

January 2019

## Neozapatismo as History and Influence

Benjamin Shultz  
CSUSB

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/history-in-the-making>



Part of the [Latin American History Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Shultz, Benjamin (2019) "Neozapatismo as History and Influence," *History in the Making*: Vol. 12 , Article 6.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/history-in-the-making/vol12/iss1/6>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the History at CSUSB ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in History in the Making by an authorized editor of CSUSB ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@csusb.edu](mailto:scholarworks@csusb.edu).

## **Neozapatismo as History and Influence**

By Benjamin Shultz

*Abstract: On January 1, 1994 the North American Free Trade Agreement went into effect with the espoused intention of opening trade relationships in North America. In Mexico City, the leaders of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional were celebrating this economic victory which they assured would bring about economic prosperity and wealth for Mexico. Yet while the PRI celebrated, the Ejercito Zapatista de Liberacion Nacional, emerged from the Lacandon Jungle in the southern state of Chiapas and took control of the city of San Cristobal de las Casas. Their demands focused on social and economic justice for the indigenous campesinos whose lands would be seized and privatized in order to meet the trading conditions specified in the NAFTA. However, the EZLN's armed insurgency was short lived since by January 12th the Mexican army drove the insurgents back into the Lacandon Jungle. The movement is alive today and has acted as a catalyst for many other anti-globalization movements, including 1999 WTO protest in Seattle and the more recent Occupy Wall Street protests. In my article I will discuss the historical factors of the ideology of Neozapatismo and how it drew in supporters for the EZLN at both the national and internal level.*

On January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1994 the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) went into effect with the espoused intention of opening trade relationships between the United States, Canada, and Mexico. In Mexico City, the leaders of the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI) were celebrating this economic victory. They

assured the people that this new economic deal would bring about economic prosperity and wealth for all Mexicans. Yet while the people of Mexico City celebrated, the *Ejercito Zapatista de Liberacion Nacional* (EZLN), a group of insurgents, emerged from the Lacandon Jungle in the southern state of Chiapas and took control of the city of San Cristobal de las Casas. Their demands focused on social and economic justice for the indigenous *campesinos* whose lands would be seized and privatized in order to meet the trading conditions specified in the NAFTA agreement. However, the EZLN's armed insurgency was short lived. By January 12th, the Mexican army drove the insurgents back into the Lacandon Jungle. This setback did not stop the vision of this small group of insurgents making an impact on history. In 2018, the movement that began in 1994 remains alive with the same focus on the issues of social and economic justice for the native people of Chiapas. While the internet was key in helping spread the ideals of the EZLN, it was the key concept of *Neozapatismo* that drew support from the people of Mexico and the international communities who had been negatively affected by neoliberal politics. This rather nationalistic myth and history, presented as *Neozapatismo*, is how the EZLN sustained its momentum within the national and international context with their call for "justice and equality" into the modern era.<sup>1</sup>

### **Literature Review**

What is it that has drawn supporters to the cause of the EZLN? The EZLN had not created new tactics or approaches to sustain its mission and disseminate its message since they began their revolt in 1994. It is very much a combination of multiple elements that have allowed the EZLN to be successful in drawing support for their cause. Yet it is still possible for one element to be a huge influence in gaining support for the movement. Therefore, it is

---

<sup>1</sup> General Command of the EZLN, "First Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle," *Enlance Zapatista*, January 1994.

important to look at how other scholars have attempted to figure out these issues.

One of the main elements that many scholars point to as a huge asset for the EZLN has been the group's use of the internet to promote their cause online. The use of the internet by the EZLN is important, because they were one of the first insurgent groups in the world to do this. This perspective is represented in David Ronfeldt's "Emergence and Influence of the Zapatista Social Network." It is in his article that Ronfeldt points out that the EZLN, as a group, could not have survived if they had not legitimized themselves on the web.<sup>2</sup> This is due to the fact that with the world's eyes on Mexico, the government in Mexico City was unable to act without being seen as violating human rights. The EZLN was therefore able to interact with an international audience without having to leave the state of Chiapas or the politics of indigenous peoples living there.

This connection between the EZLN and the use of the internet was also touched upon by in Alex Khasnabish's, *Zapatistas: Rebellion from the Grassroots to the Global*. While he does not focus solely on the internet as an influence for supporters of the EZLN, he does state that the EZLN have come to be understood as "Internet Warriors."<sup>3</sup> This status of internet warrior has been seen as a pioneering process for the EZLN since their first declarations were released for the world to see on January 1, 1994. But as Khasnabish also argues, there is more to the EZLN movement than just the material influences of the internet. For example, the timing of the movement could not have been more influential given the recent trend and development of globalization. Since the Soviet Union had collapsed just three years prior, the

---

<sup>2</sup> David Ronfeldt and John Arquilla, "Emergence and Influence of the Zapatista Social Netwar," in *Networks and Netwars: The Future of Terror, Crime, and Militancy*, ed. by David Ronfeldt (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2001), 172.

<sup>3</sup> Alex Khasnabish, *Zapatistas: Rebellion from the Grassroots to the Global*, (London: Zed Books, 2010), 175.

EZLN became a new symbol for the fight against capitalism and neoliberalism.

One other topic discussed by other authors has been that the EZLN movement is representative of the traditional underdog story, but with a more postmodern approach. For instance in John Holloway's "Zapatismo and the Social Sciences," he talks about how the EZLN is a reaction to the "bitterness" of history that has caused the indigenous peoples of Mexico to suffer hardships.<sup>4</sup> They are fighting against a force, the force of NAFTA and neoliberal politics in Mexico that seeks to further push indigenous peoples out of the picture in Mexico. It is therefore the case that the EZLN rises up to fight against this force in a nontraditional way. Instead of calling for a mass revolution and seizing power for themselves, they are calling on others to launch movements that will change Mexican society from the bottom up.<sup>5</sup> This is what the author considered to be the driving point of the EZLN's success.

A similar argument can be found in Richard Stahler-Sholk's article "The Zapatista Movement: Innovation and Sustainability." He argues that while the EZLN is fighting for change in Mexican society, the group has unintentionally developed a framework by which they are opposing the rise of globalization.<sup>6</sup> The EZLN has translated its movement into that of an international movement almost by accident. They have gained support on an international level that was meant to support the local level in the state of Chiapas. In many respects, the EZLN is one of the first successful underdogs to emerge and push back against the ever growing force of globalization that is dominating the political and the economic state of the world. This is yet another reason why the EZLN may have amassed so much support.

While all these factors are important, it seems as though most of these authors have missed a key factor in the development

---

<sup>4</sup> John Holloway, "Zapatismo and the Social Sciences," *Capital & Class* 26, no. 78 (2002): 157.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Richard Stahler-Sholk, "The Zapatista Social Movement: Innovation and Sustainability," *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 35, no. 3 (2010): 271.

of the EZLN. Many have touched upon this idea, but it has always been seen as a minor part of the overall movement. However, this idea that has been touched upon many times is one that deserves a more in-depth look. It is the ideology of the EZLN, *Neozapatismo*, that has allowed the EZLN to gain legitimacy and recognition for their cause and gain support at both the national and international level. This look will include multiple communications from the EZLN through their website as well as a number of secondary sources.

### **Roots of Neozapatismo**

*Neozapatismo* is a broad ideology which draws from numerous left wing ideas, yet the core of this ideology is a synthesis of two major ideas from Mexican society. These ideas are the importance of Mayan culture and language, along with the ideals that were formed as a result of the Mexican Revolution. The ideology is congruent with the notion of *mestizaje*, or a mixture with regards to both ethnic and cultural aspects of everyday life in Mexico and Latin America overall. Historically, the predecessor to the EZLN had not held to the ideas of *neozapatismo*, but rather to the ideas of the Mexican Revolution and various left-wing ideologies.

The primary founders of the EZLN were non-indigenous urban guerrillas from northern Mexico known collectively as the *Fuerzas de Liberacion Nacional* (FLN). Having adopted left-wing ideology, which mainly consisted of Libertarian Marxist ideals and Subcomandante Marco's own take on revolutionary theory, then infused with the ideas from the Mexican Revolution, allowed for groups to begin to move further south to appeal to the poor *campesinos* whom resided in Chiapas and other southern states of Mexico. Members of the FLN began to systematically incorporate themselves into the indigenous community with the help of local *campesino* movements and the local Catholic Church (which had been helping to develop these local *campesino* movements since the 1960s through the use of Liberation Theology). Through living in these communities, the FLN members deepened their

understanding of the struggle of the local indigenous *campesinos* and started incorporating more indigenous traditions, such as the Tzotzil language, Mayan oral history, and communal based agricultural system into the framework of their ideology thus drawing more indigenous *campesinos* into the movement.<sup>7</sup> By the 1990s, the FLN had reconstituted itself as the EZLN and were comprised primarily of indigenous *campesinos* whose primary mission was to fight for the rights of all indigenous peoples in Mexico through their new ideals of *neozapatismo*.

### **Impact of the Ideals of the Mexican Revolution**

In order to fully comprehend the essence of *neozapatismo*, it is important to understand where it draws its ideas from. The first thing to look at is the ideals on which the Mexican Revolution was fought. The Mexican Revolution began in 1910 and lasted until the early 1920s. It was an event that changed the landscape of Mexico by ending the dictatorship of Porfirio Diaz. According to Vincent T. Gawronski's analysis and essay on the Mexican Revolution, there were five promises that the revolutionary leaders made to the people of Mexico over the course of the revolution. These five promises included: 1) agrarian reform, 2) respect for labor rights/unions, 3) no reelection of the president, 4) national economic sovereignty, and 5) social justice.<sup>8</sup> These five ideas have resonated in the minds of the people of Mexico since the revolution ended and are often the crux of any nationalist movement. Historically, these five ideals have permeated the formation of the central government in Mexico City as well as the numerous guerilla armies, such as the *Ejercito Popular*

---

<sup>7</sup> Gunther Dietz, "From *Indigenismo* to *Zapatismo*: The Struggle for a Multi-ethnic Mexican Society," in *The Struggle for Indigenous Rights in Latin America*, ed. Nancy Grey Postero and Leon Zamosc (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2004), 59.

<sup>8</sup> Vincent T. Gawronski, "The Revolution is Dead. *Viva La Revolucion!* The place of the Mexican Revolution in the Era of Globalization," *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos* 18, no. 2 (Summer 2002): 365.

*Revolucionario*, that exist in the rural regions of Mexico. One thing that all of these groups had in common was that they practiced vanguardism. This means that each group believed that only their group could carry out the ideals of the revolution. However, most of these groups, like the PRI, have failed in practice to support these ideals and in many ways their actions and decisions negatively impacted the progress that had been made in some of the areas after the revolution. In part, this is due to widespread political and economic corruption that has plagued Mexico since its independence from Spain in 1821.<sup>9</sup>

In addition to the ideals of the revolution, the images and heroes of the revolution had a significant impact. These heroes include Francisco Madero, Pancho Villa, and Alvaro Obregon, whose lives and stories of their willingness to commit themselves to the causes of the Mexican people are deeply intertwined with the ideals of the revolution. The most prominent hero and mythical figure of the revolution is Emiliano Zapata. The image of Zapata is important not just in the urban areas of Mexico, but to the poor *campesinos* in the rural areas as well. Zapata has been framed as the poor man's hero. As a result, his image in history stands out even more than Pancho Villa's. What makes Zapata so special is his background growing up a poor *campesino* in the state of Morelos, and then emerging to fight for the rights of the poor farmers of the region. His famous *Plan de Ayala* was one of the first declarations in Mexico to call for mass land redistribution in order to return the land to those who worked it.<sup>10</sup> Zapata's ideals of *zapatismo* focused on bringing about social justice much like the EZLN is attempting to do now with indigenous rights. Even the EZLN's name is derived from the name of Zapata.

---

<sup>9</sup> Jose Rabasa, *Without History: Subaltern Studies, the Zapatista Insurgency, and the Specter of History* (Pittsburg: University of Pittsburg Press, 2010), 18.

<sup>10</sup> Thomas Benjamin, *La Revolución: Mexico's Great Revolution as Memory, Myth, and History* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000), 53.

## **Historic Evolution of Indigenous Rights in Mexico**

Today, the Mexican Revolution and the image of Zapata is not unique for a group such as the EZLN. What has distinguished the EZLN from other insurgent groups, however, is their integration and call for the rights of indigenous *campesinos*. Much like their counterparts in the United States and Canada, historically the indigenous people of Mexico have always been treated as second class citizens in the eyes of both the Mexican government and the Mexican people. This included being discriminated against in the private sector and being forced to live in the more remote areas of Mexico. Even when the indigenous people are recognized as being a part of *mestizaje*, along with the original *peninsulares* (Spaniards born in Spain under the Spanish Empire) and the *mestizo* (Spaniards born in Latin America), they have always been relegated to the lesser third of the three roots of Mexican people.

Historically, the indigenous peoples of Mexico have suffered as well. Since the arrival of the *conquistadors*, the indigenous population had to deal with oppression and subjugation at the hands of the Spanish Empire and later the Mexican government. From enslavement to trafficking of indigenous peoples, they had little to no freedom under the rule of the Spanish and later Mexican government. It could even be argued that the Mexican government treated the indigenous people worse, as the Bourbon Reforms under the Spanish Empire would have given indigenous peoples more freedom. When the EZLN issued its first declaration, they claimed that the indigenous peoples of Mexico had suffered for 500 years under the rule of a tyrannical government since the Americas were first “discovered.”<sup>11</sup> Even the legend of *La Malinche*, a legend of an indigenous woman who is seen as a traitor for acting as a translator and concubine for Cortez, serves as a tribute to the subjugation of the indigenous peoples.

Given this evolution of events over a 500-year period, the final straw came as a result of the adoption of NAFTA, and the

---

<sup>11</sup> EZLN, *First Declaration*.

impact of those reforms on the lives and economic opportunities allocated to the indigenous peoples. Taking the advice of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, the PRI began to privatize large sections of land in Mexico so that they could be developed by American and Canadian businesses. These were the same areas of land that were occupied by indigenous reservations since the time of conquest in Mexico beginning in 1519. Thus, the PRI seized the land from these groups in order to develop them as they envisioned these lands and peoples as being expendable in order to develop their own wealth. To make matters worse, the new trade deal allowed for the movement of products across North American borders to move more freely. For example, this meant that corn, which could be cultivated and mass produced more easily in the United States than in Mexico, would drive down the prices of corn and force these indigenous *campesinos* out of business. NAFTA also had a negative impact on the economic and social fabric of indigenous groups since they would not be able to cultivate and sell corn at a competitive price, thereby losing their ability to meet their basic needs for survival.<sup>12</sup>

When the FLN first came to the indigenous regions, the indigenous groups already living there were very skeptical about their “true” motivations. However, as the members of the FLN built relationships and trust with the indigenous peoples and integrated into their communities, they became more accepting of their ideas and clear about their intentions. This led to the elimination of the FLN and the emergence of the EZLN which fully integrated indigenous culture and language into their group structure. By the time that the groups emerged in 1994, their ranks consisted mostly of indigenous Mayans. The major features that the EZLN had adopted from the Mayan groups in Chiapas included managing communal land and adopting the Mayan language of *tzotli* as their primary language for communication. By the time the

---

<sup>12</sup> Nancy Postero and Leon Zamosc, “Indigenous Movements and the Indian Question in Latin America,” in *The Struggle for Indigenous Rights in Latin America*, ed. Nancy Postero and Leon Zamosc (Portland: Sussex Academic Press, 2004), 21.

Chiapas conflict started in 1994, the EZLN was mainly composed of indigenous fighters and became one of the first fully indigenous rebel groups to directly confront the Mexican Government. Thus, their primary goal became that of the defense of the right of indigenous *campesinos* to their land and culture. The EZLN even had a major impact in influencing the creation of the *Congreso Nacional Indigena* (CNI).<sup>13</sup>

### **Conflicting Ideals in *Neozapatismo***

As the ideals of *neozapatismo* evolved, it was clear that not all aspects of these ideals were clearly integrated and harmonious with one another. For instance, the EZLN prided itself on being a feminist organization. As seen in their *Women's Revolutionary Law*, the EZLN states that the women in the movement and their supporters are equal to men under all of these revolutionary laws and that they can also have their own personal needs met as well.<sup>14</sup> However, this is in exact contrast to beliefs from the Mayan culture which in the past had been very patriarchal, emphasizing the importance of male warriors. While it is true that some family lines were traced through the women of the family, the men in the family were still heads of the household. Therefore, it is important to note that some of these patriarchal ideas still exist in the Zapatista autonomous and support communities to this day. This was highlighted during the "Intercontinental Encounter for Humanity and Against Neo-liberalism," a conference for global supporters of the EZLN in 1996.<sup>15</sup> While the EZLN and their international guests were eating and discussing strategy, the women of the movement were confined to cooking and cleaning for the conference guests. However, the EZLN attempted to fix

---

<sup>13</sup> Khasnabish, *Zapatistas*, 65.

<sup>14</sup> General Command of the EZLN, "Revolutionary Law for Women," *Enlace Zapatista* (December 1993).

<sup>15</sup> Roger Burbach, "Zapatismo and the Intergalactic Age," in *Globalization and Postmodern Politics: From Zapatistas to High Tech Robber Barons* (London: Pluto Press, 2001), 135.

these issues by having women play a primary role in the negotiations for peace during the San Andres accords. The most prominent figures of these accords being Comandante Ramona who was the first Zapatista fighter to travel to Mexico City to begin peace talks while she was recovering from cancer treatment. If nothing else, critics will say that *neozapatismo* is very broad in terms of its definition (incorporating numerous ideas from former movements) and it is also very idealistic.<sup>16</sup> It is presented in such a way that a person could romanticize the possibilities of what could come out of the movement. This is shown in the writing of Subcomandante Marcos whose poetic stylizing has been called both artistic and propagandist given its utopic portrayal of indigenous culture and peoples. One of these books, *The History of Color*, stands out as being one of the most idealistic as it calls for social justice while also recognizing the need for unity in diversity.<sup>17</sup> Yet while these works and other publications from the EZLN are idealistic in nature, they exemplify the important ways to share their ideas of *neozapatismo*, and reach out to supporters and potential supporters. This is where supporters recognized the universal value that the EZLN had put forward and still continues to do today.

### **EZLN and PRI: Ideals in Opposition**

Before looking into the supporters of the EZLN and what drew them to the cause, it is important to understand their enemies. The one adversary that stood out as being most opposed to the EZLN was the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* or PRI. At the time of the Chiapas Conflict, the PRI had been in control of all of Mexico's political affairs since the end of the Mexican Revolution in 1920. The PRI had been ruling Mexico as a one-party state and they had been unopposed primarily due to the suppression of opposition parties. Yet there were instances in which the party

---

<sup>16</sup> Stahler-Sholk, "The Zapatista Social Movement," 283.

<sup>17</sup> Subcomandante Marcos, *The Story of Colors*, (El Paso: Cinco Puntos Press, 1999), 15.

would not hesitate to flex its strength against political dissidents. One such event was the massacring of student protesters during the 1968 Olympic Games.<sup>18</sup> The party justified this atrocity by claiming to be defending the ideals of the Mexican Revolution. While the public saw through these claims long ago, they did little to change the status quo and for decades tolerated corruption and brutality and thereby offered support, by default, for the status quo asserted by party members. Yet because they ruled Mexico for so long, they were beginning to further lose credibility in the international community. So, as a means to appease outside influences, the PRI began to adopt the neoliberal reforms that other developed countries had adopted and began to negotiate with the United States and Canada in order to create NAFTA.<sup>19</sup>

The PRI claimed that the neoliberal reforms would allow for greater economic prosperity for all of Mexico while still allowing for certain aspects of self-determination about specific economic goods, such as oil. Thus, the PRI expected to be able to hold their political and economic hegemony over Mexico. However, they began to backtrack on these promises after the International Monetary Fund and World Bank recommended that in order to fully adopt NAFTA, they would need to privatize a majority of their land for development. This in particular applied to the agricultural industries that included corn and wheat production. Most of the land that was privatized was taken from poor areas of the country, which consisted of communally owned land run by indigenous *campesinos*. Thus, the PRI violated the Constitution of 1917, which stated that indigenous persons could hold communal land separate from the government, allowing the EZLN to justify their armed struggle against the government.<sup>20</sup>

The PRI had also endeavored to take control of indigenous affairs by trying to create a bureaucratic regulatory system that

---

<sup>18</sup> Gawronski, "The Revolution is Dead," 370.

<sup>19</sup> Lynn Stephen, *Zapata Lives!: Histories and Cultural Politics in Southern Mexico* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 35.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

would come to be known as *indigenismo*.<sup>21</sup> This system of *indigenismo* was an attempt by the PRI to bring indigenous culture in Mexico into a regulated form of information that would be used by the state. The process they used was to study the various cultures of indigenous peoples around Mexico and understand their different traditions and practices. The espoused outcome was to identify the unique elements of each culture under the guise of co-opting Mexico's indigenous heritage while giving little to the actual indigenous groups. By embracing not only Mexico's revolutionary past, but also its indigenous past, the PRI sought to manipulate the information and knowledge related to the history of Mexico and the concept of *mestizaje* (the concept of the merging of cultures and societies in Latin America). Thus, by controlling and regulating cultural information, the government could use it as it saw fit as a way to influence public perceptions and interpretations of the actions and decisions that were being made at the time. This would play directly into the unique culture of *mestizaje*, literal mixing of races that has dominated the modern culture of Mexican society.

Since many indigenous languages and cultures had been either suppressed or wiped out by the 1990s, it was the Mexican intelligentsia and non-native speakers who understood and practiced the language on a regular basis. Professors would tend to be the ones who muddled the languages, and ultimately utilized the languages in order to control the image of Mexico's indigenous past.<sup>22</sup> Additionally, most indigenous people were excluded from these classes due to their poor socioeconomic status. Consequently, the development of the class was mainly done through the studies of professors and students, taking the main focus away from the people who actually spoke the language. Since the professors were constantly utilizing the language and the culture, they asserted that they knew more about the indigenous cultures of Mexico than the people from the indigenous blood lines in Mexico. These classes

---

<sup>21</sup> Dietz, "From *Indigenismo*," 35.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

were also seen as a way to fully assimilate the indigenous peoples of Mexico into the *mestizaje* culture. This meant that the culture of indigenous Mexico was downplayed in favor of this concept of *mestizaje*—with an emphasis on the European origins—the culture of modern Mexico.

Yet the EZLN came to challenge these beliefs and seized them for their own purpose. The EZLN even claimed the right to use the national symbols of Mexico, including the right to fly the national flag. By taking the mixed history of Mexico and creating *neozapatismo*, the EZLN was taking the image of Mexico and making it their own. They took what the PRI had used for years to subjugate and control the people of Mexico and instead used it to amass support for their cause on a national level. So while *neozapatismo* is a combination of ideas, it has an appeal at the national level as it relates to a common history. At the same time, *neozapatismo* generated an international appeal (in the form of Marco's stories) that amassed a large international support group. This would include ideas that are universally recognized by people from around the world. That is why this idea is so powerful, in that it is able to create a big tent effect and thus draw in more people; not just sympathizers in Mexico, but groups and organizations from around the world that would like to see the ideals of *neozapatismo* be realized. Following are just a few of these groups that sought to support the EZLN and its goals.

### **National Supporters of the EZLN**

The initial supporters of the EZLN were the indigenous Mayan groups of Chiapas<sup>23</sup> Later other indigenous groups from across Mexico, such as Mexica tribes in the north, gave their support to the EZLN. As mentioned, the FLN integrated themselves into the indigenous communities before they initiated their revolutionary actions in 1994. Once they had support from the indigenous communities, they were able to initiate their first armed rebellion.

---

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

This led to larger numbers of indigenous *campesinos* joining their struggle and resulted in indigenous members of the group becoming the leaders of the movement while the original members of the FLN stepped aside and held honorary positions. Yet the best evidence that demonstrates the support from the EZLN in the indigenous communities comes from the stories of Old Antonio.<sup>24</sup>

As the story was told by Marcos, Old Antonio was an old man of Mayan decent living in Chiapas. Old Antonio had met numerous times with Subcomandante Marcos to talk with him and to help the FLN integrate into the indigenous cultures of the area. In fact, Marcos claims that it was the stories told by Old Antonio that inspired the FLN to integrate aspects of indigenous cultures into their framework. The story that had the biggest impact on Marcos was called “Questions.” As Old Antonio told the story, he described how two ancient gods had come together to form a human being that had the ability to question the world around it and make decisions for itself.<sup>25</sup> The human that emerged, according to Old Antonio, would eventually come to be known as Emiliano Zapata, thus connecting the ideals from Mayan mythology with the mythical figure of Zapata.

Another important tale that has drawn indigenous peoples to the cause of the EZLN was the “Story of the Seven Rainbows.” In this story, Old Antonio tells Marcos about the seven rainbows which serves as a bridge between the gods and the original peoples of the earth.<sup>26</sup> This story acts as a metaphor for the connection between the EZLN and their indigenous supporters. Marcos points out how the connection between the EZLN and their supporters is a mutually supportive relationship and just like in the “Story of the Seven Rainbows,” there is a mythical connection between the

---

<sup>24</sup> Kristine Berghe and Bart Maddens, "Ethnocentrism, Nationalism and Post-nationalism in the Tales of Subcomandante Marcos," *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos* 20, no. 1 (2004): 129.

<sup>25</sup> Subcomandante Marcos, *Questions & Swords: Folktales of the Zapatista Revolution*, (El Paso: Cinco Puntos Press, 2001), 12.

<sup>26</sup> Subcomandante Marcos, "The History of the Seven Rainbows," *Enlace Zapatista*, January 7, 1996.

EZLN and their supporters which keeps them strong. While this is a very poetic way of describing the beauty of the support the EZLN receives, Marco's story is important in that it demonstrates that the indigenous groups of Mexico are the essence of what motivates the EZLN to take appropriate actions to create a beautiful future (like a rainbow) for the indigenous peoples of Chiapas.

These stories must have had a positive effect on the indigenous population, as multiple villages within Chiapas have shown support for the EZLN. In their call to action they listed eleven demands which included; work, land, roof, food, health, education, independence, freedom, democracy, justice, and peace.<sup>27</sup> All of these were rights that the EZLN claimed the Mexican government had denied indigenous peoples for far too long. The indigenous people were sympathetic to the struggle because this was one of the first times a social movement had recognized their desires beyond the corrupt system of *indigenismo* which consistently provided no real assistance and support for their cause and continued economic viability. They also needed to be steadfast and committed to this new idea because of the danger that their allegiance with the EZLN put them in.

In the years following the initial violent uprising by the EZLN, villages that had supported the EZLN were targeted by the government as being potentially dangerous. Thus, paramilitaries were established, including the infamous *Paz y Justicia* group, for the alleged protection of pro-government areas. The result has been a terror campaign against the sympathizers of the EZLN, particularly remote indigenous villages in the state of Chiapas.<sup>28</sup> This is due to the large Mayan population in the area, as well as being the main state that the EZLN operates out of. Some of the supporters of the EZLN attempted to appeal to the Comandantes in order to gain protection from the paramilitaries. The EZLN could

---

<sup>27</sup> Nicholas P. Higgins, *Understanding the Chiapas Rebellion: Modernist Visions and the Invisible Indian* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004), 102.

<sup>28</sup> Alex Khasnabish, "A Tear in the Fabric of the Present." *Journal for the Study of Radicalism* 2, no. 2 (2008): 38.

not help them however, as they were actively involved in peace negotiations with the PRI and could not break their truce. Despite these setbacks, the sympathizers were still supportive of the EZLN, and some even managed to protect themselves against the paramilitary groups by organizing themselves into defensive groups that would resist the terror being incited by the paramilitary groups.<sup>29</sup>

These organizations contributed to the creation of the EZLN's *Caracoles*. These autonomous self-sufficient communities were some of the first initiatives to be developed by the EZLN and their supporting communities.<sup>30</sup> These autonomous communities were located in the remote areas surrounding the southern mountains of Chiapas and have been the stronghold for the Zapatista communities. Yet had it not been for the supporters teaching and helping the EZLN how to live self-sufficiently in the high density jungle area, the group probably would not have survived for long. As a result, the communities that surrounded the autonomous areas have acted as a barrier between the government and paramilitary forces. Of course, these supporting communities tend to be the first and hardest hit when violence occurs in the region.<sup>31</sup>

During the early 2000s, the indigenous peasants had a resurgence of interest in their ancient culture. Unlike the oppressive forces of *indigenismo*, the ideas of *neozapatismo* sparked interest in indigenous communities to be proud of their heritage and practices. They no longer had to tolerate the bureaucratic nature of the PRI government manipulating their culture for the purpose of controlling their actions and interactions. The people were now free to use their language and practice their cultural traditions as they saw fit and continue their communal lifestyles and practices. This did not remove the threat of NAFTA;

---

<sup>29</sup> Jeff Conant, *A Poetics of Resistance: The Revolutionary Public Relations of the Zapatista Insurgency* (Oakland: AK Press, 2010), 127.

<sup>30</sup> General Command of the EZLN, "The Sixth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle," *Enlance Zapatista*, 2005.

<sup>31</sup> Conant, *A Poetics of Resistance*, 127.

however, it did allow for indigenous groups to start pushing back against the unjust nature of what had been occurring to them for over 500 years.

One of the main organizations that emerged as a group of indigenous supporters of the EZLN was the nationwide *Congreso Nacional Indígena* (CNI). This group was comprised of numerous tribes and indigenous groups around Mexico in response to the EZLN's call for action. Beginning in 1996, the group operated as a congressional body that had called on the indigenous people to act and not wait for the government to tell them what to do. Specifically, they have adopted the EZLN's model of autonomy, and began working to undo the damage that was caused by NAFTA to the communal indigenous lands. They were also looking to fight against *indigenismo* by adopting aspects of *neozapatismo*. This included their focus on expanded rights for indigenous people to their own self-determination and socioeconomic justice.<sup>32</sup>

It is important to note that while the CNI had adopted aspects of *neozapatismo*, they were not part of the EZLN and their fighting forces. The CNI was more loosely confederated than the EZLN and acted more as a voice for indigenous peoples. Thus, the CNI brought together a multitude of ideas that were not associated directly with the EZLN. It would be unwise however, to distance the two completely, as the EZLN and its ideas of *neozapatismo* was what sparked the group initially to take action and organize.<sup>33</sup> Had the EZLN not existed, it is highly unlikely that the groups would have had the confidence or the ability to initiate actions and focus on the changes that needed to be made. Thus, the CNI was representative of the ideals of *neozapatismo* going beyond the

---

<sup>32</sup> Dietz, "From *Indigenismo*," 63.

<sup>33</sup> Christopher Gunderson, "The Making of Organic Indigenous-Campesino Intellectuals: Catechist Training in the Diocese of San Cristobal and the roots of the Zapatista uprising," in *Research in Social Movements, Conflicts and Change*, ed by Patrick G. Coy (Bingley: Emerald Group Publishing Limited, 2011), 278.

EZLN to work in full support of the mission for change to positively impact the lives of the indigenous peoples of Mexico.

One of the more recent campaigns the CNI has undertaken has been a joint effort with the EZLN. As of January 2017, both the CNI and the EZLN have stated that they would be putting their weight behind an independent indigenous female candidate in the 2018 Mexican election.<sup>34</sup> This candidate would represent both the indigenous peoples of Mexico and the political agenda of the EZLN. It is unlikely that this individual will win the election, however this move does show a joint cooperation between the CNI and the EZLN in term of their unified goal to improve the conditions for indigenous peoples. That being said, the CNI does not represent all of the indigenous peoples of Mexico, yet it does show a huge indigenous support for the EZLN and their vision for change, somewhere in the tens of thousands.

Even with all of the support coming from the indigenous peoples, the EZLN and Marcos made a critical mistake. Specifically, the indigenous peoples were being characterized in idealized ways implying that they were from historically privileged groups that would one day rise up against their oppressors in Mexico and take what was rightfully theirs.<sup>35</sup> While this may be very appealing to the indigenous peoples of Mexico, it also becomes very exclusionary to non-indigenous Mexicans. To facilitate their effectiveness, that is why it was important that the EZLN have some support from the non-native population of Mexico to validate its purpose and support its actions.

This is where the appeal to the people of Mexico began to develop. Much like the indigenous peoples of Mexico, the poor *campesinos* also played a significant role in supporting the EZLN as a movement. In many cases, these groups were intertwined with the indigenous peoples of Mexico. This was especially the case when the EZLN worked with the local Catholic Churches in

---

<sup>34</sup> Rasec Niembro, "The Zapatista Candidate," *Jacobin*, January 29, 2017. Accessed February 10, 2018.

<sup>35</sup> Berghe, "Ethnocentrism," 132.

Chiapas. These groups included the working poor, the trade unionists, and the teachers of Mexico.

Many of the poor *campesinos* and working class people had been in support of the ideals of the Mexican Revolution, though not all. This concept of revolution was seen as a way to raise their status in society because of its call for social justice and respect for workers' rights. These dreams and ideals never materialized however, because of the efforts of the PRI and other corrupt groups who sought to gain power for themselves. Thus, these same peoples were forced to live and work in conditions that were as bad, if not worse, than the conditions that indigenous peoples had historically suffered under.

While the PRI and other groups had circumvented the ideals of the Mexican Revolution for the working class of Mexico, the EZLN became a new hope. The EZLN had become the most prominent group, by the end of the twentieth century, to challenge the authority that the PRI had held for decades. While the Zapatista Uprising was meant to strive for the betterment of the indigenous people, many working class peoples and *campesinos* were motivated to help the EZLN because of their shared ideals of the Mexican Revolution.<sup>36</sup>

These same *campesinos* and working class people had also helped the EZLN on a few occasions. For instance, during the creation of the *Caracoles* in the jungles of Chiapas, many working class people and other non-indigenous *campesinos* from the surrounding areas also came to establish the infrastructure. They developed the cooperative shops that have been used by the EZLN's supporters to create and sell goods in order to maintain the schools and housing for the supporters and autonomous areas.<sup>37</sup>

One of the greatest contributions that the working class and *campesino* people have contributed to the EZLN has been their support during the San Andreas Accords.<sup>38</sup> During these accords, both indigenous *campesinos* and working class people acted as

---

<sup>36</sup> Higgins, *Understanding the Chiapas Rebellion*, 56.

<sup>37</sup> Khasnabish, *Zapatistas*, 161.

<sup>38</sup> Stahler-Sholk, "The Zapatista Social Movement," 278.

protectors and supporters for the EZLN delegates who would go to these accords. The most widely known protection tactic used by the supporters was to stand with arms locked at the entrance to prevent any potential attacks against the EZLN delegates by government or paramilitary forces. All of these people were volunteers who wanted the accords to go peacefully and smoothly.

Another example of working class solidarity with the EZLN was during the speech given by Comandante Ramona in Mexico City. At the height of the San Andreas Accords in 1996, it was decided by the EZLN that the terminally ill Comandante Ramona would give a speech in Mexico City as an appeal to the PRI for peace in the region of Chiapas. Ramona along with EZLN soldiers and supporters would caravan to Mexico City from Chiapas. Along the way, the working class people of the region gave their full support and protection to Ramona and her caravan as they traveled through the harsher areas of the country.<sup>39</sup> Thus, it can be seen that support for the EZLN was widespread.

While the working class, indigenous groups, and *campesinos* of Mexico had given a large amount of support to the EZLN, support also came from the student population and the intellectual population of the country (specifically those affiliated with the political left). Most student populations have been considered radical in the political ideologies, and Mexican students were no exception. One of the most significant historic events that occurred, which was led by Mexican students, was what had come to be known as The Massacre of Tlatelolco. It was during this time that Mexican students were massacred by government forces for protesting against the government for hosting the 1968 Olympic Games in Mexico at a time when the government refused to address the economic issues faced by the country.<sup>40</sup> Much like the working class and the indigenous groups that were discussed before, the student body had also lost hope of achieving the ideals of the Mexican Revolution.

---

<sup>39</sup> Khasnabish, *Zapatistas*, 142.

<sup>40</sup> Gawronski, "The Revolution is Dead," 370.

One of the biggest contributions that the students made to the EZLN cause was during an event referred to as *The Other Campaign*. In 2000 the PRI lost its powerful hold on government and was replaced by the *Partido Accion Nacional* (PAN) with Vicente Fox acting as president.<sup>41</sup> Yet the PAN was still willing to accept the terms of NAFTA and continue expansion of these policies. Thus, the EZLN sent out Subcomandante Marcos as a spokesperson and campaigner between 2005-2006 to rally support for a wider anti-capitalist/anti-neoliberal movement that would encompass more social groups in a grand coalition against these forces. Keep in mind the main goal for Marcos was to pressure President Vicente Fox to ensure that indigenous rights were protected, and that NAFTA's accords would not negatively impact them. Students ended up being a great help to the campaign as they created networks which called for an end to the massive corruption in Mexico City. These students acted almost like a megaphone for Marcos, as their networks allowed for the greater spread of information about the EZLN's cause.<sup>42</sup>

Similar to the EZLN's activities, *The Other Campaign* was meant to draw in students and other social movements, it was also meant to make an appeal to the intellectual class in Mexico. From elementary school teachers to college professors, Marcos and the EZLN made an appeal to use their knowledge not just for the sake of their own university, but for the people of Mexico as well. In fact, Marcos himself had been a teacher before he joined the EZLN and assumed the image of the Subcomandante. However, the response from the intellectual community of Mexico was mixed and did not yield the support that was hoped for to address social and economic equality.<sup>43</sup>

For the most part, many of the teacher unions in Mexico agreed with the ideals and the cause of the EZLN. Yet they were uncertain about how long the EZLN would be able to hold out against the onslaught of the paramilitary groups and government

---

<sup>41</sup> Gawronski, "The Revolution is Dead," 374.

<sup>42</sup> Burbach, "Zapatismo," 139.

<sup>43</sup> Higgins, *Understanding the Chiapas Rebellion*, 156.

forces. They worried that the organization would also just turn out to be another group of people motivated by power. A group that would be just as corrupt as the previous groups who had taken power. Despite these reservations, some of the braver teachers contributed to the curriculum of the Zapatista schools in the autonomous rebel zones. One teacher even lost his life when a group of paramilitary soldiers ambushed and destroyed one of the schoolhouses the EZLN supporters were building.<sup>44</sup>

While some of these teachers voiced their support for the EZLN, many more were critical and even condemned the movement as a whole. They wrote scathing articles about how the EZLN had wooed the public with their leftist propaganda and that they were no better than the cartels that had been slowly gaining territorial power in Mexico.<sup>45</sup> These educators even went so far as to reveal the true identity of Subcomandante Marcos. They had found out that he was actually Rafael Sebastian Guillen Vicente, and his identity had been revealed due to the similarity between his writing style when he was working at the *Universidad Autonoma Metropolitana*, and his writings for the EZLN. Thus, the educators came out to personally condemn the actions of Marcos and the EZLN. This is still speculation however, as Marcos never confirmed these claims.

When looking at all of these national supporters, it is clear to see that the EZLN has appealed to many different constituent groups in Mexico over the last quarter century. Though their primary goal focused on the rights of Indigenous peoples in the state of Chiapas against the changes resulting from the implementation of NAFTA, the group had also appealed to the workers, the poor, the students, the teachers, and the human rights groups of Mexico more broadly. While their main ideals were narrow in scope, they had a universal appeal that historically has been shown to impact social change through the focus on economic justice. What makes their movement unique was the

---

<sup>44</sup> EZLN, "Sixth Declaration."

<sup>45</sup> Higgins, *Understanding the Chiapas Rebellion*, 156.

EZLN's use of the internet and how that has influenced their ability to make an international appeal to outside groups.

### **International Supporters**

Connected to the time frame of its social movement, the EZLN was able to use the internet as a tool that changed the course of history and its ability to gain influence by using the power of the worldwide web to disseminate information and gain international support for its mission. The EZLN were the first modern insurgent groups that utilized the internet as a tool to both appeal to the international community and to also save their dispatches and other important materials to influence the perceptions of the international community<sup>46</sup>. Because of this, the ideals of *neozapatismo* directly reached international supporters without being filtered by the press or other sources and thus the ideas of *neozapatismo* gained an international audience. This meant that the EZLN and its movement could gain support from multiple international groups appealing to individuals from many different backgrounds.

One of the first international groups to respond and offer their support to the EZLN and the *neozapatismo* movement were those affiliated with the political left. The groups included communists, anarchists, and many other groups that aligned themselves with the political left, all of whom were ecstatic to see that a grassroots movement had risen up in Mexico to fight against the corrupt state.<sup>47</sup> This was a significant event that gave hope to many left wing groups as even the EZLN would adopt the phrase "down and to the left" as a description of their political affiliation. Even Subcomandante Marcos had brought his own ideas of libertarian communism to *neozapatismo* just like the ideals of the Mexican Revolution and indigenous culture.

It is also important to understand the historic timing of this movement as it played a huge role in the amount of support that

---

<sup>46</sup> Ronfeldt, "Emergence and Influence," 172.

<sup>47</sup> Nick Henck, "The Subcommander and the Sardinian: Marcos and Gramsci," *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos* 29, no. 2 (2013): 430.

the political left gave to the EZLN. Just three years before the uprising, the USSR had economically collapsed and had ceased to exist. This event marked the end of the cold war and was seen as the last shred of hope by groups within the left to see their political and economic theories make historic and permanent changes in how governments and economic systems would work.<sup>48</sup> In fact, most of the world had now turned to the United States with its liberal democracy and capitalist economy as the victor of the Cold War and therefore the optimal system of governance with the best economic system. Along with the neoliberal economic policies that were coming into place because of international organizations such as the IMF and World Bank, very few left wing groups had any hope about the viability of their political philosophies in the modern world. That coupled with the ever growing influence of globalization, with the development of international corporations, could significantly curtail the possibility of a global working class revolution.

Yet the EZLN and their insurgency offered hope for those on the political left globally. While the movement offered hope for another potential revolution, it was also seen by many leftists with anti-authoritarian tendencies to be a potential counter to that of the brutal regime of the USSR. By developing a bottom up approach, based on autonomous development and direct democracy, a different ideal revolution could potentially occur.<sup>49</sup> That is why when the EZLN announced that they would be sponsoring an “International Conference”<sup>50</sup> on the basis of combating neoliberalism and capitalism, many of these left wing groups quickly registered to attend so they would have the opportunity to see the movement firsthand.

This conference, hosted by the EZLN in 1996 in Chiapas, was meant to create an international network of fellow anti-

---

<sup>48</sup> Khasnabish, *Zapatistas*, 168-169.

<sup>49</sup> Conant, *A Poetics of Resistance*, 26.

<sup>50</sup> Elisabeth Mudimbe-Boyi, *Beyond Dichotomies: Histories, Identities, Cultures, and the Challenge of Globalization* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 273.

globalization and anti-capitalist movements. Sometimes referred to jokingly as the “Intergalactic,” this weeklong conference drew participants from a wide range of leftist groups who came together at the behest of the EZLN to plan on building their own movements. During the conference, theories were discussed by intellectuals and plans were made for direct action and mutual aid utilizing a bottom up model of power, and all while being treated to speeches made by Subcomandante Marcos and other leaders from the EZLN’s general committee. While this event was meant to create an integrated plan and organized approach for the leftist’s leaders when they returned home, it was also meant to inspire hope among this international group of supporters reigniting hope in these groups that they could bring about change in the world despite the problems that globalization and neoliberal policy posed. It can even be argued that as a result of this conference, the left was inspired by the EZLN to start a series of anti-globalization movements against the powers that be.<sup>51</sup>

If the EZLN and their insurrection was the start of this anti-globalization trend, then the next historic event would have been the so called “Battle for Seattle” in 1999. This mass protest was meant to shut down the World Trade Organization Ministerial Conference of 1999 and on November 30, 1999 the protesters indeed managed to shut down the conference. This anti-globalization event truly demonstrated the influence of grassroots and informal organizations of people against what is perceived as and understood to be malevolent and domineering forces that negatively impact social and economic justice. One important point to notice is the clear linkage between the EZLN’s own grassroots movement and the N30 protesters organization. While well prepared, and even with some outbreaks of violence, both movements sought to challenge the authority of an international group that was attempting to impose on the rights of marginalized people. In the case of the N30, it was to disrupt the WTO as they

---

<sup>51</sup>Gunderson, “The Making of,” 277.

were seen by protesters as building an economic hegemony that would alienate and potentially harm the sovereignty of nations and peoples. Thus, these left-wing groups that participated in the “Battle for Seattle” sought to do as the EZLN and disrupt if not halt the globalization process that would hurt the underclasses of society.

One other prominent example would have to be the various *Occupy Movements* that started up in 2011. While there were numerous movements that went by this name, the biggest was *Occupy Wall Street*. Similar to the “Battle for Seattle” and the Chiapas Uprising, this movement sought to oppose the social-economic injustices that were being committed by states and corporations all over the world. They demanded social and economic justice for those who had suffered from exploitation and repression by these corporate and state entities that were committing these acts so that they could extend their own wealth, power, and influence. Unlike the “Battle for Seattle” and the Chiapas uprising however, the Occupy movements have been seen as a relative failure both due to the duration of the movement and the inability to obtain any short term goals or achievements. There have also been numerous allegations of internal strife and infighting. However, much like how the EZLN has espoused its ideas online and maintained a strong supporting group by keeping its message alive on social media, so have the Occupy movements created a lasting effect on the way people look at and understand the impact of globalization on their lives and economic well-being. While the movement may have fizzled out, it has allowed for other groups to pick up the torch and continue movement against the negative impact of globalization.

There are many other anti-globalization movements that reflect this recent historic trend, from the 15-M Movement in Spain, to the anti-austerity movement in the UK, and even the most recent J20 protest after the 2016 United States presidential election. These movements have built on the momentum focused on the need for social change and economic systems that benefit all, not just the rich and powerful, in the first part of the twenty-

first century. While the EZLN and *neozapatismo* may not have directly influenced these events, it was one of the first to be covered extensively and it has acted as a catalyst for other such anti-globalization movements.

However, in recent years, left-wing support has dwindled for the EZLN and *neozapatismo*. Because of their inability to grow due to constant economic and political pressure being put on them by paramilitary groups and the government, many left-wing groups have lost interest in the EZLN. Over time, they were no longer the spreading revolutionary force that the left had perceived them to be, but evolved into a national and indigenous group just trying to get by. Some groups even shunned the EZLN for merchandising their revolution and becoming more of an image rather than an actual social and economic movement. Despite these claims, many still see the EZLN as a prime example of developing autonomous communities and becoming self-sufficient entities.<sup>52</sup> As long as someone is paying attention to the EZLN, they can continue to maintain their influence and relevance.

The ideas of *neozapatismo* are so rooted in indigenous and Mexican culture, that one might not expect it to be directly translated into other cultures beyond EZLN controlled territory. However, their ideas have resonated with Latinos, Chicanos, and other interest groups outside of Mexico. Some of these groups have even gone on to create NGOs and other support groups that directly work with the EZLN's supporters and the *Caracoles*. Some have even supported the EZLN by touting their cause in ways that are somewhat abstract and unique.

One of these groups is a rap metal band referred to as Rage Against The Machine (RATM). This group, originally based out of Los Angeles, played during the 1990s and was a very politically charged and controversial band. Yet when they released their second album in 1996, numerous songs had been dedicated to the EZLN and their struggle. Such songs included, "People of the

---

<sup>52</sup> General Command of the EZLN, "Third Declaration of the Lacandona Jungle," *Enlance Zapatista*, January 1995.

Sun,” “Born without a Face,” “Zapata’s Blood,” and “War Within a Breath.” Even when the band played their live shows, they would drape the flag of the EZLN (a black flag with a red star) behind them as they played.<sup>53</sup> All of this was due to the activism of lead vocalist Zack de la Rocha who was the spearhead for the band’s political activism. De la Rocha even traveled down to the *Caracoles* in the late 1990s to help with their construction and development.

Part of the appeal of RATM’s interpretation of *neozapatismo*, was that they perceived this idea as being universally appealing. It was not seen as a constrained, nationalist, and indigenous ideal only, though they are still a very important part of the message. This is particularly demonstrated in the song “War Within a Breath” wherein the band presents an ideal world in which the downtrodden of the city of Los Angeles rise up against their oppressors united under the banner of the EZLN. Much like the left wing groups that were mentioned before, RATM sees the EZLN as a force that could change the landscape of the world as we know it. Thus, it was interpreted as being a universal ideal instead of a national one.

Another international supporter resides in a small community building located in the neighborhood of El Sereno in East LA referred to as the Eastside Café. Despite its name, the building is not a coffee shop, but rather a community space in which people of the neighborhood gather and participate in group activities and other community building movements. The reason that this café is included is because the creators of this building claim to be inspired by the EZLN and their ideas of *neozapatismo*. The groups emphasize the idea of autonomous development as a means to support a community from the bottom up. This was demonstrated at the café through their commitment to providing a space for the Chicano community in El Sereno and all others to participate in developing themselves and being autonomous and self-sufficient.

---

<sup>53</sup> Khasnabish, *Zapatistas*, 120.

This group at the Eastside Café also believes heavily in the rights of women to participate in community affairs just like the EZLN called on women to participate in their revolutionary movement. This is seen through the development of their artisan community, based on muralist practices, and their contribution to women's health in the area of El Sereno and providing a safe space for women who have been abused. The Café is affiliated with an all-women's biker group known as the Ovarian Psycho-Cycles that operate as an activist group in Boyle Heights. The Café has even helped to revive some of the indigenous cultural music of Mexico in its own space thus keeping up the indigenous ideals of *neozapatismo* in a unique and interesting way.

Yet there are also radical groups that have contributed greatly to the cause of the EZLN. This is partially related to the stories that were told by Subcomandante Marcos. Despite being rooted in the traditions of the indigenous Mayans of the region, they have a greater general appeal as well. One such story was the last story that was told to Marcos before Old Antonio dies called "In the Mountain the Force Is Born, but It Is Not Seen until It Reaches the Bottom." In this story, Antonio tells Marcos of the need for patience, but also to recognize the flow of power and how it influences those at the bottom.<sup>54</sup> He uses the mountain as a metaphor for the source of power and how rain acts as a dispersal of power which contributes to the benefit of the river. In this cause the river is the people making the changes that they want to see in their lives against those who seek to do them injustice.

Just as in the story, people did respond to the calls of the EZLN, as did numerous non-radical groups who voiced their support for the EZLN.<sup>55</sup> One of the primary ways that this was done was through the development of various non-government organizations (NGOs). NGOs have played a significant role in the

---

<sup>54</sup> Subcomandante Marcos, "Old Antonio: 'In the mountain the force is born, but it is not seen until it reaches the bottom,'" *Enlance Zapatista*, May 28, 1994.

<sup>55</sup> Subcomandante Marcos, "The Story of Clouds and Rain," *Enlance Zapatista*, November 2, 1995.

development of the EZLN as they have provided a financial base from which to operate. Much like how there were physical volunteers that helped with the building of the Caracoles, the NGOs were the financiers of these projects. While many of these NGOs were temporary establishments, there are still quite a few that are in operation today.

One of the most well-known NGOs that operated out of the United States is called *Schools for Chiapas*. Based out of San Diego, California, this NGO played a significant role as a support group for the EZLN in the United States. Founded in 2006, the NGO hopes to get supporters to help fund the autonomous schools that are set up in the rebel zones and generally promote the importance of the EZLN's struggles. While they are supporters of the EZLN, this NGO is not a radical organization like the Eastside Café, or the other left-wing organizations mentioned earlier. Rather this is a concerned group of supporters in the US that hope to raise funds to help the EZLN remain autonomous and develop their school programs so as to better their children. Also, much like the vendors at the national level that sell the goods created in the cooperatives, the *Schools for Chiapas* acts as a distributor for those products in the United States. Certain goods like coffee and corn are shipped over the border to this specific group so that they can sell these goods to a wider market.

That is one thing that has always been unique about the EZLN, they managed to take a nationalist and indigenous focus and translated it to an international level in order to gain support. While it does not seem as though they intended this when the process began, it evolved organically as they used the internet as a means to share their ideas and challenges. This is what is truly fascinating about the EZLN and probably what has contributed the most to their survival. Because they utilized the internet and communicated directly to a wider audience, fueled by Subcomandante Marcos's charisma, they would not be easily put down as other insurgencies have been historically. This appeal to a wider audience, and the audience's subsequent acceptance of these

ideas, was what has allowed the EZLN to survive for so long.<sup>56</sup> Their name stands out among the rest because most of the other insurgent groups were silenced by those in powerful positions who were controlling the flow of information and communications with the outside world. But because the world was watching Mexico, and at such a critical time as well, the PRI and subsequent governments could not enact the same brutal force against an opponent that had laid down its arms and spoken their mind to the world. Suppression of the EZLN by the PRI definitely would have made a deeper negative impact on the PRI's image, given the track record of corruption within the Mexican government. Thus, the EZLN and their supporters remain alive and well to this day.

### **Conclusion: History and Influence of the EZLN is Still Being Written**

The EZLN has officially cemented itself in the history of the world. It started out as a regional movement that sought to strengthen the rights of the indigenous peoples and fight against the corruption of the PRI and the bad governance of Mexico City. It went on to become an internationally recognized force whose ideas of *neozapatismo* have spread across the world. The original intent of appealing to the international world was to literally be watched by a greater audience. The movement never desired to spread outside of Chiapas, and this was reflected in *neozapatismo*.

Because of the way this movement draws from both Mexico's past, in the form of indigenous culture, and Mexican Revolutionary ideas, the intention was only to represent the socially and economically oppressed within the country. Therefore, their message would be most appealing to the groups who could culturally identify with the EZLN. Yet the movement spread out more widely because of how broad the ideas of *neozapatismo* were. These ideals have a universal recognition linked to the history of social and political oppression that has impacted so

---

<sup>56</sup> Holloway, "Zapatismo," 159.

many people in other countries globally. Such universal ideas of respect for one another and having the ability to question your environment has historically been the genesis of social movements. It does not matter whether a person was born in the Americas or even on some remote island, the ideas resonate because they appeal to the human spirit.

While the EZLN has translated this idea of *neozapatismo* to a wider audience, it never expected to be a leading movement. It was deemed to be a tactic to be used by people who were being oppressed and abused. Not every single movement that models itself after the EZLN is going to be able to develop a series of autonomous *Caracoles* where they can survive separately from other aspects of the state apparatus. Instead, *neozapatismo* becomes a series of guidelines which groups can build off of to develop their movements to create and sustain social and economic reform. Take the CNI for example, a group that was heavily inspired by the EZLN. While they have many close relationships with EZLN, they have developed their system of understanding by operating as a congress that acts as an outlet for the indigenous peoples of Mexico. As such, it has superseded the nationalistic interests of Mexico and focused on the issues that affect its own people. This is similar to the people who developed the Eastside Café, in that they wanted to make a space for the people of El Sereno to flourish as themselves.

Yet *neozapatismo* also represents something else. It is an antithesis to the emergence of NAFTA and the neoliberal reforms being implemented in Mexico. Where the policies of neoliberalism are focused on profit, the economy, trade, and general infrastructure needed for private corporations, as a counterpoint the ideals of *neozapatismo* are focused on the human factors, culture, and traditions. The ideas of *neozapatismo* offers a moral critique of the amoral politics of neoliberalism and presents an alternate future in which people are placed before profits. Hence, this is why the ideas of *neozapatismo* are seen as so important to many people on the national and global scale.

To many, the EZLN and *neozapatismo* represent a challenge to the imposing future of globalization. This “global” future has been framed in many ways, yet it shows the ever changing nature of the world. Where some see it as a beautiful and prosperous future, others see it as a threat to their very existence. The Zapatistas perceived it as a threat to their existence. That is why they became one of the first groups to act as a force against globalization. Not in the sense that people around the globe would be disconnected, but rather that entities and states would not dominate the world and exploit it for its resources at the expense of people who needed those resources for their very survival. It was then that others would follow suit to share the same struggle of the Zapatistas.

From the “Battle for Seattle” in 1999, to the Arab Spring, to the protests in Hamburg Germany during the G20 conference in 2017, anti-globalization movements have transcended the original actions of the EZLN. All of these new movements highlight and reinforce what the Zapatistas had experienced in Chiapas and sought to change the world and prevent these imposing entities from destroying them. These are people of no political affiliation who choose to represent themselves on the world stage as themselves. They want to lead the lives that they had for generations without being told what to do by an unjust government or state. In the end, these groups and movements want to be able to rule over themselves.

Now, to bring it back to the EZLN, they have come to represent many ideals. They are considered freedom fighters for some and terrorists to others. They are a group of nationalists, yet they also espouse very universal values. They are a lot like the other guerilla groups that historically have made a negative impact on Mexico, yet they are also very different from them. In a state of confusion, both literally and figuratively, they have emerged as a force calling for change and recognition to underscore the injustice that they were living under. They live in low tech communities but

have reached millions through the use of the internet.<sup>57</sup> Yet what binds these groups together, what draws people from all over the globe, what gives hope to other individuals and groups around the world, is the ideals that they hold in common. Ideals that are shaped by the rich history of Mexico, that incorporate both indigenous and revolutionary ideas. Ideals that are referred to as *Neozapatismo*.

---

<sup>57</sup> Ronfeldt, "Emergence and Influence," 173.

## **Bibliography**

- Benjamin, Thomas. *Revolución: Mexico's Great Revolution as Memory, Myth, and History*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000.
- Berghe, Kristine, and Bart Maddens. "Ethnocentrism, Nationalism and Post-nationalism in the Tales of Subcomandante Marcos." *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos* 20, no.1 (Winter 2004): 123-144.
- Burbach, Roger. "Zapatismo and the Intergalactic Age." In *Globalization and Postmodern Politics: From Zapatistas to High Tech Robber Barons*, 129-144. London: Pluto Press, 2001.
- Conant, Jeff. *A Poetics of Resistance: The Revolutionary Public Relations of the Zapatista Insurgency*. Oakland: AK Press, 2010.
- Dietz, Gunther. "From *Indigenismo* to *Zapatismo*: The Struggle for a Multi-ethnic Mexican Society." In *The Struggle for Indigenous Rights in Latin America*, edited by Nancy Grey Postero and Leon Zamosc, 32-80. Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2004.
- General Command of the EZLN. "First Declaration of the Lacandona Jungle." *Enlace Zapatista*, 1993.
- General Command of the EZLN. "Third Declaration of the Lacandona Jungle." *Enlace Zapatista*, January 1995.
- General Command of the EZLN. "Sixth Declaration of the Lacandona Jungle." *Enlace Zapatista*, June 2005.

- General Command of the EZLN, "Revolutionary Law for Women," *Enlace Zapatista*, December, 1993.
- Gawronski, V. "The Revolution is Dead. ¡Viva la Revolución!: The Place of the Mexican Revolution in the Era of Globalization." *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos*, 18 no. 2 (2002): 363-397.
- Gunderson, Christopher. "The Making of Organic Indigenous-Campesino Intellectuals: Catechist Training in the Diocese of San Cristobal and the roots of the Zapatista uprising." In *Research in Social Movements, Conflicts and Change*, edited by Patrick G. Coy, 259-296. Bingley: Emerald Group Publishing Limited, 2011.
- Henck, Nick. "The Subcommander and the Sardinian: Marcos and Gramsci." *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos* 29, no. 2 (2013): 428-58.
- Higgins, Nicholas P. *Understanding the Chiapas Rebellion: Modernist Visions and the Invisible Indian*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004.
- Holloway, John. "Zapatismo and the Social Sciences." *Capital & Class* 26, no. 78 (2002): 153-160.
- Khasnabish, Alex. "A Tear in the Fabric of the Present." *Journal for the Study of Radicalism* 2, no. 2 (2008): 27-52.
- Khasnabish, Alex. *Zapatistas: Rebellion from the Grassroots to the Global*. London: Zed Books, 2010.
- Mudimbe-Boyi, Elisabeth. *Beyond Dichotomies: Histories, Identities, Cultures, and the Challenge of Globalization*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002.

*Neozapatismo as History and Influence*

- Niembro, Rasec. "The Zapatista Candidate." *Jacobin*. January 29, 2017. Accessed February 10, 2018.  
<https://www.jacobinmag.com/2017/01/ezln-zapatista-2018-elections-subcommandante-marcos-lopez-obrador-pena-nieto/>.
- Postero, Nancy and Leon Zamosc. "Indigenous Movements and the Indian Question in Latin America." In *The Struggle for Indigenous Rights in Latin America*. Edited by Nancy Gray Postero and Leon Zamosc, 1-31. Portland: Sussex Academic Press, 2004.
- Rabasa, Jose. *Without History: Subaltern Studies, the Zapatista Insurgency, and the Specter of History*. Pittsburg: University of Pittsburg Press, 2010.
- Ronfeldt, David and John Arquilla. "Emergence and Influence of the Zapatista Social Netwar." In *Networks and Netwars: The Future of Terror, Crime, and Militancy*, edited by Ronfeldt David, 171-200. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2001.
- Stahler-Sholk, Richard. "The Zapatista Social Movement: Innovation and Sustainability." *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 35, no. 3 (2010): 269-90.
- Stephen, Lynn. *Zapata Lives!: Histories and Cultural Politics in Southern Mexico*. Berkley: University of California Press, 2000.
- Subcomandante Marcos. *The Story of Colors*. El Paso: Cinco Puntos Press, 1999.
- Subcomandante Marcos. "The History of the Seven Rainbows." *Enlace Zapatista*, January 7, 1996.

Subcomandante Marcos. "Old Antonio: 'In the mountain born the force, but it is not seen until it arrives down.'" *Enlace Zapatista*, May 28, 1994.

Subcomandante Marcos. *The Story of Clouds and Rain*. *Enlace Zapatista*, November 2, 1995.

Subcomandante Marcos. *Questions & Swords: Folktales of the Zapatista Revolution*. El Paso: Cinco Puntos Press, 2001.

**Author Bio**

Benjamin Olson Shultz is a graduate student in the Social Science and Globalization MA Program at California State University, San Bernardino. His main interests and areas of focus include Environmental History, Latin American History, and US History. He is currently involved as a Graduate Assistant for the College of Social and Behavioral Science's History Department. Once he is graduated from CSUSB, he hopes to apply to a PhD program in Environmental History, as well as starting a career in both research and non-research based writing in said interests. He then hopes to start teaching and writing professionally at either the community college or university level.

