that it will tell the story of Yecapixtla's incorporation into *Procede*, but the margins of every page feature testimonials on such subjects as the original struggle to establish the ejido shortly after the death of Zapata in 1919, the Plan de Ayala, and "Un recuerdo zapatista" ("A Zapatista Memory") (Procuraduría Agraria 1993c, 12–18, 33–36). As a national publication, the brochure was made available in the Oaxaca office of the Procuraduría Agraria.

The interior courtyard of the Procuraduría Agraria in Oaxaca has a large bulletin board displaying photographs of the various events carried out by the agency. On most of my visits to the Procuraduría, the courtyard was crowded with ejidatarios waiting to see staff members who were charged with shepherding them through the *Procede* process. While waiting, men and women often looked at the pictures, picked up brochures, and discussed their content.

In April 1994, the Procuraduría Agraria launched a widespread campaign to commemorate the seventy-fifth anniversary of Emiliano Zapata's assassination by handing out a record number of ejido parcel certificates in Morelos. Pictures of this event were posted in Oaxaca, and it was

11. This image closely matches Mario González's description of persons from El Tule when their ejido land was granted. He described them as genuinely poor, wearing white cotton pants and having no shoes.

featured in various publications and national newspapers. Accompanied by the Secretario de Agricultura Carlos Hank González, Secretario de Reforma Agraria Víctor Cervera Pacheco, Procurador Agrario Arturo Warman, and representatives of official peasant organizations, President Salinas de Gortari stated, "Zapata's struggle continues," and it has not been set back by the recent reforms made to the constitution "in order to help out peasants."¹² A ceremony was held in the municipal auditorium of Teopanzolco, Morelos—prime Zapata territory. Salinas's speech emphasized that Zapata's struggle remained alive and that notable advances had been made in the countryside but a lot of work remained to be done. Salinas commented that he had come to Morelos to commemorate a date marked by pain and hope, "the seventy-fifth anniversary of the unjust and unacceptable death of Emiliano Zapata and seventy-five years of commitment and work carried out for the good of Mexican peasants."¹³

The president's evocation of the memory of Zapata and the work done to benefit peasants included a promise that Mexico would not return to latifundios and that the reforms had strengthened ejidos. He informed the audience that the Procede program had given out two hundred thousand certificates to ejidatarios and that he was about to give out as many more in Morelos, with the result that two out of three ejidatarios in Zapata's home state of Morelos would have certificates naming them as beneficiaries. He also announced that three and a half million peasants would receive direct support through the PROCAMPO program in the spring.¹⁴ Thus Salinas de Gortari and the officials accompanying him tied the state's claim on Zapata's struggle for land to the Procede and PROCAMPO programs. Their rhetoric focusing on the seventy-fifth anniversary of Zapata's assassination further linked his legacy to thousands of rural Mexicans receiving land certificates and millions more who would be receiving farm-subsidy checks from the government.

In Oaxaca, news of the growing number of land certificates handed out in other parts of the country was received with interest by ejidatarios. They wondered whether they would ever be featured on the bulletin board of the Procuraduría Agraria or in a brochure when they completed the land certification program. As it turned out, some communities were more likely candidates for the bulletin board than others.

Ejidatarios from Santa María del Tule completed the certification process during the summer of 1994 and received their certificates in the fall. They decided not to proceed with the next step of obtaining individual titles to their land and continued to meet regularly as an ejido, publicly stating their commitment to continuing as a functioning ejido. Unión

12. Emilio Lomas, "Salinas: No habrá retrocesos en las reformas a favor a campo," *La Jornada*, 11 Apr. 1994, p. 3.

13. *Ibid.*

14. *Ibid.*

Zapata remained locked in a disagreement with the neighboring community of Mitla over boundaries between the two ejidos. San Dionisio was also working on a boundary dispute with a neighboring Zapotec community, which was eventually resolved in 1995 when they concluded the *Procede* process.

All three ejidos continued to be engaged actively on a weekly and sometimes almost daily basis with officials from the Procuraduría Agraria. Ejidatarios in El Tule reacted rather favorably to the staff of that office once they completed the process. Those in other communities remained somewhat suspicious because of the problems they were having but continued with the process, evidently placing a modicum of trust in the Procuraduría's staff.

In addition to their intense contact with officials from the Procuraduría in 1994, ejidatarios also received numerous visits from staff representing the Secretaría de Agricultura y Recursos Hidráulicos (SARH), who were promoting another new government program. Due to protests generated by producer organizations during negotiations over NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement), the Mexican government initiated a program for peasants in 1993 called PROCAMPO (Programa de Apoyos Directos al Campo). This program offers Mexican farmers who grow corn, beans, wheat, rice, soybeans, sorghum, and cotton a subsidy ranging from seventy to one hundred dollars per hectare for as long as fifteen years.¹⁵ Guaranteed price supports for these crops were phased out in the autumn and winter of 1994–1995, effectively pitting Mexican producers against cheaper U.S. imports and aligning Mexican prices for these crops with international prices.

PROCAMPO was introduced to ejidatarios with the words *libertad* and *justicia* displayed prominently in summaries of its goals, an effort that mirrored the rhetoric of *Procede*. A detailed publication passed out to ejidatarios by the SARH in 1993 emphasized, "PROCAMPO is based on the principle that producers direct their own transformation with liberty and that their progress occurs with justice and equality." It added, "PROCAMPO forms part of the Federal Government's strategy of modernization of the countryside to achieve more justice, equality, and liberty among Mexican peasants" (SARH 1993, preface, 5).

Announcement of this program evidenced some backpeddling by the Mexican government in the structural adjustments being carried out to facilitate NAFTA. PROCAMPO may soften the blow of being "eased out" of the rural sector for the three million ejidatarios (and their fami-

15. During the summer of 1994, the subsidy equaled about 100 dollars (U.S.) per hectare. After the severe devaluation of the Mexican peso in December 1994, the subsidy was worth only about half as much. In the summer of 1995, the subsidy totaled 440 new Mexican pesos per hectare (between 65 and 70 dollars per hectare, depending on the exchange rate).

lies) who were predicted to benefit from this program.¹⁶ But once price supports are phased out, the small subsidy offered by PROCAMPO clearly cannot offset the loss of higher crop prices for small farmers. In the summer of 1994, corn prices fell by 30 percent, and in Oaxacan communities with low yields, the benefits of PROCAMPO did not offset the costs of planting and harvesting. In 1995 the lower subsidy was even less successful in offsetting farming costs.

Moreover, PROCAMPO subsidies are available only to farmers who signed up during 1994. Subsidies are granted in two cycles. The fall–winter cycle is geared toward those who have irrigation and harvest winter crops. The spring–summer cycle is for those with irrigation as well as those who grow rain-fed crops. Most participants received checks from the spring–summer cycle. Those who did not sign up during 1994 are no longer eligible for the program, even though it is supposed to run for fifteen years.

The PROCAMPO program assumed a high profile a few weeks before the 1994 presidential elections, when hundreds of thousands of Mexicans received their first PROCAMPO payments. Ejidatarios from the three ejidos described here who registered for PROCAMPO spent long afternoons in lines that snaked for blocks waiting for their checks. The spring–summer planting cycle checks were paid between 15 July and 18 August in Oaxaca, many of them arriving just days before the national elections. The planting cycle began for most in May or June. PROCAMPO officials in Oaxaca estimated in an interview that about 95 percent of Mexico's peasants signed up for the program. But a review of the PROCAMPO registrations from the three ejidos under study here revealed that less than half of those eligible actually signed up. In one community, only a fifth of those eligible registered, apparently the poorest or those with larger amounts of land. Some ejidatarios stated that they did not want to sign up for fear of having to pay back the subsidy checks later. Others felt that they really needed the assistance and could not do without it.

I interviewed about 50 male and female ejidatarios regarding their feelings about PROCAMPO and how they related the program to the elections. In addition to associating the PRI with the ejido and the Mexican Revolution, some ejidatarios tied voting for the PRI directly to disbursement of PROCAMPO checks. Many stated boldly their views on the links between PROCAMPO and their vote for the PRI. A middle-aged ejidatario from Unión Zapata averred, "They set up this program to give us checks in order to buy our vote for the PRI." A young ejidataria from San Dionisio answered my question as to which party she was going to vote by declaring, "I am going to vote for the PROCAMPO party."

16. Julio Moguel, "PROCAMPO y la vía campesina de desarrollo." *La Jornada del Campo*, 26 Oct. 1993, pp. 8–9.

One ejidataria I interviewed in San Dionisio, sixty-one-year-old Herminia Hipólito, talked about the government in familial terms, describing her vote for the PRI as premised on receiving her PROCAMPO check. What follows is a partial transcript of our conversation.¹⁷

L.S.: Did you get your PROCAMPO payment yet?

H.H.: Sure, I got it.

L.S.: Do you think that the check is related to the upcoming elections in any way?

H.H.: This is what Papa Gobierno (the government) gave to help us out. It's clear that this Papa has a lot of children, and he is taking care of them. This PROCAMPO check is helping me out a lot. I wouldn't have planted if it weren't for the PROCAMPO program. If they hadn't sent the money, I wouldn't have thought about voting. I am going to vote for "Papa Gobierno." Yes, I have to vote for Papa because he sent us the money.

L.S. Do you think you would have voted without PROCAMPO?

H.H.: No, if the money hadn't arrived, I wouldn't have voted.

Herminia expressed her relationship to the government in terms of daughter and father. She clearly feels the need to obey the government and to "help out" with her vote. But when her papa's help disappears, she implied, her vote will also. Given the unequal relations of power with the government, her vote is the only leverage she has for continuing to receive a small amount of assistance. Her vote does not endorse PRI-party ideology, any specific election platform, or a particular candidate. It is instead a minimal tool for helping herself survive economically.

While responses like these were common, others were more circumspect in stating that the PROCAMPO program had increased their confidence in the government and its ongoing commitment to campesinos who had been ignored. The following dialogue is excerpted from a conversation with fifty-year-old Horacio León and forty-five-year-old Rosío López, ejidatarios from El Tule.

L.S.: What do you think of current government policies for campesinos?

H.L.: Well, it looked like the government was against us until recently, when they reformed Article 27 and made the Procede. This is going to help us.

R.L.: The PROCAMPO is going to help us as well. My question is, what will happen in fifteen years? Will they keep helping us, or will it be like the past? First they help us with the ejido, then they forget us.

H.L.: It seems that now the government is going to help the poorest campesinos. . . .

R.L.: Well, those who benefit most from PROCAMPO are those who have the largest parcels. . . . [T]hey should just concentrate on the smallest holders. . . .

17. Quotations from those I interviewed are presented in the context in which they occurred, as part of a conversation. I have therefore included the questions I asked, identifying myself as "L.S."

L.S.: What do you think about the upcoming elections and the candidates?

R.L.: Well, I definitely think that the government is listening more to the peasants now. They have to because of what happened in Chiapas [referring to an earlier discussion of the Zapatistas].

L.S.: What do you think will happen after the elections? Will there be another uprising?

R.L.: I think there could be. What is going to happen is a lot of people are going to die. That is what I see happening.

H.L.: We are not sure what is going to happen here. It's possible that there are people here who will vote for the PAN and the PRD, but they are keeping really quiet.

R.L.: Well, we are going to vote for the PRI. Maybe they are listening now.

Horacio and Rosío believed that the government is now hearing their complaints, rather than ignoring them as in the past, and is now taking their needs seriously. They viewed both *Procede* and PROCAMPO as helpful to ejidatarios. They also expressed the sentiment that the PRI is not just out to buy their vote but is considering their position seriously. They further commented that the government must take the demands of campesinos seriously because of the Zapatista uprising.

These conversations and comments are representative of many that I heard from others, clearly reflecting the importance of PROCAMPO in ensuring ejidatarios' continued loyalty to the PRI. In many cases, the check is perceived as rightful recompense from the government for having ignored rural Mexicans for so long. For others, PROCAMPO is part of the state's historical obligation to peasants that began in the era of Zapata. The material incentive of PROCAMPO coupled with the state's continued references to preserving the ejido and its commitment to continuing the legacy of Zapata provide part of the backdrop encouraging a majority of ejidatarios in the three communities studied to vote for the PRI.

Another part of the government's efforts to secure the rural vote was continued advertising to ejidatarios about the good that would come to them by completing the *Procede* process. In the ejidos I studied, completing it became a moderately important objective for some ejidatarios, but their reasons for completing the process were unrelated to any desire to privatize their land. Those eligible were interested in securing titles to pass on to their children and protecting their lands from continuing encroachment by neighboring communities or outside interests (Stephen n.d.).

When I discussed PROCAMPO, *Procede*, and the coming elections with the interviewees, we also talked about the Zapatista rebellion that rocked Mexico in 1994. While the state kept on invoking Zapata and the Mexican Revolution in defending its rural reform programs, the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN) was also projecting the figure

of Zapata in its visual culture and written communiqués. Emiliano Zapata figures prominently in the writings of the Zapatista spokesperson known as Subcomandante Marcos, who emerged as a key military strategist and ambassador for the EZLN during its first year of public life. Thus while the men and women I worked with were absorbing the materials from the Procuraduría and the SARH on a regular basis, they were also listening to the radio, watching television, and sometimes reading newspapers that highlighted the rebellion in Chiapas, particularly in the first three months of 1994.

**¡ZAPATA VIVE! THE ZAPATISTA REBELLION AND ONGOING
DISCOURSE ON THE MEXICAN REVOLUTION**

On 1 January 1994, Mexico awakened to news of an armed rebellion carried out by the EZLN. Its soldiers were Tzeltal, Tzotzil, Tojolabal, Chol, Mam, and Zoque Indians from the central highlands of Chiapas and the Lacandón jungle bordering Guatemala. Their name, method, and message clearly invoked the spirit of the Mexican Revolution as they set forth a simple platform of work, land, housing, food, health, education, independence, liberty, democracy, justice, and peace—all in the names of Emiliano Zapata and Pancho Villa.

Most Mexicans experienced the Zapatista rebellion via the radio, spotty television coverage, and the mainstream press. Because some state-controlled news media such as Televisa tried to downplay the importance of the event, radio coverage was crucial. In the Oaxaca countryside, radio reports were repeated by word of mouth in remote areas, and rumors quickly spread that the rebellion had reached Oaxaca. Such notions were also fueled by witnessing the intense mobilization of hundreds of troops stationed in army garrisons in and around the city of Oaxaca.

The Zapatistas' initial message proclaimed that they would march to Mexico City and demand the overthrow of the "dictator" Salinas de Gortari. The response of the Mexican government was somewhat delayed, but within thirty-six hours after the Zapatistas had occupied five county seats in Chiapas, the military responded. Ocosingo was the primary site of military confrontation between the Mexican Army and the Zapatistas. The army then proceeded to shell civilian populations on the outskirts of several communities, detain large numbers, summarily execute at least six and probably many more suspected Zapatistas, and commit other violations of human rights (Human Rights Watch 1994). The army tortured detained persons and treated them in degrading ways to extract confessions about belonging to the EZLN. Casualty estimates range from a low of a hundred made by the government to more than four hundred, according to Bishop Samuel Ruiz. This bishop living in San Cristobal for more than thirty years is well known for his work with the

indigenous population in Chiapas according to the tenets of liberation theology.¹⁸

Twelve days into the confrontation, the government came to the negotiating table with Manuel Camacho Solís as its negotiator. From January until early June, the EZLN engaged in a complex dialogue with the state, which received low-level coverage in the Mexican press. When negotiations ceased in the cathedral in San Cristóbal in March, the government's thirty-four-point peace plan attracted even less coverage until June, when the Zapatistas formally rejected it.

Since the rebellion first appeared in the press in Mexico, the EZLN army and movement have invoked the figure of Emiliano Zapata as a central symbol in communiqués issued by its supreme authority, the Comité Clandestino Revolucionario Indígena. The First Declaration from the Lacandón jungle, titled "Today we say enough," established Zapata and the Mexican Revolution as central to the new Zapatista struggle: "We are a product of five hundred years of struggle: first against slavery; . . . and finally, after the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz refused to fairly apply the Reform laws, in the rebellion where the people created their own leaders. In that rebellion, Villa and Zapata emerged—poor men, like us."¹⁹

A document invoking "Vo'tan Zapata" suggests that Zapata's image was incorporated into the Zapatista movement as a deity identified not only with the Mexican Revolution but with five hundred years of anti-colonial struggle. The following text was released by the Comité Clandestino Revolucionario Indígena of the EZLN's Comandancia General on 10 April 1994 to commemorate the anniversary of Zapata's assassination in 1919. Here, the name of Zapata is joined with the Tzeltal name *Vo'tan*.

Brothers and sisters, we want you to know who is behind us, who directs us, who walks in our feet, who dominates our heart, who rides in our words, who lives in our deaths. . . . From the first hour of this long night on which we die, say our most distant grandparents, there was someone who gathered together our pain and our forgetting. There was a man who, his word traveling from far away, came to our mountain and spoke with the tongue of true men and women. His step was and was not of these lands; in the mouths of our dead, in the voices of the old wise ones, his word traveled from him to our heart. . . .

It was, and is, his name in the named things. His tender word stops and starts inside our pain. He is and is not in these lands; Vo'tan Zapata, guardian and heart of the people. . . .

18. For more detailed descriptions of the Zapatista rebellion and its background, see Autonomedia (1994), Akwekon (1994), Collier (1994), Cultural Survival Quarterly (1994), Fox (1994), Harvey (1994a, 1994b), Nash (1995), Ross (1994), and Stephen (1994b, 1995c).

19. Comandancia General del EZLN, "Declaration of the Lacandón Jungle: Today We Say, 'Enough,'" 1 Jan. 1994, reprinted in AVA 42, no. 31, p. 5. The English translations of Zapatista communiqués cited in this article were taken from a special issue of an official newspaper published in Mendocino County, California. See AVA 42, no. 31, published on 3 Aug. 1994. Copies can be ordered from AVA, Box 459, Boonville, California 95415.

He took his name from those who have no name, his face from those with no face; he is sky on the mountain. Vo'tan, guardian and heart of the people. And our road, unnameable and faceless, took its name in us: Zapatista Army of National Liberation.

. . . This is the truth, brothers and sisters. This is where we come from and where we're going. Being here, he comes. Dying, death lives. Vo'tan Zapata, father and mother, brother and sister, son and daughter, old and young, we are coming . . .

Salud, Mexican brothers and sisters!
Salud, campesinos of this country!
Salud, indigenous people of all lands!
Salud, Zapatista combatants!
Zapata, being here, he comes!
Dying he lives!
Long Live Zapata!
Democracy! Liberty! Justice!²⁰

The name "Vo'tan Zapata" combines the Tzeltal mythic figure of Vo'tan, the first man sent by God to give land to indigenous peoples, with Zapata, the revolutionary hero whose radical proposal was eventually incorporated into the Mexican Constitution. According to historian Antonio García de León, Vo'tan is associated with the third day of the Tzeltal calendar and represents the heart of the people (García de León 1994, 1). In the Zapatista communiqué just cited, the legendary Zapata becomes a defender of indigenous peasant rights. As pointed out by Duncan Earle (1994, 29), Chamulas and other indigenous groups honor a tradition of mestizo heroes who suffered for Indians.²¹

Just as the Procuraduría was busily employing the anniversary of Zapata's death to promote its land-certification program, the EZLN leaders also used the same occasion to celebrate their own struggle. Zapata's martyrdom was claimed by the Zapatistas with fervor equaling that of the Mexican president. The events promoted by the Zapatistas to mark Zapata's death were coordinated with land "recuperations" or invasions (depending on one's perspective), which were taking place in Chiapas. During the first four months of 1994, as many as a hundred thousand hectares of disputed land were claimed as having been taken over by peasant and indigenous communities and organizations. The actual figure is probably closer to fifty thousand hectares. News of the events in

20. "Vo'tan Zapata, no. 57," communiqué of the CCRI-CG of the EZLN, 10 Apr. 1994, as reprinted in *AVA* 42, no. 31, p. 16.

21. Further evidence of the deification of Zapata in the Zapatista movement is offered in an earlier document written by Subcomandante Marcos as an introduction to the situation in Chiapas. He describes an event that took place on 10 Apr. 1992: "Outside the indigenous campesinos of Ocosingo, Oxchuc, Huistan, Chilón, Yajalón, Sabanilla, Salto de Agua, Palenque, Altamirano, Margaritas, San Cristóbal, San Andrés, and Cancuc dance in front of a giant image of Zapata. . . . The campesinos shout that Zapata lives and that their struggle continues. One of them reads a letter to Carlos Salinas de Gortari accusing him of destroying the agrarian reform won by Zapata . . ." (Subcomandante Marcos 1994, 4).

Chiapas celebrating the anniversary of Zapata's assassination soon reached ejidatarios in Oaxaca. Many viewed the land recuperations as justified. Several indigenous and peasant-based organizations in the state of Oaxaca such as COCEI (Coalición Obrera Campesina Estudiantil del Istmo) also held parallel events to mark the anniversary of Zapata's death.

On the days proclaimed "La jornada de liberación nacional, Zapata vive," the EZLN and peasants all over the country marked Zapata's assassination with marches, hunger strikes, and roadblocks. In Mexico City, fifty thousand peasants and Indians marched to the Zócalo to reclaim the ideals of Zapata for peasant and indigenous movements. These marchers opposed what they termed the "neoliberal anti-peasant development plans" being imposed by the government and called for an alternative development project.²² The Zapatistas carried out their own commemorative ceremony in the Lacandón jungle and invited reporters. The main statements made during these activities condemned the end of land redistribution and the privatizing of ejido land and also rejected private landholding corporations in the countryside (Correa, Corro, and López 1994, 36). The Comité Clandestino Revolucionario Indígena of the EZLN Comandancia General (CCRI-CG) issued the following communiqué on 10 April, which was read in the Zócalo.

Today, April tenth is the seventy-fifth anniversary of the assassination of General Emiliano Zapata. His betrayal by Venustiano Carranza was an attempt to drown out his cry of "Land and Liberty!" Today, the usurper Salinas de Gortari, who claims to be "President of the Mexican Republic," lies to the people of Mexico, saying that his reforms to Article 27 of the Constitution reflect the spirit of General Zapata. The supreme government lies! Zapata will not die by arrogant decree. The right to land of those who work it cannot be taken away and the warrior cry "Land and Liberty!" echoes restlessly through these Mexican lands. . . .

Our hearts are joyful: Emiliano Zapata has come again to the Zócalo of Mexico; he is in you; he walks in you. We, the small and forgotten, raise up the image of Zapata in the other heart of the country: in the mountains of the Mexico Southeast.²³

After six months of low-level exposure to the Zapatistas, their objectives, and the constant invocation of the figure of Zapata by the EZLN, how did rural men and women in Oaxaca perceive the Zapatistas? Had everyone heard of the Zapatistas? How were their actions interpreted in rural Oaxaca? Did the Oaxacans connect the struggle of the Zapatistas with their own fight for land following the Mexican Revolution?

In a random-sample survey carried out during the summer of 1994 with 126 ejidatarios from Unión Zapata and Santa María del Tule, 64 women and 62 men were asked an open-ended question: "What do you

22. Matilde Pérez, "Nuevo desarrollo rural, piden 50 mil personas en el Zócalo," *La Jornada*, 11 Apr. 1994, p. 5.

23. "Zapata Will Not Die by Arrogant Decree, no. 58," communiqué of the CCRI-CG of the EZLN, reprinted in *AVA* 42, no. 31 (10 Apr. 1994):16.

know about the EZLN?"²⁴ About 9 percent (11 individuals) declined to answer this question, most stating that they felt it was too dangerous a topic. Such a response was not unreasonable in view of the stepped-up presence of the army and federal police on the main roads of Oaxaca during July and August of 1994.

Of those who responded to the question, 62 percent (71 persons) stated that they had heard of the EZLN. Other individuals' quick response of "I don't know anything about it" suggests that more respondents had probably heard of the EZLN but did not want to discuss the subject. Most of those who responded positively indicated that they found out about the Zapatista uprising from radio news or from other community members. Some (particularly in El Tule) stated that they had seen the EZLN rebellion on television news, although with little information about what was happening and why. Some reported that the rebellion became a frequent topic of conversation in the first two weeks of January and during the peace negotiations in the San Cristóbal cathedral.

A survey is clearly not the preferred method for encouraging individuals to discuss their stances on an armed rebellion that is still going on. Many of those responding to the survey had no previous contact with me or those helping administer the questionnaire. To get a better idea of what ejidatarios really thought, I decided to discuss the Zapatistas with 48 of them (half men and half women) in in-depth interviews. These interviews were not a random sample but were deliberately conducted with persons with whom I had already established relationships. I tried to talk to individuals with a range of political opinions on the state and its programs.

Of those I interviewed, many commented that they were initially convinced the EZLN was going to arrive in Oaxaca during January 1994. Horacio León of El Tule stated, "When we heard about them on the news, we thought that they might arrive here. They could come to Oaxaca. Maybe they have people here as well. That is what we thought." Many others echoed his sentiments. Noticeable changes also occurred in and around the communities situated along the Pan-American Highway connecting the state of Oaxaca to Chiapas. For example, thirty-year-old Manuel Ruiz's discussion reflected the growing militarization of the area as the Zapatista rebellion emerged.

L.S.: How did you hear about the Zapatistas?

24. The survey covered a wide range of issues, obtaining basic demographic data and information on production, migration, political participation, and ethnic identity. In Santa María del Tule, a complete list of the names and addresses of ejidatarios was obtained, and the random sample of men and women was chosen by assigning each name a number and using a random number table to select those to be surveyed. In Unión Zapata, all ejidatarios or their spouses were interviewed.

M.R.: My mother and some other people thought that the war would come here. They said, "There was a war before here during the Revolution, so it could happen now." That is what a lot of elderly people thought.

L.S.: What did you think of the Zapatistas' demands?

M.R.: I agree with the Zapatistas because they defend the peasants. About 80 percent of the people here agree with their demands. A lot of the older people we respect are saying that the war is going to come here. They compare it with the earlier revolution.

L.S.: Did you notice any differences in and around Oaxaca during the uprising and after?

M.R.: There were more police out on the road. They were watching to make sure that there wasn't going to be an uprising here. In February there was a strong presence on the part of federal police and soldiers. My father and his friends even had their guns taken from them by soldiers when they were out hunting rabbits in the mountains on a Sunday afternoon in January. Of course, people talked about this a lot. This just made my father and others agree more with the Zapatistas.

When ejidatarios recalled hearing about the Zapatista rebellion in Chiapas, they immediately cited the fighting that took place during the Mexican Revolution as proof that the war could come to Oaxaca. Angela López Martínez of Unión Zapata revealed identification with the Zapatistas and sympathy for their cause like that expressed by many interviewees.

A.L.M.: We first heard about them on the radio. The party of the Zapatistas is named after Zapata. Because he was the first one to redistribute land and fought for this, they are fighting for this same thing in his name. They are fighting for land now in Chiapas. It seems as if the rich are getting rich again. . . . It is like before, when Zapata saw the suffering of the poor peasants at the hands of the rich. That is what is going on in Chiapas. This is why Zapata died.

L.S.: Do you think there could be an uprising in Oaxaca?

A.L.M.: It's quite possible that there could be a war here. It's possible . . . because if the government doesn't help the peasants and takes the help away, people will fight. . . . It's good that the Zapatistas are there in Chiapas. They keep on giving hope to the peasants for their fight. There are a lot of people who want to take the peasants' land away. They are getting rich down there like they did all over the country before the revolution. Some say that there are people so rich there that they give each other cars for Christmas. All people want is to be equal.

Angela's responses to the plight of the poor of Chiapas contain important echoes of the injustices suffered by those who became ejidatarios in Oaxaca during the 1920s and 1930s. She cites extreme differences in wealth between rich and poor in Chiapas as comparable to conditions in Oaxaca before the Mexican Revolution. Angela worked as a peón on a nearby hacienda and still recalls bitterly the hard times that she and her husband endured as laborers as young as fourteen. She clearly identifies with Zapata as the figurehead of the Zapatista movement. Based on her personal experience, she believes that the poverty and landlessness claimed by the people of Chiapas are real and can lead to war. Because the EZLN

has taken up the name of Zapata, she links this group to the original program of Zapata and assumes that they are engaged in a similar struggle. Angela has never met Mario González of El Tule, who spoke of Zapata as a Christ-like figure giving his blood for the campesinos, but she invoked a related image: "Zapata saw the suffering of the peasants . . . , that is why he died." For ejidatarios like Angela whose personal experience goes back almost to the Mexican Revolution, the EZLN's struggle makes perfect sense.

The Zapatistas' demands also strike a chord with middle-aged ejidatarios who identify with both the benefits of the initial formation of ejidos and their subsequent abandonment by the state. Fifty-year-old José Manuel, an ejidatario from Unión Zapata, voiced great empathy for the Zapatistas' demands that the government be held accountable. He also believed that the Zapatistas may be forcing some accountability through programs like PROCAMPO.

L.S.: How did you hear about the Zapatistas?

J.M.: We first heard of them on the radio. They took us by surprise. We thought they were going to arrive in Oaxaca, but the government stopped them.

L.S.: What do you think of their demands?

J.M.: Their demands seemed just. The indigenous race has suffered enough, just like we have here. I think they are right when they say that the government has deceived us. I don't know if the government will accept their proposals. They are asking for changes for the whole country. If the government accepts their proposals, then they are going to hear others. They are going to have to respond to the demands of a lot of people.

L.S.: What do the people here think of the Zapatistas?

J.M.: We have never talked about them in our ejido meetings, only in private conversations. A lot of people think that they did a good thing. We need to see how we are going to pull ourselves out of poverty. The government doesn't support us. They never deliver what they promise. . . .

L.S.: Do you think this will affect government programs for campesinos at all?

J.M.: I think they will have to come through with the PROCAMPO program. If they don't, there could be war.

Despite the fact that numerous individuals like Angela and José expressed their identification with the plight of the poor of Chiapas and the justice of the Zapatista's struggle, the same people passively supported government programs like *Procede* and PROCAMPO, and many even voted for the PRI. In my efforts to understand how individuals integrated these two seemingly contradictory perspectives, one interchange stood out in explaining how these men and women could be both pro-Zapatista and pro-PRI.

Pedro García Sánchez and Refugio Ruiz from Unión Zapata discussed their support for the PRI and the Zapatistas in the same seamless

conversation. When I talked at length with Pedro in 1993, he was critical of *Procede* and other government development programs. But by the summer of 1994, his perspective had changed a great deal, and he told me outright that he was voting for the PRI. When he and Refugio tied their support for the PRI to the fact that they had received their ejido land from the government, I finally understood how the mediating figure of Zapata, as claimed by both the state and the Zapatistas, served to integrate seemingly contradictory discourses. Here is a partial transcript of our exchange.

L.S.: Who did you vote for?

R.R.: We voted for the PRI because they gave us our land. We keep on supporting the government party because they gave us the ejido land we make a living from now.

L.S. Well, last year when we talked, you were very critical of past government problems and their perpetual failure to fulfill their promises.

P.G.S.: We realize that the government is helping now. Before they used to always promise and never deliver. Now they are helping more. Before when we asked for help, they would forget us. Now you ask for help for your piece of land [referring here to PROCAMPO], and they give it. We look more favorably on the *Procede* as well.

L.S.: How did you first hear about the Zapatistas and what did you think about them?

P.G.S.: We thought that the fire had started and that it was going to arrive here. . . . The Zapatistas want land to be redistributed. They want to get rid of the big landholders in Chiapas. If they [the government] don't take care of that problem, the fighting will continue. The Zapatistas didn't have any other road open to them. . . . We sympathize with them. We realize on the one hand that the government doesn't like them, and on the other hand, those fucking *terratientes* [large landholders] want to take all of their money. I'm going to tell you why I understand them by making a comparison. When I was a young man, about thirteen years old, my parents were peones for the hacendados. My parents worked their land, but they had to turn over most of the harvest to them. My parents couldn't produce enough to eat.

Whoever disobeyed the hacendados got beaten with a horsewhip. One day when I was watching some cows, one of them went onto the land of the hacendados and began eating. After that, one of the hacendados' bosses grabbed me and started beating me with a horsewhip, like an animal. That's why we took their land away from them. That is what they are fighting for now in Chiapas. They are going to do the same thing to the large landowners there. . . . When we woke up here and saw what was going on, we took the land away from the large landowners. The government helped us to do that here in our struggle for the ejido. The ejido law never reached Chiapas. Nobody helped them there. Now the PRI has to help them get their land there, or the blood will keep flowing.

The historical connection that some ejidatarios made with Zapata is also linked to the state. As reflected in Refugio and Pedro's discussion above, the ejido is tied historically not only to Zapata but also to the government, specifically to the PRI as the provider of the original agra-

rian reform. According to the oral ejido history of El Tule, government officials played a strongly positive role in securing land for the community. For most ejidatarios middle-aged and older, the ejido land they currently make a living from reminds them daily of what the state did for them and their families sixty or seventy years ago. Comparisons of what happened in Oaxaca during the revolution with the present situation in Chiapas suggests an evolutionary analysis. For many of those interviewed in Oaxaca, what is going on in Chiapas is a logical outcome of a revolution that never reached the southern part of the country. They identify with the struggle of the Zapatistas and expect the government to facilitate the process of land redistribution in Chiapas, taking it from large landholders and redistributing it to those without land as the government did in Oaxaca beginning in the 1920s.

A second step in this thinking, however, involves recognition of a long period of neglect and betrayal by the government since the ejidos were formed and up to the present. Only recently has the state been reformulating its historical legacy of support to peasants by invoking Zapata and the Mexican Revolution to market programs like Procede and PROCAMPO. Ejidatarios like Pedro and Refugio pointed out a period of betrayal by the state and campesino disillusionment with the government.

After this long period of feeling ignored and disillusioned, ejidatarios were primed for the Zapatistas' message: "Basta, we won't be deceived by the government any more." But ejidatarios were also primed for the state's ideological marketing campaign on how its reform of Article 27 along with programs like Procede and PROCAMPO were going to help campesinos secure their rights and improve their lives. Ejidatarios responded to both events and used the historical thread connecting themselves to Zapata and the revolution to integrate what at first appear to be contradictory tendencies. Perhaps the Zapatista rebellion even contributed indirectly to raising the level of support generated for the state's promotion of Procede and PROCAMPO by further publicizing the plight of rural Mexicans as "*los olvidados*." For the first time in decades, campesinos were targeted for attention by the state and the press.

CONCLUSIONS

As suggested by the discussions and comments of rural men and women highlighted here, participation in government programs and rural voting patterns in Mexico cannot be interpreted as a referendum on the population's endorsement of particular political ideologies or even overall party platforms. The political ideology of the men and women from three ejidos analyzed here is a complex mix of competing discourses oriented first by local selective tradition and then by the changing elements of the hegemonic and counterhegemonic messages projected through

the national media, alternative media, and the state with its own communication apparatus. Particular symbols, such as the mediating figure of Emiliano Zapata, can embody multiple and seemingly contradictory meanings when projected through local histories. Selective traditions like that of El Tule can identify Zapata as well as state agrarian officials as “the good guys” in the struggle for ejido lands. Thus some ejidatarios can integrate the Zapatistas in Chiapas and their goals with a partial endorsement of the state and its programs because the EZLN’s demands for land and invocation of Zapata resonate with the struggles experienced by many Oaxacans to obtain land of their own.

The age composition of ejidos also must be considered in determining how ejidatarios arrived at their pro-Zapatista and pro-PRI positions. Given the fact that the average ejido member is in his or her late fifties, most are still close to the legacy of Zapata and the revolution, either personally or through stories told them by their parents and other relatives. The moral appeal of the Zapatistas and their passion for their cause can stir emotional testimonials by elderly ejidatarios to the violence they themselves faced, their ill treatment at the hands of hacendados, and their former lives of endless toil. But significant differences separate those who lived through the creation of ejidos first-hand or through the experience of their parents versus those who have grown up in the past thirty-five to forty years.

Many younger people in ejido communities have experienced a different socialization from that of their parents. Although they have learned about Zapata and the revolution through public education and have listened to family stories about local history, their personal work experience is more likely to be in the urban service sector than on the land. They may share some of their parents’ knowledge and appreciation of local history, but their visions of the past are filtered through a different set of personal experiences of the present, one more likely to include Mexican national culture and elements from the United States as well. One thirty-five-year-old ejidatario’s analysis of the Zapatista uprising and Mexican politics brought up his experience of living for ten years in Los Angeles as a short-order cook. We were talking about the confusion that surrounded the Mexican Revolution and the possibility of more Mexicans dying in the wake of the Zapatista uprising. He said, “I’m sorry to interrupt you, but I want to make a comparison with Bobby Kennedy. I lived very close to where Bobby Kennedy was assassinated. Then Martin Luther King was shot too. Here it was Colosio. Colosio was a better candidate than Zedillo. Things get crazy. Here the elections are on, but it’s like Bobby Kennedy. They never really solved who shot him. They said it was one person acting alone, but it wasn’t. The same thing is going on with Colosio. Things are out of hand. There could be another uprising, like before.”

While previous discussions have focused primarily on one specific

economic and age sector of the Mexican rural population, acknowledging the particular demographic characteristics of ejidatarios in contrast to the diversity of Mexico's rural population suggests the difficulty of trying to generalize about the future political responses of "the Mexican rural sector." Just as hegemonic processes are fragmented, incomplete, and contested, counterhegemony is also varied and contingent. In a useful discussion of Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony, William Roseberry observed, "for both the ruling and the subaltern classes, Gramsci implies plurality or diversity; unity is for them a political and cultural problem" (1994, 359). Just as the state's discourse on Zapata and agrarian politics is changing and currently contradictory, the response to that discourse among ejidatarios in Oaxaca is also varied rather than unified. The previous discussion of how a simultaneously pro-Zapatista and pro-PRI position emerged among some ejidatarios in Oaxaca suggests that unified strategies of resistance to state programs or the PRI will not be found among all of Mexico's rural population. Regional variation within Mexico about whether or how agrarian reform was carried out since the Mexican Revolution, the importance of local selective tradition in reconstructing community history, differences within local populations, and thus the variation and creativity employed to interpret and reinterpret hegemonic discourses of the state and counterhegemonic discourses like that of the Zapatistas all discourage analysis of the countryside as a homogenous sector. Specific historical and ethnographic case studies allow researchers to perceive the process by which a specific group comes up with a particular political position, but they also can alert us to the particularities of how that stance was taken. Political analysts seeking to understand Mexico's political futures should not underestimate regional and local diversity in the formation of political positions. In the 1990s, the image of Zapata—the man of many faces, masks, and claims—has served as a central figure for all.

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