INDIAN AUTONOMY IN MEXICO: SEPARATE NATIONS OR RENEGOTIATED NATIONALISM?

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Before January 1, 1994, demands for autonomy by popular organizations desiring some degree of independence from the state were not uncommon. In fact, since the late 1970s, autonomy has been a central demand among popular groups that have organized outside of official corporatist channels. Yet, since the Zapatista uprising, the Indian movement has made autonomy a central focus of its efforts to force the state to make a new "pact" with indigenous peoples. Autonomy has become a kind of key word around which a whole series of other demands have been joined. Anthropologist and vocal advocate of Indian autonomy, Héctor Díaz-Polanco, speaks of the crucial impulse the Zapatista uprising gave the "autonomists":

> What we have, then, if we could divide the entire long period into two parts:
> we could say that in the first phase, until 1994, the autonomist current within
> the national Indian movement is a minority, a relatively small group with
> certain prestige, with a certain amount of influence within the Indian movement
> but without being able to take control of the central direction of the movement
> as a whole. What the Zapatista uprising does in 1994 is revert all of this to
> give it a new direction. Beginning at this moment, autonomy becomes
> hegemonic within the more organized sectors of the movement and this
> manifests itself in the negotiation process, in table one [Indian Rights and
> Culture] at San Andrés (Héctor Díaz-Polanco, personal interview, Tlalpan,
> México, May 21, 1996).[1]

While observers and activists disagree on the extent of Zapatista commitment to autonomy, it is generally agreed that the demands for autonomy received an extraordinary boost by the January 1, 1994 uprising. The National Assembly of Indigenous Peoples in Support of Autonomy (ANIPA) itself grew out of the dynamic generated in the wake of the Zapatista rebellion. In the last months of 1994 and early 1995 the idea of forming a group of supporters of Indian autonomy within the national Indian movement was born. After two initial forums which took place in the spring of 1995, the assembly met in late May of 1995 in Yaqui Indian territory in Sonora. Subsequent assemblies were held in August in Oaxaca, in December of 1995 in Chiapas, and in Guerrero in April 1996. These assemblies served to organize many local and regional Indian organizations around support for autonomy, a substantial number of whose participants later served as advisors or guests invited by the EZLN to the official peace negotiations.

The discussion of autonomy, which has taken place in numerous forums, conferences, and congresses held throughout the country since the uprising, has occurred on three levels: regional, municipal, and communal. On all three levels, proponents demanded control over the natural

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[1] In another place Diaz-Polanco insists that discussion on autonomy was present before January 1, 1994, but did not have the force or dynamic that was generated by the Zapatista movement: "It was not as if the demand for autonomy was completely absent before the Zapatista uprising. There were voices and isolated groups that demanded autonomy and that rejected the imposition [of the federal government] and articulated indigenous aspirations for a better world.   On some occasions indigenous organizations utilized the term, although in very few cases was it converted into the backbone of a political program that recovered, at the same time, the ethnic, the national, and the urgency of democracy.   More than a clear articulation of demands was the often un-organized and interminable laundry list of demands made by organizations. But with the Zapatistas uprising, the theme of autonomy acquired a national relevance, democratic vigor and a more defined profile. A multitud of small and large contributions have originated from every corner of the country, theories and practices that have been constructing the concept of regional autonomy, pluri-ethnicity, and inclusive democracy as a tool of justice for indigneous peoples and for the peace of the nation" (Díaz-Polanco 1993: 133, author's translation).

resources found within these boundaries, recognition of local leaders elected by their communities under Indian law, greater indigenous representation in tribunals of positive law, and control over the means of communication, among other things. One of the most heated debates within the Indian movement since 1994 has concerned the relative merits of regional and communal autonomy. The level of regional autonomy is most concretely expressed by the Autonomous Multi-cultural Regions (Regiones Autónomas Pluriétnicas, or RAP) project. According to its proponents, the RAP are "founded upon principles of national unity within diversity, of equality of all Mexicans in their plurality, fraternity among its members, and upon equality among all identity groups, both Indians and non-Indians, that co-exist in the diverse regions within the country" (ANIPA 1996). While key leaders within ANIPA have come out strongly in favor of regional autonomy, as an assembly it has consistently supported autonomy on all three levels. Although the RAP project is probably the most fully developed in a legislative or legal sense, a substantial contingent of indigenous organizations and leaders both within ANIPA as well within the movement as a whole supports the notion of communal autonomy (over regional or municipal) as adequate to fulfilling their current demands. Adelfo Regino Montes, a Oaxacan Mixe leader, states that while the indigenous he represents are not in principle opposed to regional or municipal levels of autonomy, they have opted to put their energy into consolidating communal autonomy because, he argues, "our daily life takes place in large part within the framework of the community and therefore, from our perspective, communal autonomy constitutes a foundation. For this reason we are obliged to prioritize the strengthening of communal autonomy" (*Servicios del Pueblo Mixe*, A.C., author's translation).

It is difficult to assert Zapatista preferences with respect to this important debate, which at times has threatened to divide the movement, because they have not been specific about the level of autonomy they currently practice and would support within the regions they control. Yet, most activity has occurred at the municipal level within Zapatista territory. On December 19, 1994, the EZLN created 32 new municipalities through a military take-over. This was part of a response to Robledo Rincón's inauguration as governor of Chiapas, an act that was viewed by the Zapatistas as well as by many other *chiapanecos,* as illegitimate. Along with Amado Avendaño, who was sworn in by most of the popular sectors of the state as governor of a "transitional" government, the Zapatistas began to call for the creation of free municipalities (*municipios libres*).

This theme of autonomy figured prominently in the final accords reached between the government and the Zapatista delegations in the first "table" of discussion (Indian Rights and Culture) in February of 1996, and is one of five key principles which are to guide the State in a new pact between the State and the indigenous. While the accords are significant in that the state admits the failure of the integrationist policies that attempted to *mexicanizar* the indigenous, it is important to note that the government's understanding of autonomy (they prefer the term *libre determinación*) is a seriously attenuated version of what many independent Indian organizations are demanding. The government has preferred to focus on communal autonomy rather than regional as the latter would be potentially strong enough to challenge state and national government policies. Reducing indigenous action to the communal level was an old practice used by the colonial state in Mexico to ensure greater control as well as to avoid potential revolts. In this century, official party leaders have often supported local caciques who, in return, have delivered Indian votes (Rus 1994). Supporters of regional autonomy, such as ANIPA, are not allowing the state to reduce their action to this level and call for the creation of a "regimen of

autonomy" which would ensure the recognition and exercise of political, economic, social, and cultural autonomy on the communal, municipal, and regional levels.

The notion of autonomy, especially as expressed by proponents of the RAP project, highlights the profoundly political nature of space. Autonomous regions would be drawn to enhance the possibilities of electing indigenous representatives to local and national congresses. Political representation is recognized by RAP supporters as being partially constituted by spatial boundaries. This link that Indian leaders have made between spatial boundaries and political power has been closely bound up with demands concerning larger national issues such as federalism and democracy, which are demands that impact all Mexicans, Indians and non-Indians alike. Demands for autonomy made by indigenous organizations have been closely linked with calls for decentralization and federalism. In the final document emerging from the fifth meeting of ANIPA held in San Cristóbal in December of 1995, one of the principal reasons cited for the "miserable and oppression situation of the indigenous in Mexico today" is the extreme centralism of the current Mexican political system. ANIPA participants argue that the government cannot recognize genuine de jure autonomy without a profound restructuration of political and economic power in Mexico.

Historical Precedents

Not a new theme in Mexican political circles, decentralization has been a central topic of discussion and legislation since the start of Miguel de la Madrid's administration in 1982, when the Mexican government embarked on a systematic program of decentralization. However, while some substantial changes have been made such as shifting governmental agencies to the provinces, re-working the equations that distribute tax revenues to state governments, and shifting the locus of primary control over municipalities from the federal to the state level, muncipal governments still only receive about five percent of total government outlays. Under President Salinas (1988-1994), decentralization efforts to channel resources to the periphery occurred through his National Solidarity Program (Programa Nacional de Solidaridad or PRONASOL). While its outcomes and community participation elements were designed to decentralize, PRONASOL was highly centralized in terms of overall control and direction (Rodríguez and Ward 1994). Today, municipal governments still only receive % of total tax revenues. Indian demands for autonomy call into question the synonymity of national unity and centralization, an equation which has a long history in Mexico and Latin America (Díaz-Polanco 1991). While Indians have made it clear that their project is not a separatist one and that they offer the notion of autonomy as a contribution to the national debate on democracy, they are firmly asserting their right to difference. This is a problematic topic for modern nation-states, constructed upon liberal notions of equality for all citizens, regardless of race, sex, or creed. Additionally, the demand that Indian rights and jurisdiction are respected and protected under the Constitution presents a strong challenge to the liberal concept of individual rights (Appiah 1994;Taylor 1994).

Important antecedents to the autonomy demands that emerged in the late 1980s and early 1990s within the national Indian movement can be found in the experiences of peasant organizations during the 1970s and 1980s that attempted to augment their political and economic autonomy from the government. Fox and Gordillo (1989: 141) argue that during the Echeverría administration (1970-76) state intervention in the countryside through governmental agencies increasingly resulted in the displacement of the CNC (National Peasant Confederation) from decision-making in the mediation of the state-peasant relationship. Concomitantly, during this

decade there was a gradual increase in the number of rural organizations that demanded greater autonomy. For example, in 1975, second tier organizations such as *uniones de ejidos* were created to encourage two or more local producer groups (i.e. ejidos, indigenous agrarian communities, or private production societies and cooperatives) to join together. Rural Collective Interest Associations (ARICs) were also developed as third tier organizations that united two or more second level groups (Fox and Gordillo 1989: 142).[2] Beginning with the administration of López Portillo (1976-1982), there was a shift in state discourse from a focus on land reform to the productive process. That is, state resources were aimed at increasing agricultural productivity by provision of credit and fertilizer, for example. As the opportunity structure for collective action changed, many peasant organizations and new producer associations began to shift their attention to the appropriation of the productive process. Demands for peasant autonomy accompany this shift. Julio Moguel notes that, "The appropriation of the productive process was considered, since the mid-1980s, from a perspective of autonomy, a concept that implied 'the smallest possible intervention of the State' (beginning by transferring a good deal of state functions to agricultural productive organizations)" (Moguel 1992: 16).

These new organizational structures such as *uniones de ejidos* and ARICs were designed, not as hierarchical corporatist models, but as autonomous networks. One of the most important examples of these networks is the National Union of Autonomous Regional Peasant Organizations (UNORCA) which was created in 1988 in an attempt to seek unity among distinct regional forces and "to act on the national level as a factor of convergence" (Hernández Navarro 1992: 238).   Soon after the highly contested 1988 presidential elections in which Carlos Salinas de Gortari was declared the victor in the face of massive public outcry and accusations of fraud, the new president called for "a new pact between peasants and the state". On January 6, 1989, the national leader of the CNC, Maximiliano Silerio Esparza, announced the formation of a Permanent Agrarian Congress (CAP) which, according to Luis Hernández, "represented the end of the state monopoly of official peasant organizations, particularly the CNC, in their almost exclusive role of interlocutor with the State" (Hernández Navarro 1992: 239). The initial participants in the CAP represented a diverse mix of official and independent peasant organizations, among them the CNC, CCI (Independent Peasant Confederation), CAM (Mexican Agrarian Council), UGOCM (General Union of Workers and Peasants), UNORCA (National Union of Autonomous Regional Peasant Organizations), and CIOAC. Why did Salinas seem so

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[2] Although most of the autonomy discourse in the 1970s and 1980s came from within peasant organizations, there is one important precedent within official Indian organizations. The first mention of autonomy or self-determination of Indian peoples was at the First National Congress of Indigenous Peoples held in Pátzcuaro, Michoacán in October 7-10, 1975. This congress was convoked by various government dependencias such as the INI, the Ministry of Agrarian Reform, and the CNC. With respect to self-determination they stated: "In order to facilitate our incorporation into the objectives of the Mexican Revolution that will emancipate us, we demand of the society in which we are inserted, the respect of self-determination of indigenous communities. To us, self-determination means conscious integration into the national community and a complete exercise of the democratic rights that we are privy to under the order of the Constitution of the Republic. It is not, by any means, a sign of privilege or isolation". At the same congress, the creation of the National Council of Indian Peoples (CNPI) was announced in which Supreme Ethnic Councils would be formed. The purpose and mission of the CNPI was stated as follows: "The fundamental objectives of this new organism [CNPI] is to increase and maintain the unity of the Indian Peoples so that they can obtain their demands and fight constantly for the objectives of the Mexican Revolution that will permit the self-determination of our communities and the end to all the mechanisms that have kept us on the margins of social progress" ("Resultado del Primer Congreso Nacional de Pueblos Indigenas: *Accion Indigenista*, no. 268, octubre de 1975, author's translation).

intent on supporting the efforts of autonomy by independent and semi-independent peasant organizations? Hernández argues that "for the Salinas government the agreements were, besides an instrument to apply his new politics to the rural sector, a mechanism to reassert his presence among the most organized (productively) peasant sectors in a moment in which many of them had shown sympathy for *Cardenismo* (Hernández Navarro 1992: 244) [3] . A certain degree of peasant autonomy was also potentially beneficial to the neo-liberal state's desire to withdraw from key sectors in which it had previously intervened. If peasant sectors agreed to take over responsibilities that had previously been fulfilled by an interventionist state, neo-liberal technocrats such as Salinas and his team were more than willing to accommodate. While the state had to ensure that this autonomy did not increase the costs of containing and controlling the sector as a whole and that it did not spill over into demands for political autonomy, peasant autonomy fit well within the neo-liberal state's goals to reduce its overall size and activity, especially in the social sectors.

   While Salinas used the CAP as a way of controlling independent peasant organizations by offering them concessions and a privileged relationship with the State, monies from the National Solidarity Program (PRONASOL) also catered to these new, more autonomous channels of peasant organization. During the first year of PRONASOL's operation (1989), funds went directly to the municipal level, either to municipal governments or to local solidarity committees, thus bypassing state governments and regional bosses. Later much of this decentralization effect was attenuated as implementation was channeled through state level *Convenios Unicos de Desarrollo* (CUDs), giving governors enormous power (Hernández Navarro 1992: 246).   The Salinas administration, to sum up, put a great deal of emphasis on economic or productivist autonomy, building on a tendency that had emerged in the mid-1970s amidst growing calls for autonomy by peasant organizations. Parallel to this tendency toward increased economic or productivist autonomy were the growing calls for political autonomy and rights that had been developing within the national Indian movement during the 1980s. It is to this topic that I now turn.

First Legislative Steps at Reform
   The first legislative initiative proposing political rights and autonomy for indigenous peoples was put forward by federal deputy Margarito Ruiz in 1990. A Tojolabal from Plan de Ayala, Las Margaritas who was elected under the PRD banner in 1988, Ruiz initiated legislation to reform Article 4 in 1990. According to Araceli Burguete, Indian rights advocate and Ruiz's principal advisor, their first contact with legislation concerning Indian rights in Mexico took place in 1989. In the fall of that year, Ruiz was invited to the Interamerican Indigenist Institute for a round-table discussion of the International Labor Commission's legislation on Indian rights. Ruiz and Burguete, along with a group of colleagues who had been working on Indian rights "more out of intuition than understanding", attended (Araceli Burguete Cal y Mayor, personal interview, San Cristóbal de las Casas, April 9, 1996).   "It was in this meeting", Burguete says, "when they began to speak of Convention 169, well, we suddenly understood that what we were talking about was a question of international law. From that point on, we took note that there was much work to be

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[3] Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas was the left-coalition candidate for president in 1988.

done in the area of Indian rights". [4] Later that year Burguete and Ruiz, along with other Indian leaders such as Carlos Beas Torres (Union of Indigenous Communities of the Northern Zone of the Isthmus-UCIZONI) and Antonio Hernández Cruz (CIOAC), formed a Regional Council of Indian Peoples in the Mexico City metropolitan area. During the early 1990s, this Regional Council became the base upon which a *consulta* was organized to work toward the constitutional recognition of Indian rights. At the same time, preparations were beginning in Mexico and throughout the Americas for the counter-celebrations which would accompany the Quincentenary of the "discovery of America". Beas, Ruiz, Burguete and others from UCIZONI designed the first Human Rights Encounter of Indigenous Peoples, which was held in Matías Romero, Oaxaca in 1990. Burguete notes that from 1989-1993 one of her main activities, along with many other activists within the Indian movement, was giving workshops on Indian rights to organizations around the country. Their didactic method used illustrations and stick figures to explain Convention 169. The idea was, Margarito Ruiz explains, to teach the general notion of Indian rights from an explanation of specific rights, such as those found in Convention 169 (Margarito Ruiz, personal interview, San Cristóbal de las Casas, May 4, 1996).

Future Alliances

The Zapatista rebellion, as I have previously argued, had a fundamental impact on the Indian movement, generating a series of alliances among Indian organizations as well as between Indian and non-Indian popular groups and provided increased visibility for the movement as a whole.   However, recent events point to evidence of retrenchment and to the fragility of these alliances. One of the strongest threats to the unity of the Indian movement has been the division between some key members of ANIPA and EZLN leadership. In February of 1996 following the National Indian Forum, the EZLN released a communiqué to the press in which it announced the formation of a Permanent National Indigenous Forum, without the advice or collaboration of ANIPA which at that time had united the most important organizations within the national Indian movement. Additionally, the coordinating team of the Promoting Commission of the Permanent Indian Forum was composed of four mestizo*s* (Lucio Leyva, Ramón Vera, Geronimo Shell, and Gilberto López y Rivas) and two Indians (Carlos Manzo, zapoteco, and *comandante* David, tzotzil). Of these, only López y Rivas could claim any longevity within the Indian movement. Speculation immediately emerged to explain why the EZLN had moved so quickly to cut off ANIPA from taking a leadership role in the process, ranging from the assertion that the EZLN was reluctant to share power with a strong organization such as ANIPA to the idea that personal rifts between some ANIPA leaders and the EZLN explained the division. Hector Díaz-Polanco, founding member of ANIPA and one of its most visible "ethnic intellectuals", describes the rift between ANIPA and the EZLN like this:

> One can summarize the conflict in the sense that the difficulty has come
> about not because there are two different conceptions in the ANIPA and in
> the National Forum [EZLN-convoked National Indian Forum]. Rather it
> has to do with the idea on the part of the National Forum concerning the
> construction of the Indian movement. We see it, or I do at least, that the
> EZLN wants to begin from zero. *Tabula rasa*. Of course that cannot be

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[4] Discussions of the ramifications of Convention 169 were important for Mexican politicians as Mexico was a signatory of International Labor Commission legislation and the Mexican Senate ratified the treaty agreement in September of 1989.

done. We must incorporate all previous experiences, including those of
ANIPA, as a great river incorporates many streams, a great river of unity.
It is this old tendency of the left that has done so much damage, that we
must always begin from zero; they "discover" that nothing that came before
is of any worth and must be destroyed. (Héctor Díaz-Polanco, personal
interview, Tlalpan, México, May 21, 1996).

At the Second National Indian Forum held in Oventic, Chiapas (Aguascalientes II) in July of
1996, several ANIPA leaders were present (Abelardo Torres Córtez from the Organization of the
Purépecha Nation, Thaayrohyadi Bermúdez de la Cruz from the Council of the Otomí Nation, and
Carlos Beas from UCIZONI, among others) although little effort was made to reconcile the
conflict. At an Indian Congress held in Mexico City in October of 1996, however, it appears that
some rapprochement between the two groups occurred (Stephen 1996b; *La Jornad*a, November
1996). At that congress, ANIPA decided to dissolve itself into the Congreso Nacional Indígena
(CNI).

Chiapas: the Indian Movement and "*20 mil obstáculos*"

   While thousands of peasants and Indians throughout Mexico participated in autonomous
producer organizations during the 1970s and 1980s, their experiences varied greatly from region
to region. In Chiapas, national independent peasant organizations such as the CIOAC and CNPA
(National 'Plan de Ayala' Network) became a significant presence in the state during this period
and numerous regional organizations such as the UU (Union of Ejido Unions and Solidarity
Peasant Groupsof Chiapas) and the Emiliano Zapata Peasant Organization (OCEZ) emerged as
alternatives to the CNC for mestizo and Indian producers. However, state violence against these
organizations, particularly during the 1980s, was frequent and harsh. Many authors have pointed
to the gradual decline of the CNC beginning in the late 1960s as the principal mediator between
peasants and the state and its partial substitution by other state agencies and independent
organizations (Fox and Gordillo 1989; Hardy 1984; Rubio 1987). However, in states with strong
regional oligarchies such as Chiapas, the CNC continued to be the most powerful actor in the
countryside. Independent organizations have suffered tremendous losses at the hands of regional
caciques and the state police who frequently act together to repress dissident voices. According
to a document published by the Mexican Academy of Human Rights, there were 165 political
assassinations in Chiapas from 1974-1987 (Burguete n.d.).

   Popular organization in Chiapas has typically been organized around peasant rather than
Indian or ethnic demands (Collier 1994; Harvey 1992). And while this has been true of Indian
organization throughout Mexico until the Zapatista uprising, Indian organization in Chiapas
lagged behind such early Indian movements as the Organization of the Purépecha Nation in
Michoacán and the Coalition of Workers, Peasants, and Students of the Isthmus (COCEI) in
Juchitán, Oaxaca. Why was this so? First, the strong presence of peasant unions like the CIOAC
and the influence of political activists with strong Marxist leanings who came to work in Chiapas
during the 1970s and 1980s gave the peasant movement a more orthodox bent. Second, the
establishment of the country's first Coordinating Center of the INI in San Cristóbal in 1951 and its
subsequent role in defining, "creating", and marketing Indian tradition among the highland
indigenous was also an obstacle to independent Indian organization. Nevertheless, beginning in
the late 1980s, talk of Indian rights and Indian politics began to emerge in Chiapas within new
Indian organizations that formed outside of more traditional peasant channels. Discussion of

Indian rights also began within peasant confederations by Indian leaders. The official ending of state-directed land reform, the failure of productionist policies to ameliorate agricultural crisis, and the political opportunities opened up by the EZLN uprising were all important factors explaining the shift from peasant to Indian politics.

Some of the first independent Indian organizations to organize around Indian identity and rights were the Indigenous Organization of the Highlands (ORIACH) in 1987, the Independent Indigenous Peoples Front (FIPI) created in 1988, and the "Struggles of the Maya People for Liberation" Network (COLPUMALI) in 1991. These organizations faced tremendous obstacles to unity such as geographical and physical isolation, hostility of the state, misunderstanding and resentment by peasant organizations, lack of funds, and a host of others. The first months and years of Indian organization were characterized by both external and internal pressures which threatened their very survival. Gaspar Morquecho comments on some of these obstacles within the ORIACH where he served as advisor in the late 1980s:

> In this organization [ORIACH] an infinity of conflicts, needs, and problems
> were present that are part of the daily life of the indigenous in the region
> and that are the result of misery, caciquismo, and abandonment. In the
> ORIACH there are persons and groups with diverse experiences of struggle
> and organization. One must also take into account the internal
> contradictions of the group, their histories, leaders, knowledge, discourses,
> and political and religious practices (Morquecho 1992: 8, author's
> translation).

Margarito Ruiz, founder of FIPI, speaks of "20 thousand obstacles" to Indian organization. "First", he says, "there is the state with its branches of local and regional powers, caciques or municipal presidents, that together with small land-owners impede unity among the communities. For this reason there are arrests, ejections from occupied lands, threats, and orders of apprehension that frighten the communities, making them reluctant to respond to the call to struggle with other peoples and organizations" (Ruiz 1990: 15). The creation of Indian organizations proliferated in the 1990s as the information about and the visibility of Indian rights increased throughout the country. Many of these organizations, however, were plagued by internal divisions, a weak social base, and external pressures from the state and regional caciques that have made Indian organization in Chiapas historically difficult and dangerous.

Yet, the Zapatista uprising seemed initially to promise the possibility of increased unity among these Indian organizations as well as between Indian and non-Indian popular organizations. The creation of the CEOIC on January 13, 1996, which united 280 Indian and peasant organizations throughout the state in support of Zapatista demands and a peaceful resolution to the conflict was a step in the direction of unity. Within the CEOIC there were strong voices in support of Indian autonomy, such as those of Antonio Hernández and Margarito Ruiz. Not surprisingly, because of the large number of organizations within the CEOIC, leaders with a well-organized plan of action were in a position to dominate the proceedings of the organization. From the first meetings in January and February of 1994, the emergence of autonomy as a potential long-term solution to the conflict can be observed. The autonomy "solution", however, was controversial from the beginning and provoked tension, especially between Indian and peasant organization members. Indian organizations within the CEOIC began to coalesce around demands for autonomy while mestizos, in general, favored demands for land reform within the structure of the ejido. The CIOAC emerged as a crucial player in resolving this

tension between autonomy vs. ejido supporters. Because the CIOAC enjoyed a position of trust and respect among mestizo peasants and could count on Indian support because of its historical presence and political activity in indigenous regions, it could serve as a bridge between the two. Antonio Hernández's leadership within the CEOIC tipped the balance in favor of the autonomy proposal. In part, the declaration of seven autonomous, multi-ethnic regions within Chiapas on October 12, 1994 was largely conjunctural. As October 12, 1994 approached, it became apparent to leaders within the CEOIC (i.e., Arturo Luna, Antonio Hernández, Margarito Ruiz) that the CEOIC had to do something important in favor of the indigenous on the *día de la raza*.   The turning point came when CIOAC leadership announced that they would declare the creation of the regions if the CEOIC would not:

> When we were discussing the autonomy proposal there were organizations
> who were not in agreement. Their disagreement was such that at 1:00 a.m.
> we were still debating the point. Finally, I told everyone that if they did not
> want to announce the creation of the regions CIOAC would declare them. I
> was convinced that it was a crucial political proposal and if we did not do it in
> that moment the effect would be diluted. Margarito [Ruiz] supported this
> idea, and finally the *compañeros* said that they would do it, but that we should
> announce that the regions are being in the process of being formed and that
> we do not know yet which regions they will be. Margarito [Ruiz] and
> Marcelino Gómez from the Highland RAP [Autonomous Pluri-ethnic Region
> project] edited the document and it was decided that Marcelino read it in
> public. Marcelino Gómez is the one then who read it in public on October 12
> (Arturo Luna Luján, personal interview, Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Chiapas, March 26,
> 1996).

Two Autonomy Projects: comparing regional and communal autonomy

As of late 1996, two principal autonomy projects are being discussed within the Indian movement. The first is the RAP project, which has been most closely identified with ANIPA, although (as I mentioned above) ANIPA has incorporated all three levels of autonomy in its legislative proposal. The second proposes communal autonomy and has been advocated most strongly by the Mixe people in Oaxaca. The Mixe people do not reject municipal and regional autonomy proposals, but simply assert that at this moment the level of communal autonomy best represents their situation. Although there has been tension between the two camps since 1994, open conflict between the regional and communal autonomy proponents has not been the rule; both ANIPA and Congreso Nacional Indígena documents support protective legislation for all three levels of autonomy. During the first 'table' of peace negotiations in Chiapas, however, there was heated debate among EZLN advisors concerning the extent to which they could push the government to accept a regional autonomy proposal. Finally, the majority of advisors decided that in the present context (January 1996) of military encroachment and hostility, the EZLN needed to move quickly to forge a consensus on an autonomy agreement the government would sign. While the government was willing to, in principle, agree to some degree of communal and municipal autonomy, the regional proposal was practically abandoned. Despite their differences, both autonomy proposals insist on the possibility of political representation for Indian peoples without the participation of political parties. Many indigenous have spoken out about the division

that partisan political conflict has caused in communities.[5] Both of the proposals support the notion of independent candidacies so as to broaden the political playing field. Both regional and communal autonomy proponents tie autonomy to effective political representation by proposing the addition of a proportionally elected representative district to the five existing ones in which Indians would be guaranteed an indigenous representative.

Proponents of both proposals have consistently reiterated that autonomy does not denote separatism and that it is not to be confused with the sovereignty of the Mexican nation-state. In the first days of the uprising, the Zapatistas were accused by the president and other high-ranking officials of being foreigners and of threatening the nation-state. The EZLN quickly responded that they were simply asking that the promises of the Constitution and the Mexican Revolution be fulfilled for all Mexicans. In the first peace negotiations held in the cathedral of San Cristóbal in February of 1994, the Zapatistas presented a Mexican flag to the president's chief negotiator, Manuel Camacho. The Zapatistas told Camacho that they had come to the negotiation table to see if the indigenous and poor of Mexico could live better under that flag. While many right-of-center Mexican intellectuals continue to insist that Indian autonomy proposals are separatist and encourage the isolation of the indigenous, Indians have responded by claiming that the autonomy proposals are intended to help democratize the country and not to create Indian enclaves.

Autonomous Multi-ethnic Regions (RAP)   The centerpiece of the RAP project is the addition of another 'step' (*piso*) of government between the state and municipality: the regional government. This regional government would have partial jurisdiction in political, administrative, economic, social, cultural, educational, judicial, resource-management, and environmental spheres. Its representatives would negotiate with state and municipal governments concerning areas of over-lapping jurisdiction. While ANIPA has been identified with the RAP project since it was formed in early 1994, it has modified its position after each successive assembly held. For example, in May of 1995 the Second Assembly took place in Yaqui-Mayo territory in Sonora. The experience of listening to Indians who have lived in mono-ethnic autonomous regions for decades forced ANIPA leaders to accept the possibility of mono-ethnic regions and not just the multi-ethnic ones originally proposed. After assemblies in Oaxaca in August and Chiapas in December of 1995, ANIPA accepted a 'gradualist' formulation of its objective by admitting the co-existence of communal and municipal autonomy in areas where there were not conditions for RAPs to be formed.

RAP project documents note that the marginalization and poverty of indigenous peoples can be attributed to the unequal and subordinate relations that have been imposed upon Indians and the social and political exclusion that they have suffered since the Conquest and not to socio-cultural or ethnic characteristics.   They insist on the fact that isolation is not the cause of the poverty and marginalization in which they live, but lack of access to political power:

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[5]   Indian organizations in Oaxaca have been pioneers in pressuring the state government to modify its Electoral Law to protect the exercise of Indian 'uses and customs' in the election of political representatives.   In Oaxaca's Code of Political Institutions and Electoral Proceedings, Volume 4, Article 112 ("Of the Renovation of State Government positions in the Muncipalities through Election by Uses and Customs") it states that "the communities referred to here, respecting their uses and customs, may register their candidates directly, without the intervention of any political party or through any political party" (*Codigo de Instituciones y Procedimientos Electorales de Oaxaca, Instituto Estatal Electoral*, October 1995. This law has been in force since September of 1995).

These same peoples [the indigenous] have been subject to the most severe and inhuman conditions of marginalization and poverty. For example, in municipalities with an indigneous majority, the level of illiteracy is 43%, more than three times the national average; 58% of children under five years old do not attend school and close to a third of the population between 6 and 14 years of age cannot read or write....The causes of this marginalization and poverty cannot be attributed to sociocultural or ethnic characteristics of indigenous peoples, but rather to the unequal and subordinate relations that have been imposed on them, to the social and political exclusion that they have suffered during three centuries of colonial regime and that they continue to suffer since Mexico became an independent country (*Asamblea Nacional Indigena Plural Por la Autonomia, ANIPA* 1996).

RAP proponents have stated that "it is necessary to rethink the project of the homogenous state" while reiterating that their project is not a separatist one. "The regime of autonomy proposes to strengthen unity and national integration, favoring the increase of harmony among all the socio-cultural components of the Mexican nation and providing the impetus for democratic life" (ANIPA 1996). Supporters of the RAP project assert that it is possible to enjoy the constitutional liberties guaranteed by the liberal state while simultaneously "conquering spaces to reproduce difference". Because racial and cultural discrimination have been so pervasive in Mexican society, Indian leaders have insisted that the resulting inequalities cannot be addressed on the basis of equal rights for all Mexicans under the Constitution. Indians are now demanding rights based on the very ethnic and racial difference that has been used to discriminate against them. At the National Indian Forum held in San Cristóbal in January of 1996, one Indian noted that "with the term 'Indian' they oppressed us, with the term 'Indian' we will be liberated. We want to be recognized as Otomí, Purépecha, and Maya" (1996 field notes).

Communal Autonomy Project   Experiences of communal autonomy are a daily reality throughout indigenous Mexico. Since the colonial period, when Indians were encouraged to reproduce themselves in small, 'closed corporate' communities, the community has been the center of Indian life. In most Indian communities, local leaders are elected by communal assemblies; infractions of the law are dealt with internally without recourse to external authorities (Cancian 1992; field notes). Thus, a functional 'regime of autonomy' exists in most indigenous areas in Mexico. As I mentioned above, the Mixe people of Oaxaca have been active within the Indian movement in proposing a concrete legislative proposal that protects this level of autonomy. One organization in particular, *Servicios del Pueblo Mixe* (SER), has strongly supported this option. In the late 1980s, SER was formed with a specific focus on ethnically-based demands and emphasized cultural mechanisms and traditions which distinguish the Mixe people, such as communal work or tequio and local forms of justice (Stephen 1996b). SER differed from prior Mixe organizations that had addressed peasant or producer concerns such as the Assembly of Mixe Producers (Ibid). Within the Indian movement and in the peace negotiations of San Andrés, the SER proposal has been the most developed articulation of communal autonomy.

For the Mixes of eastern Oaxaca, the exercise of autonomy is best practiced from below, that is, from the community level. They worry that a regional structuring of autonomy could create new caciques and reduce the freedom of individual ethnic groups. They tend to favor "mono-ethnic" over "multi-ethnic" autonomy because of long-standing conflicts they have had with other Indian peoples in the region, especially the Zapotec. After the Mexican Revolution the Mixe fought for the creation of an ethnically distinct district which was established in 1938. In

part, this region was formed as an attempt to re-dress the historic economic and political domination of the Mixe by the Zapotec Indians (Stephen 1996b). While in Chiapas, municipalities in majority Indian districts have historically been governed by mestizos, the 435 municipalities in Oaxaca (over a third of Mexico's total number of municipalities) have been typically run by Indians. This is not to suggest that Indian municipal leaders in Oaxaca have been less corrupt and heavy-handed than Chiapan mestizo functionaries. Nevertheless, the municipality in Oaxaca (which in many cases is coterminous with the community) enjoys greater legitimacy than its counterparts in Chiapas and in other largely indigenous states of Mexico. A good part of the efforts of independent Indian leaders in Oaxaca has been oriented around the 're-conquest' of the municipality, whereas in other states Indian organizations have fought to by-pass municipal authorities who have been their natural enemies by establishing direct contact with the national government (Victoria 1996: 40). The SER proposal recognizes the advantages and merits of the RAPs proposed by ANIPA, but notes that "there is not, today, a clear consciousness in our region concerning the convenience of installing a RAP and is therefore not in our present interests." Rather, for the Mixe people, "the communal level of autonomy is the most adequate form to preserve the aforementioned values of the community" (*Servicios del Pueblo Mixe* 1996).

Similar to the RAP project, communal autonomy proposals like that of the SER condition the exercise of individual rights on the recognition of the communal rights that make Indians different from other peoples. According to the SER proposal, there needs to be affirmative action taken on the part of the Mexican state "not to create inequalities among Mexicans but to re-dress those inequalities that already exist". In a public debate with the historian Aguilar Camin on the pages of the Mexico City daily *La Jornada* in October of 1996, Mixe leader Regino Montes argued that "the demand for autonomy should not be viewed as an attempt at isolation from the rest of the country". He insisted that "we understand the recognition of our autonomy as something that will benefit and strengthen not only indigenous peoples but will consolidate the unity of the entire nation".

The Mixe people of western Oaxaca are not the only example of ethnic resistance and autonomy in the state. The history of the Zapotec people of Juchitán is one of the most important examples of self-determination and ethnic politics in the country. From the colonial period, Juchitán has emerged as a site of ethnic resistance rooted in illicit commerce, defense of communal lands and salt flats, an adversarial relationship to the Marquesado hacienda, and in opposition to colonial and mestizo Tehuantepec (capital of the Isthmus region) (Campbell 1994: 242). *Juchitecos*, in contrast to other Indian groups in Mexico, have historically cultivated a positive sense of being Zapotec. Howard Campbell notes that during the nineteenth and twentieth century, conflicts hardened and animosities emerged between residents of Juchitán and authorities of Tehuantepec (regional capital), Oaxaca City (state capital), and Mexico City (national capital). *Juchitecos* turned in on themselves and developed a fierce localism, regional identity, and love for the Zapotec language and customs (Rubin 1990; Campbell 1994: 243). During a period of political opening under the 'progressive' administration of Luis Echeverría (1970-76), the Coalition of Peasants and Students of the Isthmus (COCEI) was born. Unlike previous ethnic organizations active within the Juchitán community, COCEI espoused class politics and politicized cultural identity. The COCEI used ethnic identity to win a class battle with upper-class Zapotecos who claimed that they were the "legitimate" representatives of Zapotecan culture, as opposed to peasant and working-class Indians. As Stephen points out, the COCEI used a class-based ethnic identity to fight a very specific class battle within Juchitán (Stephen 1996a: 27).

In the 1980s, the COCEI was the first leftist opposition group in the country to be recognized by PRI political leaders in municipal elections. During the two-and-a-half year term of the "people's government", the COCEI embarked on an ambitious cultural program centered on the Zapotec language and attempted to regain land lost by peasants to large landholders, organize the peasantry, and develop public works projects that would benefit the city's poor majority. In 1986 it took part in municipal elections and joined a coalition municipal government, and in 1989 it won the elections and governed jointly but in a majority role with the PRI (Rubin 1990: 250). The COCEI won another victory in 1992 and governed the city until 1995. Unfortunately, attempts at applying the Zapotec experience to other Indian areas in Mexico have not been very fruitful. It is a regionally-based movement whose experiences are largely based on the particular history of Zapotec Indians from one city. *Zapotecos* from Juchitán have been reticent to include even their Zapotec neighbors in their project (Stephen 1996a).

The two autonomy proposals discussed here are closely linked to particular geographic spaces and historical experience. Chiapan Indian leaders have been instrumental in the leadership of ANIPA; the RAP project originated in Chiapas under the guidance of Tojolabal leaders Margarito Ruiz and Antonio Hernández. The SER proposal, as already discussed, is the product of Mixe experience in a largely mono-ethnic region where infighting among Indian peoples has occurred for generations. While Indian struggles in Chiapas have been directly primarily against an exploitative ladino oligarchy, in Oaxaca conflicts are typically waged against hostile Indian neighbors. Because of the widespread system of debt-servitude and share-cropping that often forced Indians from different ethnic groups to mix together and opened up the possibility for regional association and organization, Chiapan Indian peoples have cooperated across ethnic groups to a degree unimaginable in Oaxaca. The early loss of land in Chiapas during the colonial period (especially in eastern Chiapas among the Tojolabales) and the historic control of Indian areas by ladino municipalities contrasts sharply with the situation in Oaxaca where Indians have been more successful in maintaining control of their land and who govern themselves in small communities. The colonization of eastern Chiapas since the 1940s has also facilitated the possibility of inter-ethnic cooperation in the state. The presence of progressive Catholic clergy and leftist organizers working in Chiapas since the 1970s have also been a significant factor in stimulating inter-ethnic alliances. Stephen (1996a) notes that state repression in Chiapas has been more generalized than in Oaxaca. Ironically perhaps, harsh state repression provided Chiapan Indians with a common enemy and facilitated multi-ethnic organizing strategies.

Las Margaritas: Peasant or Indian Politics?

As is clear from the drama surrounding the declaration of the RAPs on October 12, 1994 by the CEOIC, the two most important leaders of the autonomy "movement" were Margarito Ruiz and Antonio Hernández, both Tojolabales from Las Margaritas. To what degree did their enthusiasm and support for the RAPs come from their experience working with Tojolabales in Las Margaritas? Is there an example of a functioning RAP among the Tojolabales? Is there anything unique about the Tojolabal experience as compared to other indigenous groups throughout the state that has facilitated their leadership in the Indian movement and on the autonomy issue? As its name indicates, the main reference point for the RAP is the regional level. It is possible to speak of a Tojolabal region and not just tojolabal communities, in contrast to the highland region, for example, which was divided up into small communities during the colonial period and whose indigenous identify with their community or municipality much more closely than with their ethnic

group. Any Tojolabal community structure that existed was broken up in the late nineteenth century as Tojolabales were forced to work as peons on farms and ranches in the region.[6] The RAP proposal is also multi-ethnic, taken from the Tojolabal experience of living side by side with tzeltales in Altamirano and mestizo*s* in the municipalities of Independencia and La Trinitaria. As Araceli Burguete put it: "Our experience was that it was possible to live together with autonomous governments that were governments for all people because we had come from an experience of political formation where Tzotziles, Tzeltales, Tojolabales, and mestizos all shared one region" (Burguete, interview). The RAP project and its advocates also drew heavily from the experiment with Tojolabal regional government in the late 1980s when the *Unión de Ejidos y Pueblos Tojolabales* (CIOAC member) acted as a instance of regional government for all its members living in communities within the *Cañada* Tojolabal (a geographical region between Altamirano and Comitán).

    After declaration of the RAPs in October by the CEOIC, a series of regional forums was held throughout Chiapas to concretize the details of how these regions would function in practice. While the Tojolabal region had been the foundation for the development of the original project designed in large part by CIOAC leadership and Margarito Ruiz, the northern region, encompassing eleven municipalities including Simojovel, Bochil, and Soyaló, quickly became a focus of attention and activity. The CIOAC spearheaded a series of forums in this region in the fall of 1994, culminating in the ratification of the Constitution of the Autonomous Region of the Tzotzil, Chol, and Zoque Indian Peoples on October 17 in Soyaló. The ratification of the region's constitution was accompanied by the taking of municipal buildings, the "recovery" of farms and ranches, and the suspension of negotiations with federal and state governments (Morquecho 1994). The declaration of the autonomous northern region was publicly lauded by diverse Indian organizations around the country who pledged to support the effort. Roxana Ojeda, member of the *Unión de Comuneros Emiliano Zapata* (UCEZ) from Michoacán, publicly declared that the Indian autonomy which is being practiced in Chiapas "is not illegal because it is recognized in Convention 169 of the International Labor Commission that Mexico ratified" (Pérez 1994, *La Jornada*).

    While declaring a region autonomous is a first important step, the daily work of the autonomy process, say leaders in the movement, is the hard part. Arturo Luna, one of the key actors behind the northern autonomy project comments on the long and laborious process of autonomy in that region:

> We can say that the problem of autonomy has to do with the economy of the
> region and of the communities. We are not going to be autonomous if we do
> not resolve the problem of self-sufficiency in food production. It is not a
> problem of discourse, it is a question of developing subjects, actors that can
> genuinely build autonomy.   We need to build a diversified agricultural base
> in the region for families....We are also talking about health teams (*comités
> de salud*). In each community we are trying to develop health teams that
> would integrate traditional medicine from the communities with Western
> medicine....We need to strengthen the cultural foundation of the communities
> with theater and dance. We need to strengthen their own instances of
> justice. The entire society needs to develop itself so that it can demand, with

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[6] Tojolabales call this period of forced work on farms as the baldío (see Gómez Hernández and Humberto Rus 1993).

force and strength, its own autonomy and forms of government. This will not come about just because a decree institutes autonomy or because the government and the EZLN sign an accord in San Cristóbal. We can sign a decree but if we do not achieve a strengthening of our own communities and regions we will continue to have to deal with *cacicazgos* and dependencies on the government (Arturo Luna Luján, interview).

José Antonio Vásquez, regional leader of CIOAC-Comitán and tojolabal from Bajucú, Las Margaritas, also warns of the danger of separating the discourse of autonomy from its practice. Among the Tojolabales, he says, "people are autonomous but in their own way, from their own community, as they see it" (José Antonio Vásquez Hernández, personal interview, Comitán, Chiapas, November 22, 1995). While Tojolabal leaders from CIOAC-Comitán such as Antonio and Luis Hernández have been at the forefront of the autonomy movement in Chiapas as well as on the national level, Vásquez admits that he is not as clear about the details of the RAP project: "When at times I have spoken to the people about the RAP project, it is not clear to me yet what it actually consists of. Or maybe I am seeing it like the people do because I am judging it with them from their perspective....Words on paper are one thing. The law is one thing but the trick is how it is practiced. That is how I see it. I am in agreement with autonomy. Maybe it just needs to be explained to the people better." Vásquez insists that autonomy is practiced within the member organizations of the CIOAC. That is, people are not under the jurisdiction of municipal authorities because they solve their problems within the region, in their communities, and through their organizations. For Vásquez, this is "real" autonomy.

Similarly, local CIOAC leaders such as Arturo Giménez and Juan Gómez Hernández of the ejido union Pueblos Tojolabales, when asked about the RAP that is has been declared in the region where they live and work, told me that they could not comment on this because "we don't know anything about it" (personal interview in Comitán, Chiapas, December 18, 1995). Yet, when I asked Giménez and Gómez more particular questions about the election of authorities, internal forms of justice, and community organization, it became evident that the daily practice of autonomy is operative in Tojolabal communities. Giménez spoke of the fact that most problems are resolved within the community in negotiation with local authorities:

Now, if the problem is very grave we work it out within the CIOAC. We see how it can be arranged there and smooth things out. As a community and as an organization we see how things can be worked out. Our problems are resolved within the community or the organization [CIOAC] (Arturo Giménez, interview).

Comments made by Gómez and others suggest that members of the PRI-affiliated union in the region, Lucha Campesina, often present complaints at the Public Ministry in Las Margaritas, unlike CIOAC-affiliated union members who tend to work problems out within communities or regional structures such as the CIOAC. Not surprisingly, then, autonomy demands, when they are made, are made by opposition political activists. According to local leaders from the ejido union Tierra y Libertad (also affiliated with CIOAC) in the selva region of Las Margaritas, autonomy means "that the people have decision-making capacity to name their authorities. For example, like in the community, the municipality, all of this, the people have the right to name their own authorities.... All the work that is being done in the community here makes it easier for the people to understand what autonomy is because they are now beginning, it is already

working" (Eduardo Méndez, personal interview with author, ejido Tabasco, Las Margaritas, January 2, 1996).

Even leaders who are more informed about the RAP project and closely connected to its chief proponents seem unsure as to how to strike a balance between theory about autonomy and its actual practice. Luis Hernández Cruz, state leader of CIOAC-Chiapas and brother of Antonio, admits that

> Starting with the discourse of some *compañeros*, some Tojolabales involved there [on the regional level], the discourse and theory is a bit advanced, but really the practice does not exist. I believe that the Tojolabales more than any other peoples are practicing autonomy because if there is a problem we resolve it there, including cases of rape and murder are resolved there. Land invasions are also resolved on there. We are practicing autonomy, not much in theory, but we are there in theory as well (personal interview with Luis Hernández Cruz, Comitán Chiapas, December 18, 1995).

Curiously, Hernández begins by stating that no practice of autonomy exists in the region, just discourse and theory on the subject. Yet, he then goes on to claim that autonomous practices are being carried out in the region, especially among Tojolabales.

My work in the region uncovered a significant degree of confusion among Tojolabales over the RAP project and the different definitions of autonomy currently being discussed. Local leaders from ejido unions in the region seem to be more concerned about access to credit, the cost of fertilizer, lack of transportation, and the low prices for their products. People are worried about the divisions within their communities over religious and political affiliation and the increasing militarization of the region. Much of their political experience has occurred within peasant organizations such as the CIOAC and the CNC and their vocabulary and collective action strategies come from within this tradition. As noted, some regional leaders are slowly moving toward a more Indian-based politics, but the social base is just beginning to be built from below. While it is true that there is a long tradition of practical, lived autonomy in the Tojolabal region,[7] the task of forging a regional identity and government has barely begun.

In an uncommon moment of candor at the fourth ANIPA held in the Valle de Jovel (San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas) December 8-9, 1995 in the first "table" of discussion which was dedicated to autonomy, Indian activists from various regions of the country spoke frankly about the difficulty of legislating autonomy when little grassroots work had been done. One Indian man from Michoacán said that "we are scarcely beginning to understand the autonomy initiatives. We do not have knowledge yet" (1995, field notes).

One of the reoccurring themes in the assemblies and forums that I attended on autonomy was the tension between the concerted action needed to deal with human rights abuses within the communities and the strategic political action that needed to be taken to advance the movement. Carlos Beas of UCIZONI spoke to that tension when he argued that "all of our words about autonomy are useless - they are just on paper - if we have not advanced in opening spaces in the communities...we need to create a network of self-defense to protect ourselves" (1995 field notes). One of the tasks of this first "table" of discussion was to evaluate the preliminary results

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[7] In my interviews with local and regional leaders I found that *ejido* assemblies typically elect the municipal agent (agente municipal) and other local officials. Minor crimes are resolved within the community and region without having to go to the municipal judge in Margaritas, punishments are set by the communities, and most have their own jails.

of the discussions of San Andrés on Indian Culture and Rights that were held in October and November of 1995. Those participating in this "table" on autonomy were supposed to add or subtract from the government and EZLN proposals. Manuel de Jesús from Michoacán commented that "In the majority of the communities we do know what autonomy is but we are not experts in making laws." In this assembly, and in others, the important work of *denuncias* (denunciations) and the communication of the daily acts of resistance in which these communities participate, make it difficult to find time to strategize as a movement. National leaders of the Indian movement felt that the movement had to act quickly with respect to proposing a regimen of autonomy because the window of legislative opportunity was quickly closing. The EZLN, in the context of the negotiations of San Andrés, had the opportunity to guarantee legal protection for some form of autonomy. If they did not take advantage of the opportunity, the leaders rationalized, it would not soon come again. So, using this logic, even though little grassroots work had been done in Chiapas, for example, on the operationalization of the RAPs, it was thought, by Antonio Hernández Cruz that "we must declare the RAPs where the conditions are present...where they are not we must say that we are in the process of forming the regions" (1995 field notes). This, in part, explains the declaration of seven RAPs in Chiapas on October 12, 1994 by the CEOIC. While understandable on a strategic level, the follow-up and operationalization of these RAP has been very difficult since the RAP project has been largely developed by leaders, both Indian and mestizo. This is not to say that autonomy does not exist as a daily practice. The election of local leaders and the exercise of justice in communities and regions are evidence of the practice of autonomy and are widely recognized.

The fact that the RAP project in Chiapas was initiated by Indian leaders and not by a purely spontaneous indigenous mass movement is not, in itself, evidence of an inappropriate imbalance between leaders and followers or of the project's inauthenticity. Speaking about southern Italy, Gramsci noted the difficulty of organizing rural populations, given their dispersal and isolation. In light of these difficulties, he argued, "it is best to start a movement from intellectual groups" (quoted in Hoare and Smith 1971: 75). After a movement has been organized, questions need to be raised concerning the relationship between leaders and followers and the degree of contact between them. How responsible are leaders to their followers? Do leaders act with the intention that there should always be rulers and ruled, or is their objective to create the conditions in which this division is no longer necessary? (quoted in Hoare and Smith 1971: 144). Gramsci repeatedly pointed out the tension that exists between theory and practice in collective action and in politics, encouraging readers to examine the extent to which leaders return to the masses. He stressed "...the importance and the function which the creative contribution of superior groups must and can have in connection with the organic capacity of the intellectually subordinate strata to discuss and develop new critical concepts" (quoted in Hoare and Smith 1971: 341). This dynamic tension between "spontaneous" and "conscious leadership" or "discipline" is precisely the real political action of the subaltern classes, insisted Gramsci. "Theory cannot be in opposition to the spontaneous feelings of the masses. Between the two there is a quantitative difference of degree, not one of quality" (quoted in Hoare and Smith 1971: 198-99). The fact that RAP leaders in the Tojolabal region are Tojolabales in close contact with the communities they serve, seems to suggest that leaders will be flexible in the operationalization of the project in the region. The forums and congresses I attended on the RAP project allowed for ample grassroots participation. Because the project is still in incipient stages, however, it is too

soon to evaluate the degree to which leaders have returned to followers to explain their actions as well as to receive critical guidance.

Indian Autonomy and Institutional Linkages

While demands for autonomy by popular organizations vis-à-vis the state and political parties have been fairly common since the late 1970s (increasing in number and intensity during the 1980s), the current demands for Indian autonomy in Mexico differ from these in their ambition and scope. Indian organizations demanding autonomy are not simply asking the state to recognize their right to decision-making over a particular aspect of their lives, such as party affiliation, distribution of state subsidies and credits, or curriculum choice (in the case of the autonomous university system). Rather, these organizations want control over a wide-range of activities in economic, political, ecological, social, and cultural spheres. For example, under the RAP proposal, regional representatives elected by the 'uses and customs' of the regions would manage natural resources present in the region, promote the use of Indian languages and 'traditions', and design regional development projects, among other tasks. Critics of Indian autonomy claim that organizations enter into blatant contradiction when they demand autonomy, on the one hand, yet call for the government to provide clinics, schools, and other social services to indigenous regions. Sociologist Fernando Escalante articulates this position, stating "Now, on the one hand they [Indians] ask that they [the government] leave them alone to produce and that intermediaries leave, and on the other hand, they demand education, health, social spending, and guaranteed prices. These are contradictory demands" (Escalante quoted in Correa and Corro 1996: 24, *Proceso*). Autonomy proponents defend their position by stating that "autonomy does not mean that the state should abrogate its responsibility to its citizens" (Araceli Burguete Cal y Mayor, field notes 1996). Local leaders who have pushed the highly centralized Mexican state to decentralize and devolve power to state and municipal levels have also faced this tension between the demand for independent decision-making and fiscal responsibility, on the one hand, and the federal government's responsibility in certain spheres, on the other (Rodríguez and Ward 1994).

One of the main tensions within the Indian movement has been the extent to which member organizations should accept government support (i.e., subsidies or funding for special programs). This tension has exacerbated since the Zapatista uprising and Chiapas has been flooded with dozens of special envoys and national government agency representatives who offer monies for development projects, the purchase of land from landowners that peasants had 'recovered', and a host of other programs. (*La Jornada*, 29 November 1995). In May of 1995, an internal rift between the Democratic State Assembly of Chiapan People (ADEPECH) and the CCRI (Clandestine Revolutionary Indigenous Committee-EZLN) over the expediency of negotiating with Dante Delgado, coordinator of federal support to Chiapas named by President Zedillo, was front page news in national and local newspapers. Subcomandante Marcos accused ADEPECH member organizations of being 'traitors' for their decision to negotiate with Delgado. According to various ADEPECH members interviewed in 1995 and 1996, the hostility generated over that conflict caused grave damage to the relationship between the EZLN and popular organizations within the state. Amado Avendaño, opposition 'Governor' in Transition, split with AEDEPECH when the assembly decided to negotiate with Delgado. In typical official party fashion, Delgado conditioned the monies he offered on case-by-case negotiations. That is, ADEPECH member organizations were not allowed to negotiate programs and the disbursement of funds as a block, but only as individual organizations. In the end, Delgado delivered very little

money, and, according to one participant, "only a few local projects for purchasing pigs were approved. The government just wanted to divide us and they succeeded" (José Antonio Vásquez, field notes 1996).

The extent to which the Indian movement should ally itself with political parties has also been a point of contention and heated debate. In numerous forums and congresses held since the Zapatista uprising, the overwhelming position shared by both leaders and grassroots members of Indian organizations is that permanent alliances with political parties are undesirable. There is disagreement, however, on the potential benefit of temporary alliances. While partisanship has generated division and, in some cases, violence, within many indigeneous communities in Chiapas and throughout the country, movement leaders have held or presently hold elected positions in the national Congress (i.e, Margarito Ruiz, Antonio Hernández, Gilberto López y Rivas). However, many grassroots members of Indian organizations are openly skeptical of partisanship when the topic is raised. [field notes 1996]. This uncertainty and ambivalence is exacerbated by the fact that the only viable national leftist opposition party is the PRD, which has not yet resolved debates present since its inception in 1989 over whether it could more profitably be organized like a social movement organization (or coordinator of various social movement organizations) or, conversely, like a traditional political party.

EZLN leadership has also wavered on the nature of its eventual transition to civil, political life. When the CCRI first announced on January 1, 1996 that it would promote the formation of a Zapatista front organization (*Frente Zapatista de Liberación Nacional*) in the Fourth Declaration of the Lacandon Selva, it claimed to renounce power and personal gain.

> We invite national, civil society, those without a party, to a social and citizen-
> based movement, [we invite] all Mexicans to construct a new political force.
> A new political force that is to be national. A new force with a foundation in
> the EZLN....A political force whose members do not occupy and do not
> aspire to occupy positions of popular election or governmental posts on any
> level. A political force that does not aspire to take power. A force that is not
> a political party (*Cuarta Declaracion de la Selva Lacandona, January 1,*
> *1996,* author's translation).

While many romantics on the left celebrated the EZLN's denouncement of power politics, others on both sides of the political spectrum were openly skeptical as to the EZLN's understanding of the nature of power and its insistence of being, in some way, outside of power and power relations (Covián Pérez 1996: 9, *La Jornada*; Aviles 1996: 4, *La Jornada*; Woldenberg 1996: 5, *La Jornada*). During a forum convoked by the EZLN on State Reform and Democracy held in June of 1996 in San Cristóbal de las Casas, one of the central debates in the eight 'tables' of discussion concerned the relationship between political parties and popular organizations (i.e., the Indian movement, the independent union movement, the civil wing of the EZLN forces). The majority of Indian organizations and civil branches of Zapatismo (*comités civiles de diálogo*) were opposed to any alliances with political parties, proposing instead alternative forms of political organization outside of the party system. Declarations by EZLN leaders have been ambivalent in this respect. During this same forum, *subcomandante* Marcos signed informal agreements to work together with the PRD and the PT (Worker's Party) to create leftist fronts before the 1997 state and federal elections. The EZLN was quick, however, to play down these arrangements and insist that they did not bind the organization or its sympathizers to vote for or to work within any political party.

While it has been common since the 1970s for popular organizations to assert some degree of autonomy from political parties (horizontal autonomy), the calls for autonomy from the state (vertical autonomy) have not been as frequent. In part, this is due to what Foweraker (1993), following Gramsci, has called the "transformist" nature of the Mexican state. Foweraker warns that:

> Insistence on total autonomy suggests a 'jacobinism' that seems unrealistic in the political conditions created by the historical success of State transformism, which has consistently deepened and complicated the institutional penetration and control of Mexican civil society. In these conditions, popular movements depend for their survival and success on the political representation they can achieve, and on the ways their organization and strategy condition their insertion into the political system overall. There is no denying that popular movements may seek a strategic defense of their autonomy, but more as a condition of effective representation and never as an absolute end in itself (Foweraker 1993: 145-146).

Some more radical elements on the left have argued that anything less than a complete autonomy from the State leads to a "constant destruction of democratic channels and spaces", which means that the only movements to survive will be those 'with restricted identity' (Zermeño 1987 cited in Foweraker 1993). Foweraker has strongly criticized this perspective, which he views as naive: "Implicit here and elsewhere is the notion that popular struggles can be divorced from the realm of institutional politics and left to inhabit an Arcadian world where popular experiments in social life create a 'small-scale counter culture' (Evers 1985) uncontaminated by relations of political power" (Foweraker 1993). While the autonomy proposals, especially the RAP project, may be laudable in pressuring the state to decentralize both political and economic power, they could be inadvertently condemning themselves to ineffectiveness if substantial institutional change does not occur concomitantly. The record of popular movement activity in Mexico seems to affirm this perspective. Independent union organizations have tended to prosper less in Mexico than movements within State-chartered union corporations.

How do Indian autonomy projects envision the relationship between the State and autonomous communities, municipalities, and regions? Does autonomy mean independence from the State, and, if so, to what extent? What responsibility would the state have under a 'regime of autonomy'? These are important questions and have not been fully addressed to date by autonomy proponents. Likewise, responsibilities that correspond to the State under the autonomy proposals have not been concretely defined; even the accords reached in San Andrés are imprecise on this note.[8] In part, this ambiguity is attributable to the fact that the debate over Indian

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[8] In the second of three documents signed by the EZLN and the government in February 1996 in San Andrés Larraínzar, Chiapas, it is stated that: (1) "we are to create a new juridical framework that establishes a new relationship between Indian peoples and the State, with a foundation in the recognition of the right to free-determination and the juridical, political, social, economic, and cultural rights that are to be derived from them. la The new constitutional dispositions must include a framework of autonomy; (2) Autonomy is the concrete expression of the exercise of free determination, expressed as a framework that conforms to part of the nation-state. Indian peoples can, in consequence, decide their form of internal government and their own ways of organizing themselves politically, socially, economically, and culturally. Within this new constitutional framework of autonomy, the right to free determination on the part of Indian peoples is to be respected in each one of the levels on which they are to be enforced, encompassing one or more Indian communities that conform to particular

autonomy is still quite incipient and the details are yet to be worked out. However, this ambiguity is also due to the fact that the significant institutional change and decentralization called for by these proposals cannot be dictated by fiat.

Indian Migration and the 'New Politics of Representation'? [9]

Both autonomy proposals examined in this paper are based firmly on the assertion that Mexico is a multi-cultural nation and that the government's policy of assimilation of indigenous peoples has been fundamentally misguided. The government itself recognized the failure of its assimilation policies in the San Andrés accords on Indian Culture and Rights:

> History confirms that Indian peoples have been subject to inequality,
> subordination, and discrimination that have placed them in a position of
> structural poverty, exploitation, and political exclusion. It is also confirmed,
> finally, that in order to surmount this reality, profound systematic,
> participative, and convergent new action on the part of the government and
> society are needed and above all, the participation of Indian peoples
> (*Pronunciamiento Conjunto que el Gobierno Federal y el EZLN Enviarán a
> las Instancias de debate y Decisión Nacional*, January 16, 1996, documento
> 1, author's translation).

Despite the persistence of views by leading intellectuals and politicians that indigenous autonomy is a separatist project and that it proposes to divide the nation into small, independent territories, a careful reading of autonomy documents and declarations by advocate organizations do not support this conclusion. The San Andrés accords make it very clear that the accords are situated within the framework of the nation-state and promote national unity. Interestingly, during the International Encounter Against Neoliberalism and For Humanity, which was convoked by the EZLN and held in Chiapas in July of 1996, many European anarchists and autonomists were shocked at the open demonstrations of Mexican nationalism by the Zapatistas. During the inauguration of the Encounter in Oventic, Chiapas, one of the EZLN *comandantes* serving as MC introduced participants from the Basque country as "our Spanish *compañeros*". This was met, not surprisingly, by boos and hisses from these *compañeros*!

The autonomy proposals and the San Andrés accords combine demands based on traditional peasant and worker pleas for education, health care, and access to government services with important provisions for the use of and respect for indigenous languages, increase in

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circumstances in each state and municipality The exercise of autonomy on the part of Indian peoples will contribute to the democratization of national life and will strengthen the sovereignty of the country.

In a subsequent sub-section of this document entitled "Competencies", it states that "it is necessary to configure a concurrent provision dealing with agencies and institutions of the federal, state, and municipal governments as well as the distribution of political, administrative, economic, social, and cultural, educational, and judicial competencies, the management of resources, and the protection of the environment between these institutions and levels of government and the State in order to respond in an opportune manner to the requirements and demands of Indian peoples. Similarly, we must concretize the faculties, functions, and resources that may be transferred to indigenous communities under the criteria established in the addendum 5.2 of the document entitled "Pronunciamientos Conjuntos" as well as the diverse manners in which Indian peoples will participate in front of government agencies and institutions with the goal of interaction and coordination with the latter, particularly at the municipal level" ("*Propuestas Conjuntas que el gobierno federal y el EZLN se comprometen a enviar a las instancias de debate y decision nacional, correspondientes al punto 1.4 de las reglas de procedimiento*", documento 2, January 18, 1996, author's translation).

[9] This term is Kearney's (1996).

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indigenous political representation, diffusion of Indian culture, the recognition of Indian peoples in the constitution, their right to free-determination, and the protection of migrants. Observers of Latin American social movements have pointed out an increased focus on human rights and citizenship demands by both rural and urban popular organizations since the 1980s (Roberts n.d.; Kearney 1996). A rise in the importance of NGOs (non-governmental organizations) as political actors, international legislation protecting Indian rights (i.e., Convention 169 of the ILO), and the new transnational identities of migrants has also been witnessed (Mato 1994; Nagengast and Kearney 1990).

In an important recent work, *Reconceptualizing the Peasantry: Anthropology in a Global Perspective*, Kearney (1996) argues that the term 'peasant' is seriously outdated as contemporary, transnational, migrating 'peasantlike' subjects are defined by complex and inter-connected webs of production and consumption, far removed, in most cases, from subsistence agricultural and 'closed, corporate communities'. Kearney argues that ethnic identity is part of a 'new politics of representation'. He claims that:

> Unlike peasantness as an identity that, because of its productionist nature, is tied only to certain environmental and political landscapes that permit it, ethnicity has no such direct dependence on means of production. It is thus a dimension of identity suitable for the dispossessed, the exiled, those in Diaspora, the marginal, the migrant, the diverse (Kearney 1996: 180).

But while there has been a notable shift in the framing of Indian demands in Mexico and throughout the continent since the 1980s, demands for land reform and access to basic services have not been totally eclipsed by 'newer' demands based on consumption rather than production.

To what extent are Indians demanding rights that supersede the scope of the nation-state and challenge its foundations? Kearney claims that while peasant-agrarian issues are constructed as contestation over access to and control of land as a means of production,

> ...the reframing of productionist issues within the space of human rights has similar deep implications for peasant and agrarian issues as usually conceptualized. Normally, the relationship between a state and its citizens is conceived and enacted as an internal affair, but when state authority becomes identified by international human rights agencies as abusive, the relationship between state and citizen becomes transnationalized. Human rights as a social movement is distinctly transnational in the historical sense of having established a moral and political frame of reference that transcends the sovereignty of nations and is able to bring particular nations to account for their actions. In this transnationalization the social definition of person is expanded from that of subject of nation X to that of global citizen (Kearney 1996: 184).

While Kearney is correct in stating that there has indeed been a sea change in Indian occupational status and mobility as thousands of Indians migrate to large urban areas in Mexico and the United States, dismissing the continuing significance of peasant demands and organizational strategies that have not remained static over time but have also evolved would be erroneous. For example, while the activity of peasant organizations continues to be dedicated to filing land regularization papers through the Ministry of Agrarian Reform, demands for credit, the sale of subsidized fertilizer, and the development of sustainable development projects are an important part of the work of these organizations.

Most Indian leaders today active in the Indian movement were trained within peasant organizations; some continue to work within these organizations. While some peasant leaders and leftist political parties have been reluctant to recognize racism against Indians, other peasant organizations such as the CIOAC have viewed the "Indian question" as a way to reinvigorate stagnating peasant discourse and organization (field notes 1995-96). Kearney and others who have written about transnational identities seem to be suggesting that migrating Indian peoples are transgressing the rules and categories of the nation-state in constant acts of resistance and defiance. While migrant Indians have developed possibilities for transnational organization previously unheard of and Indian movements throughout the continent have used international legislation and resources to put pressure on national governments, migration, by itself, is not transgressive; states, along with national economies, often precipitate migration. One of the phenomena which has accompanied the emergence of this latest phase of transnational or global capitalism seems to be the opening of national borders for some goods (i.e., maquila finished products, capital, agricultural goods) while the tightening up of borders for others (i.e., labor flows, drugs). Transnationalism has also been accompanied by increased levels of militarization in both the U.S. (i.e., drug and crime czars, war on drugs) and in Mexico (i.e., military officers serving police functions, army troops 'occupying' rural areas). This increasing militarization and policing of national and international populations seemingly belies neo-classical economic predictions of open borders between free trade partners.

While it is too soon to declare that peasant identity and organization have given way to transnational, migrant identities, one of the important issues re-introduced by observers of international migration flows and transnational political activism is that of territory. Indians have worked outside of their communities of origin as temporary agricultural workers for decades, but the last fifteen years have seen a tremendous increase in the numbers of Indians working in Mexico City and Cancún (as well as in Los Angeles and Houston). Thus, any discussion of autonomy must take these changes into account. The communal autonomy proposal put forward by the Mixe in Oaxaca, for example, is based on the territorial unit of the community. Members are identified as belonging to the community by the consensus of other members. The RAP regional autonomy proposal, for example, is a pluri-ethnic proposal which includes a number of ethnic groups (Indians and mestizos) that inhabit a given region. The opening up of ethnic categories to include mestizos as well as the flexibility of regions (they are to be created by consensus) flags the constructed nature of these categories and their historical contextuality. The RAP proposal openly defies the government's traditional method of defining indigenous identity by primordial traits such as language, dress, participation in ritual fiestas, and communal work. The protection of migrant Indians has also been a central point of discussions at ANIPA forums held in 1995 and 1996. Yet, because the Indian movement, finally, couches the discussion of autonomy as an ethnic claim, it opens itself up to an essentialization of Indian identity, the very thing the movement is struggling against. This apparent paradox in identity politics has been widely discussed (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992; Hale 1992). As the Comaroffs state, "Any activity aimed at the reversal of 'ascribed' inequalities may reinforce the primacy of ethnicity as a principle of social differentiation; the very fact that such activity is conducted by and for groupings marked by their cultural identities confirms the perception that these identities do provide the only available basis of collective self-definition and action" (1992: 62). "Thus while ethnicity is the product of specific historical processes, it tends to take on the 'natural' appearance of an autonomous force, a 'principle' capable of determining the course of social life" (1992: 60).

If territory and ascriptive characteristics are not really the determinants of Indian identity, how does 'indigenous' get defined, and by whom? A provocative essay by Pauline Turner Strong and Barrik Van Winkle (1996) argues that blood quantum (often 25%) is the most common criterion of membership in government sponsored programs for Indian peoples in Canada and the United States. While official discourse, they argue, tends to be fixed, rigid, essentialized, and bureaucratized, the Indians themselves define Indian identity through culturally valued competencies, activities, affiliations, and characteristics. In the Mexican case, this problem has surfaced in the hype surrounding the program for the Certification of Ejidal Rights and Titling of Urban House Lots (PROCEDE), which was created in 1994 in response to EZLN uprising (and the backlash against NAFTA by many social movement organizations). In November of that year, the Agrarian Attorney's Office released a draft document that confirmed the state's power to decide which communities were legitimately indigenous and therefore had the right to exclude their communal land from the government's land certification and titling program (Stephen 1995: 24). In order to administer the program and to decide who qualifies, officials have divided agrarian communities into indigenous and non-indigenous communities (Procuraduria Agraria 1994: 2, quoted in Stephen 1995: 24). Indigenous communities are described by 'culturalist' traits such as language, subsistence farming, participation in *mayordomías*, community solidarity and forms of communal labor. Non-indigenous communities, according to the Procuraduría, do not speak an Indian language, typically participate in wage-labor, and practice heterogenous customs. Stephen (1995) points out that the main problem with this system of classification is that most agrarian communities in Mexico are some mixture of the two. Ethnic identity, under this system, is tied to ahistorical culturalist or folkloric traits. Indian organizations themselves often fall prey to this system of categorization as well. To cite one example, the supreme command structure of the EZLN, the CCRI, is organized along linguistic lines (Stephen 1995).

But even assuming that ethnic identity is re-inforced by the use of a common language and the practice of community rituals and celebrations, identity is also significantly forged in conflict and struggle. As we saw in our discussion of the COCEI in Juchitán, Oaxaca, a strong sense of Zapotec identity was created over time in opposition to 'meddling' officials in Tehuantepec, Oaxaca City, and later, Mexico City. Similarly, Tojolabal identity has shifted from one grounded in opposition to plantation owners late last century and early this century to one based on ejido identities forged after the distribution of ejido land by Lázaro Cárdenas in the late 1930s. Since the late 1980s, Tojolabal identity has shifted yet again to encompass regional identification, including, in some cases, other Indian ethnic groups within the multi-ethnic Lacandon rain forest, against ladino landowners and the state. Whereas Indian organization in Chiapas tends to embrace alliances with popular mestizo groups and other Indian ethnicities, Oaxacan Indians tend to favor mono-ethnic organization due to historic conflicts among Indian peoples. Thus, ethnic identification is rooted in a common sense of struggle and defined in political conflict. When Indians speak of their language and customs as defining characteristics, they assume an type of ethnicist identification, making it easier for the government to de-politicize their demands and struggles.

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While the regional, communal, and municipal autonomy proposals put forth by Indian organizations do hold great promise for decentralizing and democratizing the Mexican political system, their limitations are also substantial. One of the main challenges for the future of the

Indian movement on both national and regional levels is the question of intra-community division. Today, many indigenous communities in Chiapas and throughout Mexico are splintered by religious and political divisions. Autonomous communal and regional regimes such as the one advocated by ANIPA and others could reinforce regional and local cacicazgos and worsen extant internal divisions. Fox and Gordillo's warning about autonomy in general applies here: "The relative autonomy of a rural enterprise from the state cannot be assumed to involve participatory democracy....Leadership accountability to the rank and file is never guaranteed" (Fox and Gordillo 1989: 158). Yet, as I have suggested in this paper, a regime of autonomy could be an important step in the direction of greater political and economic decentralization and increased federalism, especially as the "autonomists" continue to make alliances with other non-Indian forces on the left and center-left.

As I have pointed out repeatedly in this paper, the language used to describe autonomy by both Indian organizations and the government is exceedingly vague and unspecified. There is much talk of Indian uses and customs, yet little concrete work has been done to codify the significant differences which exist among Indian peoples in the exercise of their "usos y costumbres" as well as the instances in which positive law and Indian law come into direct conflict. Another notable problem is the lack of infrastructure within Indian communities and regions which would permit the exercise of new functions and responsibilities that are to be transferred from state and national governments.

Finally, this paper has examined the relationship between Tojolabal leaders and followers with respect to the development of a RAP project in the region. While the project was created by regional and national Indian leaders, it builds on the quotidian experience of lived autonomy in indigenous communities. (And an experiment with regional government in the Cañada Tojolabal in the late 1980s.) While a certain distance between leaders' discourse and community experiences of autonomy is to be expected, more time is needed to evaluate the extent to which leaders have returned to their followers for dialogue and direction on the evolution of the project in the region.

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