

# SPREADING THE WORD:

## Music as a Communicative Strategy in the Contemporary Zapatista Movement



**Andrew James Green**

Department of Music  
Royal Holloway, University of London

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Declaration of Authorship

I, Andrew James Green, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the use of music as a tool of political communication in the contemporary Zapatista movement, which emerged after a 1994 rebellion in Chiapas, Mexico conducted by the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN). On the basis of ethnographic research carried out in Chiapas, Mexico City and Los Angeles in 2012 and 2013, I examine the related notions of “dissemination”, “spreading the word”, “telling stories” and “transmitting the message” as key structuring concepts for musical practices in different sites in the contemporary Zapatista movement in Mexico. However, recent scholarship in the field of communication theory has tended to critique the dualist, linear models of communication this emic discourse reflected. Correspondingly, I demonstrate that activity structured around these one-way notions of “disseminating” or “transmitting” pro-Zapatista messages had a series of often unrecognized effects that may be highly significant for understanding the potential and limitations of this music-centred activism. As pro-Zapatista musicians in rural Chiapas, San Cristóbal de las Casas and Mexico City used various strategies to disseminate messages through musical practice, they also brought into play a number of dynamics involving the ongoing constitution of organization, the cultivation of ties, the sonic production of social space, the creation of means and capabilities for the “independent” production of music within a logic of (Zapatista) “autonomy”, and the communication and contestation of the notion of “Zapatismo” itself. Music, in this interpretation, may be understood not only as a means of communicating message in a unidirectional fashion, but as a multifaceted practice that serves to hold together this complex, geographically diffuse social movement as a meaningful entity.

## GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS, TERMS AND NAMES

**Autonomous community:** A village or settlement whose members are affiliated to the EZLN (and, since 2003, one of five JBGs). Sometimes referred to among pro-Zapatista activists as simply *las comunidades* (“the communities”). (It should be noted that the fact that this term is used throughout this dissertation should not be taken to indicate an *a priori* stance on the part of the author concerning whether or not these communities are, in fact, “essentially” autonomous. Instead, this usage reflects both emic discourse and communicative convenience.)

**Base de apoyo (support base):** Member of a Zapatista autonomous community in Chiapas and supporter of the EZLN.

**Campesino:** Peasant, or one who works and lives in the countryside (*campo*).

**Caracol:** Term used to describe five Zapatista centres of culture and administration located across rural Chiapas which were created in 2003. Formerly called *Aguascalientes*.

**Chiapanecan:** Pertaining to Chiapas.

**CIDECI:** Centro Indígena de Capacitación Integral (Comprehensive Indigenous Training Centre), a centre for education located on the edges of San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas. Strongly linked to the EZLN, and venue used as hub of the 2013 Zapatista Escuelita.

**CLETA:** Centro Libre de Experimentación Teatral y Artística (Free Centre for Theatrical and Artistic Expression), anarchist theatre collective linked to UNAM.

**Coletos:** Term used to refer to *mestizos* in the context of San Cristóbal de la Casas, Chiapas. Often linked to supposed descendants of the *criollos* who founded the city.

**Criollo:** Term used by Spanish colonialists to refer to people of Spanish descent.

**CVDC:** Coordinadora Valle de Chalco, a pro-Zapatista activist group located in Valle de Chalco, Estado de México.

**DF:** Distrito Federal (Federal District), the capital of Mexico and a federal entity located in the centre of Mexico City’s urban metrópolis.

**Ejido:** Unit of communally used agrarian land to which either the rights of use or ownership belong to a group rather than an individual.

**Escuelita:** Literally “Little School”, a term used to refer to a series of EZLN-sponsored events, beginning in August 2013, in which activists from around the world went to live in Zapatista communities across different areas of Chiapas.

**Estado de México:** Mexico State, a federal entity which surrounds the Federal District and incorporates zones such as Chalco, Chimalhuacán, Valle de Chalco, Ciudad Nezahualcoyotl, Texcoco, Atenco and Ecatepec.

**EZLN:** Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (Zapatista Army of National Liberation), a *guerrilla* army that rebelled against the Mexican government in January 1994.

**GATT:** General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, a multilateral international trade agreement created in 1947 through which countries have historically negotiated limits on trade protection, subsidies and tariffs.

**INBA:** Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes (National Institute of Fine Arts): Arts organization founded in 1947 by the Mexican state with a mandate to protect “national cultural heritage”.

**Indígena:** Term used to refer to the peoples inhabiting the Americas since prior to Spanish colonization.

**Indio:** Term for *indígena* commonly used under Spanish colonialism.

**INI:** Instituto Nacional Indigenista (National Indigenist Institute), organization created by the Mexican state in 1948 with the goal of preserving indigenous culture (or a reified notion of it).

**JBG:** Junta de Buen Gobierno (Good Government Council), five decentralized Zapatista authorities created in 2003 and situated in the five *caracoles* located in rural Chiapas.

**La Realidad:** Zapatista *caracol* located in the Lacandon Jungle, Chiapas.

**Las voces:** Las voces rebeldes del otro lado, a compilation album developed in California and Chiapas between 2008 and 2013 in order to support the Zapatista JBGs.

**Mestizo:** Term used to refer to an individual of mixed-race background incorporating both Spanish and indigenous heritage.

**Milpa:** Agricultural smallholding, often used to grow corn or for polyculture.

**NMTs:** New Media Technologies.

**NGO:** Non-Governmental Organization.

**Other Campaign (*Otra Campaña*, or [since 2013] *Sexta*):** Campaign established by the EZLN in 2005 to link together leftist, anti-state political struggles across the world.

**Oventik:** Zapatista *caracol* located in Los Altos, Chiapas.

**Palomazo:** An informal, spontaneous concert, usually held in a restaurant, after which musicians ask the audience for donations.

**PAN:** Partido de Acción Nacional (National Action Party), right-wing, free-market political party in Mexico.

**PRD:** Partido de la Revolución Democrática (Party of the Democratic Revolution), centre-left political party in Mexico.

**PRI:** Partido Revolucionario Institucional (Revolutionary Institutional Party), political party that ruled Mexico for the majority of the twentieth century as well as at the time of writing. Historically a leftist party, but increasingly supportive of neoliberal economic policies, especially since the administration of Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988-1994).

**Pro-Zapatista activist:** Non-*base de apoyo* actor working in support of the EZLN or the Zapatista JBGs.

**Subcomandante Marcos:** Military leader, writer and spokesperson for the EZLN. Thought to be Rafael Sebastian Guillen, UNAM Philosophy graduate of Spanish descent. Also known as “Delegado Cero” and, since 2014, “Subcomandante Galeano”.

**UAM:** Universidad Autónoma de México (Autonomous University of Mexico), a public university with Mexico City campuses in Xochimilco, Iztapalapa and Azcapotzalco.

**UNAM:** Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (National Autonomous University of Mexico), a public university located in the south of Mexico City.

**RCRS:** Red Contra la Represión y por la Solidaridad, nationwide network of activists formed by the EZLN in 2007.

*Rola:* abbreviation of *Rola la lucha zapatista*, compilation album created by CVDC in 2012.

**Zapata, Emiliano:** Leader of the Zapatista Army during the Mexican Revolution of 1910-20. Iconic figure appropriated by the EZLN.

**Zapatismo:** Political worldview associated with the EZLN.

**Zapatista movement:** Social movement, operating across the globe but most concentrated in Mexico, made up of individuals and groups acting in support of the EZLN and the Zapatista JBGs.

**Zócalo:** Central square of a given city.



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Andrew Green

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## INTRODUCTION

*No morirá la flor de la palabra [...] Nuestra palabra, nuestro canto y nuestro grito, es para que ya no mueran más los muertos. Para que vivan luchamos, para que vivan cantamos. Vive la palabra.*

“The flower of the Word will not die [...] Our word, our song and our cry, is so that the dead will no longer die. So that they might live, we fight; so that they might live, we sing. Long live the word.”

(EZLN, Fourth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle, 1996)<sup>1</sup>

In March 2013, pro-Zapatista activist collective Colectivo Azcapotzalco published an article in their magazine *La Voz del Anáhuac* entitled “3 Contingent Definitions from the Free Media Movement: Free Media, Popular Communication and Holes in the System”.<sup>2</sup> This article outlined a pluralist vision of alternative communication within Mexican activist circles built around three categories of action designed to “break the informational siege” imposed by the country’s powerful establishment. The collective defined “Popular Communication” as “everyday communication, person-to-person, the communication of the street”, and said to include “house-to-house visits, informative assemblies, flyering [...] popular theatre, the corridos and songs of popular struggle, dance with themes of struggle [and] stories and poems of struggle”. Meanwhile, “Holes in the System” involved “locating the holes and cracks in the communication channels of the system in which information of struggle can be placed”, including working with “honest and critical journalists” and seeking out “programmes with social content in commercial media”. Finally, “Free Media” was “a tactic based on constructing media of communication from within processes of social struggle”, and involved developing “independent newspapers and magazines, independent publishers, blogs, webpages and informative portals on the Internet, independent community radio [and] community television”. Only combinations of these different strategies, the article suggested, would

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<sup>1</sup> All translations in this dissertation have been made by the author unless otherwise stated.

<sup>2</sup> “3 Definiciones Contingentes Desde El Movimiento De Medios Libres: Medios Libres, Comunicación Popular Y Hoyos En El Sistema”, <http://sexta-azcapotzalco.blogspot.co.uk/2013/03/3-definiciones-contingentes-desde-el.html?spref=fb> (accessed 12-03-15).

prove ultimately effective in an overarching effort to spread information and messages about social struggle.

One of the key points of reference within Colectivo Azcapotzalco's article was the contemporary Zapatista movement, which forms the focus of this study. I examine the use of a medium that this article only briefly mentions, but which contributed significantly to pro-Zapatista communicative activities across Mexico, including those of this collective itself: music. I will look at the use of live and recorded music as a communicative strategy within this social movement from an ethnographic standpoint, paying attention to discourses and practices arising in response to the goal of awareness-raising. My intention is to argue that music, far from being the afterthought it appears to be in this collective's article, formed a crucial part of such strategies of dissemination. Nevertheless, I also suggest that, although in pro-Zapatista circles music was typically ascribed value as a medium for the one-way communication discussed by Colectivo Azcapotzalco, a number of qualities of music that were rarely mentioned in these circles also assumed great significance. Among pro-Zapatista actors, music was implicitly used as locus of "community", as presence within physical space, as manipulator of bodies and emotions, and as commodity.

The Zapatista movement emerged in the wake of an uprising which occurred in Mexico's southernmost state of Chiapas in January 1994 whose key protagonist was the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN). This rebel army was populated almost entirely by indigenous members (Collier and Collier, 2005). In naming themselves "Zapatistas", they harked back to the Mexican Revolution of 1910-20 and the rebel Emiliano Zapata, who had led an army against the government demanding land redistribution with the refrain "land and liberty" (*tierra y libertad*) (Washbrook, 2005: 421-2).<sup>3</sup> Declaring war on the Mexican state, the EZLN launched a series of rapid, audacious attacks on major settlements in Chiapas on January 1 1994, claiming seven towns and cities before being forced back into the countryside by a government counteroffensive, and accepting a ceasefire on January 12 (Collier and Collier, 2005; Washbrook, 2005: 417-21). These attacks were timed to coincide with the date that the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) between Mexico, Canada and the United States came into

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<sup>3</sup> Throughout this dissertation, the term "pro-Zapatista" is used to refer to the movement in support of the EZLN, the Juntas de Buen Gobierno (Good Government Councils or JBGs), and the Zapatista autonomous communities in Chiapas, and the term "Zapatista" should be taken to refer to these autonomous communities, the EZLN and JBGs. Meanwhile, the "Zapatista movement" denotes these two broad groups of people, especially as they unite to form a social movement with an active existence on a national and transnational level, and "Zapatismo" is used in a more abstract sense, to refer to the system or constellation of beliefs, ideologies, and identities associated with this social movement.

effect, establishing neoliberal policies in Mexico and opening up key Mexican markets to US-based businesses.<sup>4</sup> After the ceasefire, the Zapatista uprising became emblematic of an international movement opposing neoliberalism, and the EZLN started to cultivate networks of individuals and groups working in solidarity with its cause both in Mexico and around the world (Collier and Collier, 2005: 452; Brass, 2005: 655-6). It also established a large number of “autonomous communities” in Chiapas (many on land that Zapatista fighters had taken from large landowners during the uprising of January 1994) which claimed to receive no support from municipal, state or federal governments. Instead, these communities established their own systems of governance and institutions of social support, culminating in the creation of five Juntas de Buen Gobierno (Good Government Councils or JBGs) to administrate Zapatista territories in 2003 (Barmeyer, 2009). Crucially, from its inception, one of the key strengths of the EZLN lay in the way that it managed to cultivate ties with the outside world, emphasising “communication and dialogue over authority and force” (Ruggiero, 1998: 7; cf. Gil Olmos, 2014).

I mention Colectivo Azcapotzalco’s article at the start of this dissertation because it provides a useful synthesis of a broader vision of strategic communication which informs the practices of activist musicians on the Mexican alternative Left supporting and participating in the contemporary Zapatista movement. Pro-Zapatista musicians – located both inside and outside Zapatista “autonomous communities” – have long used music as a tool to “communicate” messages about the Zapatista movement’s aims, histories and ideals. As in the vision outlined above by Colectivo Azcapotzalco, pro-Zapatista musicians worked in diverse settings and used a range of media in order to achieve their aims, sometimes implying relationships of compromise and interiority with powerful “mainstream” institutions, but mainly involving rejection of, and exteriority from, them. Despite such apparent diversity, however, almost all of the musicians I spoke to during research considered their activities to form part of what resembled a single, broader pro-Zapatista project – that of “disseminating” or “spreading” the Zapatista “word”. This was, then, no ordinary social movement; rather, it was a *missionary* one. Musical activities within the Zapatista movement were overwhelmingly structured around a discourse of communication that emphasised the importance of “message” over feeling, rhythm,

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<sup>4</sup> I use the term “neoliberalism” here principally to refer to a set of economic policies including reduction in state spending on social care, education and health; privatization of previously nationalized state-provided services; reduction of state investment in nascent industries, typically (and arguably erroneously) labelled “import-substitution industrialization”, in favour of “export-oriented industrialization”; a reduction in taxes on the rich; and the reduction of trade protection (Chang, 1993, 2003). I do not, in general, wish to extend the term into the sociocultural realm, although I accept that some writers do so (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2001).

harmony, or any other value typically associated with music. Before going into further depth about these discourses, however, I wish to root this discussion in scholarly debates about communication.

### **Theories of communication: a discussion**

In this dissertation, I am particularly interested in addressing a series of questions concerning the social implications of using music as a tool of political communication. First, what kinds of musical activities does the goal of “spreading the word” encourage? How do musicians use this overarching goal to inspire compositions and performances? What kinds of material arrangements do pro-Zapatista musicians develop in order to get their voices heard, and how do these arrangements facilitate particular modes of musical production? Second, what narratives or discourses accompany these activities? How, in other words, do pro-Zapatista activists attribute value to music? Third, are there unintended consequences of such communicative activities which do not figure prominently in the dominant discourses of these groups, and how important may we consider them to be? What understanding of the notion of “communication” might be said to be most relevant in this context, outside of emic conceptions of the term? Finally, how, within this milieu, do musicians enact, embody, talk about, and sing about Zapatismo (the ideology associated with the Zapatista movement)? How can musical practice contribute to the affective experience of “Zapatismo” or “Zapatista-ness” in different contexts?

These questions suggest a line of inquiry that intersects with scholarly literature on communication from political, pragmatic and theoretical perspectives. In this section, I start by examining the influential work of communication theorist James W. Carey, before moving on to a more general discussion about the history and future of communication as a subject of scholarly research, and connecting this discussion to approaches to the topic taken in the field of music studies. In *Communication as Culture*, Carey (2009 [1989]) distinguishes between two perspectives on communication, which he terms “transmission” and “ritual” views. According to Carey, the transmission view is the hegemonic communicative logic of the twentieth-century West. He defines transmission as “a process whereby messages are transmitted and distributed in space for the control of distance and people” (13). For the scholar, transmission has a meaning similar to “transportation” (although technological advances since the nineteenth century abstracted



the concept from perceptible physical movement). Associated with both expanding colonialism and Christian evangelization, transmission expands space and consists of, among other things, “persuasion; attitude change; behavior modification; socialization through the transmission of information [and] influence” (33). Modern technologies of transmission, Carey argues, are the (im)material grounding for the creation of the nation-state; they hold countries together as political entities, at the cost of the loss of earlier traditions of orality (4-5).

By contrast, a “ritual view” of communication emphasises communication’s status as a collective endeavour: the creation and maintenance of a common reality (or “culture”). Ritual communication is “directed not toward the extension of messages in space but toward the maintenance of society in time; not the act of imparting information but the representation of shared beliefs” (Carey, 2009: 15). Reiteration, bringing together different times, is favoured by group “sacred ceremonies”, in place of transmission, which brings together different spaces (33). Yet a ritual view goes far deeper than this, using ceremony and ritual as a metaphor to explain the totality of human communication, in which communicative activity is geared towards “the construction and maintenance of an ordered, meaningful cultural world that can serve as a control and container for human action” (33). While communicative media may be understood through both transmission and ritual perspectives (16), the study of communication must not focus simply upon the efficient transmission of data from point A to point B. Rather, it must examine how human interaction constructs, maintains, and alters the matrices in which meaning is suspended (24). Importantly, many communication theorists now reject the transmission model on various grounds. To begin with, it is reductive, failing to take into account the complexities and contingencies of real human communication; it is also impractical, assuming knowledge about human beings’ reception and “decoding” of information that is difficult to achieve (Craig, 1999: 125). Further, it is built upon a dualistic conceptual separation between “travel” and “communication” (and, correspondingly, “material” and “immaterial”) that is more recent, and contingent, than most people realize (Carey, 2009: 14-17). Finally, it is also worth mentioning that the historical focus on transmission in communication studies was largely the result of investment in the discipline by the United States government, which sought to extend its geopolitical influence during the Cold War by developing new means of disseminating propaganda and thus exerting control in areas beyond the direct reach of the US military (Simpson, 1995).

Important themes in contemporary ethnomusicology such as entrainment, musical ritual, and musical intersubjectivities each have epistemologies that presume a particular notion of musical communication (Clayton et al., 2005; Bader and Martin-Iverson, 2014). However, although the notion of music as a medium of communication was explored by early ethnomusicologists such as Merriam (1963, 1964) and Charles Seeger (1962), few in music studies have explicitly brought contemporary communication theory to bear on scholarship concerning performances of and ideas about music (cf. Stockmann, 1991; Attali, 1985). Studies of music that do examine theories of musical communication have often implicitly endorsed the transmission view that many communication theorists now reject (Lull, 1992; Denski, 1992; Goodwin, 1992; McLaughlin, 1970; Jenne, 1984; Agawu, 2008; Cogley, 2008). McLaughlin, in seeking to pinpoint that which music expresses to human beings, ends up speculating about human cognition, a difficult area to research in the humanities and social sciences (1970: 16, 106-8). The same approach – and the same dead end – is apparent in Agawu (2008), who concludes that music is not “a system of communication” – although it “was sometimes pressed into communicative service” (310) – but that, nonetheless, the value of the association between music and communication may be found in the way that it inspires academic debate (representing a somewhat tautological rationale for scholarly activity). In particular, many in music studies have utilized a semiotic approach in which a one-way sender-message-receiver relationship is presupposed and later adjusted to take into account the contingency of communication upon the receiver, usually via a model of “decoding” (Tarasti, 2002: 3). While semiotics can provide a useful language for discussing and processing communicative dynamics uncovered during the course of fieldwork, in this dissertation I move beyond the linear model of communication that this approach tends to imply.<sup>5</sup>

Outside the field of music studies, debates concerning communication have become increasingly rich, and are often founded upon the work of thinkers, like Carey, who break down the sender-message-receiver model. To mention three thinkers whose work has influenced the approach taken in this dissertation, Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of the “dialogic”, Bruno Latour’s “actor-network theory”, and Manuel Castells’ theory of the network society all seek, in distinct ways, to develop an account of

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<sup>5</sup> It is notable that Turino’s (1999, 2008) development of a Peircean semiotic framework in which to analyze musical signification positions symbols as a result of social negotiation, although even here Turino defines (musical) communication as “the transference of intended meaning or information from composer to listener” (2008: 7).

human communication that moves beyond a linear view. In Bakhtin's theory of "dialogism", all utterances are radically contingent upon the contexts in which they emerge, the addressees to which they are directed, and the "speech genres" available for use. It follows that speech is not the product of a single agent, but rather of a web of complex, interconnected relationships of power; thus, it makes little sense to attempt to disentangle any utterance from these contexts (Bakhtin, 1984, 1986). Meanwhile, in Manuel Castells' theory of the network society the sociologist strives to form a holistic vision of social, cultural and political developments under technological conditions that favour networks as an organizational form. While his approach shares, at points, some of the language of transmission – particularly "messages", "codes", and "decoding" – Castells eschews a linear, dualistic view of communication, focusing instead on the broader structures that are being immanently created by human communicative activity. The result is a grandiose theory – whose relation to questions of identity and technology will be covered in greater detail later in this dissertation – that seeks to bridge the microscopic and the macroscopic (Castells, 1996, 1998, 2010). Finally, Bruno Latour seeks to redistribute agency away from the human subject, critiquing the modernist "purification" of human knowledge and the creation of separate categories for enquiry such as "nature" and "culture" or "knowledge" and "power" (1993: 7, 3). The philosopher of science opposes the abstraction of discrete forms of communication for specialized study outside of their contexts, as revealed in the following quote:

When I describe Pasteur's domestication of microbes, I am mobilizing nineteenth-century society, not just the semiotics of a great man's texts [...] Yet rhetoric, textual strategies, writing, staging, semiotics – all these are really at stake, but in a new form that has a simultaneous impact on the nature of things and on the social context, while it is not reducible to one thing or the other. (Latour, 1993: 5)

Notably, Latour highlights the potential of ethnographic research to bring out the holistic complexity of human social and communicative life (1993: 7).

Despite their significant differences, these scholars all coincide in conceiving of human communication as a contextual phenomenon, the dualistic abstraction of which serves the advancement of knowledge very little. This key observation has influenced the emergence of many new areas of study and theoretical observation. Craig's "constitutive metamodel of communication" (1999, 2007) seeks to understand communication in relation to the manners in which it is narrated, conceptualizing "models of communication as different ways of constituting the communication process symbolically for particular purposes" (1999: 126-7). Meanwhile, scholars using the set of research

practices labelled CCO (Communicative Constitution of Organizing; see Vazquéz and Cooren, 2013; Cooren et al., 2011; Stohl and Stohl, 2011; Putnam and Nicotera, 2009, 2010) describe large organizational entities as the product of a plethora of everyday practices of communication. This implies close study of communicative events, and also suggests attention to “[a]mbiguity [and] indeterminacy” in communication, recognizing gaps between intention and outcome (Cooren et al., 2011: 1152). Elsewhere, communication scholar Francois Cooren (2010, 2012) has built upon Bakhtin and Latour’s redistribution of agency beyond the human to discuss ventriloquism or “ventriloquation” as a key cornerstone of interpersonal communication, looking at ways that socially negotiated concepts such as genres of speech, social roles, concepts and professions come to “speak through” us in everyday interactions. Meanwhile, a recent edited volume entitled *Communication Matters: Materialist Approaches to Media, Mobility and Networks* (Packer and Crofts Wiley, 2012) takes a different, yet linked, perspective, seeking in particular to break down the material/immaterial dualist division made in the transmission approach to communication. In order to effect this reimagining “beyond transmission”, Slack (2012: 144) adopts Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of the “assemblage”, as “an intermingling and arrangement of heterogeneous elements – structures, practices, materials, affects, and enunciation”. Using these conceptual underpinnings to emphasise the materiality of communication allows the contributors to this volume to link communication to the social production of space (Crofts Wiley et al., 2012; Gallagher et al., 2012), understand spatiality *and* temporality in terms of materiality and power (Sharma, 2012), and comprehend recent changes in the relations between media and the sensibilities of their users (Hansen, 2012).

In this dissertation, I take as a starting-point scholarship that paints a holistic picture of communication, as the process by which social entities such as groups, networks, organizations and communities are formed, space is socially produced, and power is created, negotiated, and contested. Understanding communication within this framework is not a question of gaining access to the minds of the “sender” or “receiver”, nor of “decoding” messages. Rather, it entails close attention to the formation of relational ties, the organization of activities, and collective interaction during such activities, as well as gaps between discourse and practice that emerge during these practices. In his book *Noise*, Jacques Attali has outlined an approach to music which is reminiscent (or prescient) of the communication theories discussed in the previous paragraph:

Everywhere codes analyze, mark, restrain, train, repress, and channel the primitive sounds of language, of the body, of tools, of objects, of the relations to self and others. All music, any organization of sounds is then a tool for the creation or consolidation of a community, of a totality” (1985: 6).

It still represents a challenge to transfer Attali’s theory into the realm of lived experience. This study seeks to situate music within conversations about communication, and situate communication within conversations about music, thus contributing to our understanding of both. As part of this endeavour, it focuses on a variety of dynamics involved with musical practice used for political communication, in place of a transmission-oriented study focusing on audience apprehension. Such an approach suggests ethnographic research methods, as Latour suggests above. Ethnography can, as Baker points out, “allow the researcher to probe strong, deeply internalized official discourses and unearth internal conflicts and divergent opinions that may be obscured in surveys and official interviews” (2014: 10). As well as discursive conflict, ethnography can also uncover gaps between rhetorical presentation and lived experience. It will become clear to the reader at various points during this dissertation that the understanding of “communication” pursued here often conflicts with the emic discourse concerning communicative “dissemination” found among the pro-Zapatista musicians with whom I carried out research. In other words, although in interviews almost all of my consultants echoed Carey’s “transmission view” and highlighted the importance of “message”, we may understand more about these activities by examining them from other perspectives, incorporating notions of ritual, sound, space, organization and community. Ultimately, it is principally on the basis of ethnography that this approach may be vindicated.

### **Solidarity, music, *palabra* and the EZLN**

In this study I focus on the “Zapatista movement” rather than any of the particular groups that constitute it (such as the EZLN, the JBGs and pro-Zapatista organizations such as Red Contra la Represión y por la Solidaridad). Thomas Olesen identifies three levels on which the Zapatista movement may be studied. First, the micro-level of the movement consists of the EZLN and its mostly indigenous *bases de apoyo* (“support bases”); at the meso-level one may locate the “transnational solidarity network”; and the macro-level is a “transnational field of synergy” not restricted to Zapatismo (Olesen, 2005: 6-7). Olesen suggests that it is only through considering the interrelations between these different levels that we might understand pro-Zapatista networks as a unity (7-8).

Leyva Solano (1998), meanwhile, distinguishes between four levels of this movement. On the first level she places the EZLN and its direct members in Chiapas. On the second is “the central unit of strategic Zapatista alliances which have played a prominent role in the advancement of the EZLN’s aims”, such as NGOs and activist groups working on the ground in Chiapas (47-8). The third consists of “political actors who existed even before the armed conflict and continue to have their own political life” but which contributed to peace negotiations in Chiapas, such as the Catholic Church (47-8). On the fourth are located “political agents who act in international spheres” manoeuvring, in various ways, in support of the Zapatista movement (47-8).

It ought to be recognized, however, that this movement is dynamic and fluid, and that pro-Zapatista actors are not working in relation to a structure or a network, but *create* structures and networks as they respond to a received set of ideas collectively denoted by the word “Zapatismo”. Leyva Solano suggests as much when she states that:

[T]he [new Zapatista movement] is an “imagined community”. The movement’s members will never all know one another, but they constitute an “imagined community” in the sense that they share certain symbolic references, general political goals and, of course, the feeling of belonging to the collective colloquially called *Zapatismo*. (1998: 46, italics in original)

Benedict Anderson’s (1991) influential concept of the nation as “imagined community” precisely understands the nation as a process, the result of ongoing communicative activity. The similarity between Anderson’s perspective and that of Carey (2009), let alone the influence these thinkers had on each other, can hardly be overstated.<sup>6</sup> Leyva Solano’s depiction of the Zapatista movement, then, may be seen to have much in common with the (materialist, ritual, dialogic) perspective on communication outlined in the previous section. That *Zapatismo* may be actively “imagined” also indicates that it may be “performed”, or socially imagined in collective fashion. This, in turn, also implies and opens up the possibility that Zapatista networks and organizations might be constituted by acts of (human and beyond-human) communication.

Notably, these attempts by Leyva Solano and Olesen to define *Zapatismo* structurally strongly reflect the time in which they were written (for instance, the Zapatistas withdrew from peace dialogues with the government in Chiapas in the late 1990s [Speed, 2007: 167-8]), and this social movement has changed much over time. During the early stages of the Zapatista movement, a number of outside groups sought

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<sup>6</sup> The forebear that both figures have in common is Harold Innis (1951).

to provide support for the EZLN within Chiapas. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were particularly influential at this time, playing active roles in development projects located in Zapatista communities, as well as assuming positions of advocacy in favour of the indigenous communities of Chiapas more generally (Bob, 2005: 118). In addition, a large number of activist outsiders, either individually or in collectives, descended on Chiapas in the wake of the uprising and began to involve themselves in the movement, assuming a variety of roles. While some directly sought to join the EZLN in order to physically fight for the cause, many ended up working for NGOs as part of development projects, or conducting human rights observation in Zapatista territories (Barmeyer, 2009: 136-74, 215-31; Speed, 2002: 209-11). At this time, a mode of “solidarity” emerged outside of Chiapas which involved fundraising or providing other forms of material support for Zapatista institutions, as well as raising consciousness about the nascent Zapatista movement (Barmeyer, 2009: 145). Nonetheless, in recent years, especially after the Sixth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle (2005) the EZLN placed increased emphasis on “autonomy” and the economic independence of Zapatista communities, suggesting a greater role for “awareness-raising” activities within pro-Zapatista solidarity. My research between 2012 and 2015 took place at this historical moment. With this dissertation, I investigate ways that an influential ideology of *palabra* (“word”) – linked to practices aiming to effect change through spreading political messages – pervaded pro-Zapatista circles, affecting modalities of music-making in these settings.

The phrase *difundir la palabra* (“spread the word”), along with others with similar meanings used in parallel with it such as *llevar la palabra* (“carry the word”), *dar a conocer* (“make known”) and *transmitir el mensaje* (“transmit the message”), constituted a key structuring concept for pro-Zapatista musical practice in the areas in which I conducted research. The EZLN’s Fourth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle (1996) evinces a complex and occasionally cryptic use of the term “word” (at points resembling Carey’s notion of “culture”), stating that enemies of Zapatismo “want to take our history so that our word and ourselves will be forgotten” and that “[w]hen we were silent, we died, without the word we did not exist”.<sup>7</sup> Nonetheless, among the groups with whom I conducted research “word” and “message” were commonly elided, highlighting a different interpretation of such rhetoric, and recalling long-standing debates about the relationship between music and text. In the mythology of ancient Greece, some

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<sup>7</sup> Indeed, the EZLN’s use of the term “word” in this communiqué evinces many similarities with the usage of the term among the Concheros in Mexico City studied by Rostas (2009).

storytellers made a binary distinction between Apollonian rationality and Dionysian pleasure in music, in which human experience was bifurcated between ideals of “reason” and “beauty” on the one hand and “emotion” and “affect” on the other (Higgins, 1992: 631). As Nietzsche observed in the nineteenth century, this dichotomy was expressed in musical terms; Apollo was typically associated with the kithara, a stringed instrument used to accompany poetry, while Dionysius performed on the aulos, a “double-flute-like instrument that drove its listeners to revelry if not madness” (632). This connection between “reason” and “text” in musical performance continued to be relevant in Europe throughout the Middle Ages. At the Council of Trent (1545-63) high-ranking members of the Catholic Church debated the place of music in church services, many valuing the communication of religious messages among congregations and advocating music composed “in such a way that the words may be clearly understood by all” (Monson, 2002: 11). Among some who attended the Council, this emphasis on textual intelligibility manifested itself in attempts to remove polyphonic music from church liturgy (8). More recently, many musicians in the American folk movement of the 1950s and 1960s emphasised the “plain presentation” of political messages in their songs, and performed in simple, direct ways in order to produce music as “political propaganda” (Frith, 1981: 162-3). As the reader will discover, there are many parallels between these discourses and those of participants in contemporary Zapatismo.

Nonetheless, the discourse of “word” has limited explanatory potential for pro-Zapatista musicianship in practice. It is notable that most of the pro-Zapatista activists and musicians studied in this dissertation encountered opportunities to discern the fruits of their labour very rarely. More often than not, “reception” was a process they themselves had to imagine. In this gap, music can be assigned value in a number of ways, besides its status as a medium for the transmission of messages. Leyva Solano’s quotation above highlights the importance of “symbolic references” and “the feeling of belonging to the collective colloquially called Zapatismo”, thus suggesting an important role for shared artistic practices such as music in the construction and perpetuation of Zapatismo. As well as a symbolic medium – although one that is not reducible to “symbols” in the semiotic sense – music is a powerful means for the perpetuation of feeling, affect, and emotion (Biddle and Thompson, 2013). Moreover, as argued by Grossberg (1992) among others, affect is a highly political topic, and the perpetuation of particular types of affect in music is the subject of much political debate and contention. Indeed, this dissertation may be read in the context of a broader literature on art, music and social movements,



especially that located within the recent so-called “emotional turn” in the social sciences.<sup>8</sup> The near ubiquity of music within political activities suggests that it should be taken very seriously; as Roy bluntly puts it, “[s]ocial movements do culture” (2010: 234). Eyerman and Jamison highlight the ways that social movements become the site for an “active reworking of cultural resources, both an inventive, creative work of artistic experimentation and a critical, reflective work of evaluation” (1998: 10-11). Likewise, in a study of music’s role in social movements in the mid-twentieth-century United States, Roy (2010) traces changes over time in the way music was used within these movements. While the Old Left in the wake of the Wall Street Crash of 1929 sought to create a popular folk song with mass appeal, the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s used music as a medium for the face-to-face enactment of togetherness; “blacks and whites joining arms and singing together” (2). Indeed, it is relevant to ask how, in these contexts, changing visions regarding music’s role within processes of political transformation correlated to developments in musical style.

Mattern (1998) provides a useful framework through which to understand the dynamics of musical practice within social movements, and one which is (like the work of James W. Carey) built upon the links made by American philosopher John Dewey between the terms “common”, “communication”, and “community” (cf. Dewey, 1916: 4). For Mattern, music can function as “the social glue for creating and maintaining diverse communities”, and form a medium for the enactment of a type of collective political activity that he calls “acting in concert” (1998: 6). He divides acting in concert into three categories: confrontational, deliberative and pragmatic (25). The first of these, confrontational action, creates clear in-group and out-group dynamics, and “occurs when members of one community use musical practices to resist or oppose another community” (25). Meanwhile, Mattern’s second category, deliberative action, involves the use of “musical practices to debate [a group’s] identity and commitments or when members of different communities negotiate mutual relations” (28). Finally, a pragmatic mode of “acting in concert” seeks to build bridges between different groups and communities, and then to “use music to promote awareness of shared interests and to organize collaborative efforts to address them” (30). This model provides a lens through

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<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Marcus (2002) for an argument in favour of the political importance of emotions informed by neuroscience. Alexander (2010) also moves beyond the rational choice model by emphasising the emotional, performative, and symbolic dynamics of political campaigns. Mayer et al. (2002) focus on the ways that social movements strategically mobilize identity in order to gain support. In geography, see, for example, Henderson (2008), Thien (2005, 2011), Anderson and Harrison (2006), and Pile (2010). For recent studies of the politics of affect in music see Kassabian (2013) and Stokes (2010).

which Mattern can evaluate the success of different attempts at political mobilization through music; thus, for instance, he posits that the failure of the *nueva canción* movement in Chile to contribute to a leftist consensus prior to General Augusto Pinochet's bloody 1973 coup could have been averted had participants acted deliberately and pragmatically, instead of confrontationally (52).

Mattern's tripartite conceptual division opens up many avenues through which music might be seen as "political" beyond and outside of the transmission of messages. Nonetheless, this division seems inappropriate to address two key factors: first, the sheer variety and unpredictability with which music may be considered to have significant political effects, rendering typology an unsuitable descriptive instrument; second, the possibility for unintended or unrecognized consequences of overtly political music. There are a multiplicity of ways in which music can contribute to the health of social movements besides the transmission of messages. As well as communicating messages to audiences, music constituted an important medium within which the "feeling" and frames of reference of political concepts such as Zapatismo were formed and contested. As an activity in which sameness, difference, collectivity and individuality may be negotiated, music can be understood not only as an interesting and important lens through which to view the social dynamics of activist communities, but also the very enactment and embodiment of them. Finally, I suggest that the fact that music is an almost inescapably social, expressive, affective and bodily activity makes attempts to direct it towards an instrumental communicative purpose especially worthy of study. In focusing on "message", pro-Zapatista musicians risked neglecting these multifaceted aspects of musical performance that were, nonetheless, highly important. By contrast, this study highlights ways that the affective, social and spatial aspects of musical performance impacted upon the use of music as a tool for communicating messages, stories and information.

### **Understanding Zapatismo through music**

Ever since the 1994 uprising, music has been a prominent mode of expression within the Zapatista movement across Mexico, as well as in other important sites for pro-Zapatista activism such as Los Angeles. Be it at large-scale rock concerts at which performers manifest their support for the EZLN or at small-scale meetings during which the "Himno Zapatista" (Zapatista Hymn) is sung to mark the beginning or end of proceedings, music

is a constant feature of Zapatista activist practice. Nonetheless, little has been written, until the time of writing, about music-making within this movement. Heau-Lambert and Giménez (1997, 2004) note the existence of a “Zapatista songbook”, looking both at the production of music within Zapatista communities and the composition, by outsider musicians with Zapatista sympathies, of songs in support of the movement. De la Garza (2013) focuses in greater detail on the “neo-Zapatista revolutionary corridos” composed and performed by Zapatista musicians, highlighting the ways that these songs narrate episodes from the movement’s history. These authors broadly follow a framework of literary analysis, and deal little with the kinds of questions that would interest an ethnographer. The contributions of Benjamin Anaya (1999, 2013<sup>9</sup>) are somewhat different: Anaya writes from a position of experience as a musician who participated in and helped to organize pro-Zapatista musical events in the 1990s, and conducted a number of interviews with key figures in this scene. Nonetheless, in aiming to provide an almost exhaustive catalogue of pro-Zapatista musical activity during the 1990s in particular, these short books eschew the detailed, focused analysis associated with ethnographic study. They are, however, valuable contributions to the topic of this dissertation, which constitutes the first ethnographic study of musical practices across Zapatista networks in Mexico.<sup>10</sup>

This dissertation is constructed around the proposition that we may gain meaningful insights about the Zapatista movement by studying the music produced by participants in it. Pro-Zapatista networks are complex phenomena with an enormous spatial and social reach. They attract people from highly varied social backgrounds, and the set of values associated with the Zapatista movement appeal to people of many beliefs and none: atheists, anarchists, evangelical Christians, socialists, Marxists, feminists, vegetarians and liberation theology Catholics, to name but a few categories. Those inhabiting this movement’s spiritual “home” in the autonomous communities of Chiapas typically live rural lifestyles that, in many instances, may be only indirectly impacted by recently developed technologies of communication, and in which the organization of daily life is still highly dependent on agricultural and climatic cycles. Meanwhile, the

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<sup>9</sup> For full disclosure, it should be stated that I collaborated on the translation of Anaya’s 2013 book *Rebel Soundtrack: Zapatista Music*.

<sup>10</sup> It ought to be noted that both Perez-Torres (2000) and Pedelty (2004) also briefly discuss music and Zapatismo within the contexts of the United States and Mexico City respectively. The latter’s perspective on this topic is particularly relevant, as it is situated within a broader ethnography on music and politics in the 1990s in Mexico City (Pedelty, 2004: 249-74). Elsewhere, Coutiño Soriano (2014) provides an account of pro-Zapatista solidarity concerts in the 1990s that covers much of the same ground as Anaya (1999, 2013). Finally, Elijah Wald includes an illuminating discussion of “Zapatista minstrel” Andrés Contreras in his book *Narvocorrido* (2001: 213-30).

majority of the movement's supporters live in cities, are frequent travellers, follow "metropolitan" lifestyles in which time is strictly regulated by capital, and are often among the first to embrace new technologies of communication. The Zapatista movement, then, is highly varied, covering a range of distinct social, political and economic contexts. Recently, Kruger and Trandafoiu have highlighted the potential for "musics in transit", especially that set in motion by processes of tourism and migration, to "establish new connections and adopt new 'traditions', marked by multiplicity and multimodality", as well as processes of deterritorialization and reterritorialization (2014: 3, 22). It follows that a highly mobile and diverse area of human social life such as music can act as a suitable opening through which to critically listen to Zapatismo.

This study, therefore, may be understood to narrate a particular history and geography of Zapatismo through sound. As such, it provides an opportunity to consider some of the diverse ways in which the Zapatista movement has been represented, many of which are recorded in Mark T. Berger's 2001 article "Romancing The Zapatistas: International Intellectuals and the Chiapas Rebellion". As Berger observes, scholarly characterizations of the Zapatista movement vary hugely. Thus, for example, Gossen (1994) highlighted the movement's Mayan indigenous identity, seeking to contextualize Zapatismo through an understanding of different types of souls within the Tzotzil language that form the self (*ch'unel*, "individual spirit", and *chanul*, "animal spirit"). Petras (1997) and Veltmeyer (1997) take a slightly different perspective, positioning Zapatismo as part of an international peasant movement that includes the Landless Workers' Movement in Brazil, and which is strongly politically influenced by "Marxist analysis" as well as "Indian practice" (Petras, 1997: 37-8). For Roger Burbach, meanwhile, the Zapatista uprising represented "a postmodern political movement", "an attempt to move beyond the politics of modernity", in which "bottom-up" political change was attempted and the traditional divide between communism and liberal capitalism rejected (1994: 113). This viewpoint was fiercely contested by Daniel Nugent (1995), who argued that Zapatismo had much in common with modern, and even pre-modern, modes of organization and thinking:

It is difficult to see how a rebel army of peasants, aware of itself as the product of five hundred years of struggle, that quotes from the Mexican constitution to legitimate its demand that the president of Mexico immediately leave office, that additionally demands work, land, housing, food, health, education, independence, liberty, democracy, justice, and peace for the people of Mexico, can be called a "postmodern political movement". How can the EZLN move beyond the politics of modernity when their vocabulary is so patently modernist and their practical organization so

emphatically pre-modern? (Nugent, 1995: 131)

Other scholars understand Zapatismo in entirely different terms. Gallaher and Froehling (2002) characterize the EZLN as a deeply nationalist organization comparable to the US Patriot Movement. Rao, meanwhile, highlights what he perceives to be the Zapatistas' "cosmopolitan sensibility" (2010: 154). Finally, Legorreta Díaz (1998) and Estrada Saavedra (2007) both highlight the religious element of Zapatismo, looking at the ways that the history of liberation theology in Chiapas facilitated the emergence of the empowered indigenous, Catholic subjects that were to later fight for the EZLN.

I am not interested in deciding which of these writers is "right" and which is "wrong"; after all, while it is a worthwhile exercise to attempt to understand contemporary political occurrences and organizations according to received terminology, the Zapatista movement is a complex phenomenon and has no "radical essence" that positions it definitively in one category or another. It is important, however, that despite the great variety of ideas that have emerged concerning what Zapatismo is, nowhere is this category's existence itself subject to contestation. That is, all appear to agree that there is such a thing as "Zapatismo" which forms a coherent entity: in other words, Zapatismo has "entativity" (Cooren et al., 2011: 1156). Building upon this observation, I seek to analyze which of the categories that collectively contribute to this (perceived and experienced) "Zapatista-ness" become activated by musical performances, and how these categories relate to particular contexts. This endeavour may be exemplified by lyrical analysis of a song performed by a Zapatista band from rural Chiapas:

Hace tiempo que vivimos explotados	We've been exploited for a long time
[...]	
Explotados por todos los poderosos	Exploited by all the powerful ones
Nosotros, los indígenas de Chiapas	We, the indigenous people of Chiapas
Levantamos para pedir nuestros derechos	Rise up to demand our rights
Levantamos en contra de la explotación	Rise up to oppose exploitation
Hace mas de 500 años sin libertad	More than 500 years without freedom
Hoy es tiempo que el pueblo se defienda	Now, it's time for the people to defend itself
Con las armas en la mano	With weapons in hand
Por honor a nuestra Patria	Out of honour for the Fatherland
Vamos todos, campesinos y obreros	Come all, peasants and workers
Vamos todos, todos juntos por luchar	Come all, together to fight
Por una Patria, por una Patria mas justa	For a more just Fatherland
Vamos todos a luchar por un mundo nuevo	Come all, to fight for a new world

("Obreros y campesinos" [Workers and Peasants], Grupo Nuevo Amanecer San Juan de la Libertad)

These lyrics activate many of the different categories through which scholars have sought to understand Zapatismo, principally indigeneity (“500 years without freedom”), the working class (“peasants and workers”), “the people” and the nation (that is, the “Fatherland”). It makes significant omissions (such as references to religious belief) and links certain actions to particular categories or identities – for instance, in this song, “exploitation” is suffered by *indígenas*, peasants and workers, while “rising up” involves taking up arms. What is most notable about this song is the way that it brings together different categories of identity to collectively “fight for a new world”. This effect is achieved in part by the lyrical construction of a common “other” – the “powerful ones” that exploit the “people”, the plural subject of “Obreros y campesinos”. Concomitantly, it also implies a universal “we”, temporarily making of Zapatismo the sum of its parts. The lyrical construction of these relations thus suggests questions about the role of musical practice in creating possibilities for the enactment of such togetherness.

To focus purely on lyrics, however, would be to miss much of the referential complexity of songs such as this one. “Obreros y campesinos” is written in the corrido style, exhibiting features such as octosyllabism and a vocal line that moves in step and is harmonized at a distance of a third (see Chapter One). Performing in this style creates an indexical link to the oppositional, poetic corridos of the Mexican Revolution of 1910-20, connecting contemporary Zapatismo to its perceived roots in the peasant rebellion led by Emiliano Zapata during this period. This connection, in turn, helps create legitimacy for the former party by association with a historical revolutionary moment which still provokes deep nostalgia and pride among many Mexicans. Musical indexicality (see Turino, 2008: 8-10) can work in many complex ways that, for researchers, are only accessible through deep engagement with particular cultures. Across Spanish-speaking Latin America in the twentieth century, certain genres of music have come to be identified with revolutionary politics. This tendency is exemplified by *nueva canción*, a continent-wide folk movement which drew from indigenous musical traditions and emerged in 1960s Chile (where socialist President Salvador Allende declared in 1970 that “there can be no revolution without song”) (Tumas-Serna, 1992; Morris [Nancy], 2014: 20-29) and was often accompanied by analogies between musical instruments and firearms (Marsh, 2010). (Both of these tropes were to subsequently re-emerge in artistic and musical practice within the Zapatista movement.) In other Latin American settings, genres such as bossa nova, samba, rock, and rap have emerged as legitimate means to express dissent (Trece, 1997, 2000).

The enduring presence of particular genres of music in Latin American oppositional politics suggests attention to the colloquial connotation of “ritual”, in conjunction with Carey’s (2009) more elaborate use of the term. That is, the notion of music as a ritualized, habitual feature of protest praxis may be just as useful as that of music as a vehicle for political messages. In this study, therefore, I aim both to reflect the complexity of moments of musical co-presence and exchange in which different understandings of Zapatismo may be privileged or omitted, and to connect the musical representation of this contested concept with a continent-wide legacy of political song.

### **Methodology**

The principal methodology used in this dissertation is ethnography, consisting of observation (sometimes participatory, sometimes not) and over 150 open-ended interviews which often took the form of exploratory conversations with my consultants concerning musical practices and political beliefs. This research was conducted in three key areas – Mexico City, Chiapas, and (for a shorter time) Los Angeles – and was divided into three trips: one from June to July 2012; another from October 2012 to October 2013; and a final visit to Mexico from May to August 2015. Often, these conversations opened up many more questions than we had time to address or contemplate; thus, on many occasions, I sought to follow up on these questions at a later stage, either in interviews or with more informal conversations. In addition, I made many recordings, both acoustic and video, of live performances of music, filled four notebooks with field notes, and took many photographs of the venues in which these performances were taking place. These research methods were the foundation for Chapters Three to Seven of this dissertation. In these chapters, I aim to produce a “thick description” (Geertz, 1994) of the practices of pro-Zapatista musicians, using ethnographic methodologies to peer beneath the surface of these practices, understand the motivations, beliefs and self-perceptions that drive these musicians to action, and experience the communicative dynamics at play during these activities more directly.

While “thick” ethnography must form the base of any inquiry into human social life, however, it might not be suitable for all topics of research. Kruger and Trandafoiu, introducing a study of “musics in transit under post-global conditions”, state the following:

It is perhaps safe to say that ethnography alone no longer suffices [...] Historical research alongside ethnography can serve as the methodological tools of choice in this case, yet these may

also be complemented by cartography, semiotic analysis, performer-observations, statistical analysis, virtual observation, and social media monitoring, in short, multimodal research. (2014: 25)

Since my object of study in this dissertation is highly dynamic, fluid, and mobile, it followed that the methodology used to study it, while having ethnography as its base, should also utilize more multimodal methods when appropriate. These issues emerge in Chapter Seven, in which I employ some “virtual observation” to investigate two pro-Zapatista compilation albums, *Las voces rebeldes del otro lado* and *Rola la lucha zapatista*. In addition, in Chapter Three I conduct musical analysis in order to accompany and complement ethnographic research in a restaurant in Chiapas.

Most notably, in researching music produced in Zapatista communities themselves for Chapters One and Two, a pragmatic and multimodal approach to research was made necessary by circumstance. Although I made several efforts to do so, it was difficult to gain any access to Zapatista autonomous communities in order to carry out ethnographic research. Such access can, at the time of writing, be granted only by one of the five Zapatista JBGs, and has been given to few people since the turn of the millennium. For a project to be approved, one has to travel to one of the JBGs and ask for a meeting, a request which may or may not be denied. After making a petition in this meeting with the JBG, the petition undergoes a time-consuming process of community consultation before being approved or rejected. On one occasion during my research, I joined a small team of people to put together a proposal for a recording project in Zapatista territory; however, having made a long journey in order to put our proposal to one JBG, we did not receive a response. Further, during our meeting, we were told that due to ongoing preparations for the 2013 Zapatista Escuelita (“Little School”, an event introduced in detail below), there was little time for any Zapatista community to take on new projects. This was one of several such frustrating and ultimately fruitless encounters.

Nevertheless, I found that it was possible to use other means to outline histories of music-making in Zapatista communities in a more tentative fashion. Chapters One and Two, which both address this theme, follow the pragmatic research methods utilized by Estrada Saavedra (2007) in his history of the Zapatista movement, and also have much in common with those deployed by Baker (2014) in his study of the Venezuelan government-run social music program El Sistema. In these studies, research is explored at the margins of opaque social entities in order to illuminate them. Estrada Saavedra, for instance, interviewed a large number of former Tojolabal members of the EZLN, and paints a highly revealing portrait of the organization from its creation in 1983 until the



2000s. For these two chapters, I conducted interviews with a number of former members of the EZLN and Zapatistas from rural Chiapas who had migrated to nearby cities. These individuals' perspectives were highly valuable, and sometimes critical of the EZLN, while maintaining sympathy for the organization's aims. Many had suffered greatly during the violence of 1994 and used these interviews as an opportunity to talk about their experiences of this conflict, in what (I hope) may have acted as a form of catharsis. In addition, I amassed a large collection of compact discs produced by Zapatista ensembles during my time in Chiapas, which allowed me to develop a perspective on the development of Zapatista song at different periods in the movement's history. Playing some of these songs to my ex-Zapatista consultants proved a particularly rewarding exercise, awakening memories in many of an era for which they still harboured great nostalgia. Finally, analysis of some of the Zapatistas' own material has helped to complement this picture, particularly with a number of documentaries produced by Zapatista radio station Radio Insurgente, and the textbooks created for the 2013 Zapatista Escuelita. Only by using these multimodal research methods, in a spirit of pragmatism, could I write Chapters One and Two.

I used two means of gaining consent for participation in my study. The first was a consent form in Spanish, which I would generally offer to consultants prior to interviews (see Appendix 1). It asks consultants to confirm their participation in my project and declare themselves satisfied with the explanation given to them about its contents and purpose, requests permission to use their real names, and – with awareness of the violent manner in which the Mexican state was capable of treating those critical of it – affirms consultants' right to withdraw from this project entirely should circumstances change. I had to take into account the strong possibility, however, that these forms would be unsuitable for some consultants, such as those without high levels of literacy, who spoke little Spanish, or who felt uncomfortable signing a form for other reasons. Thus, I also gained consultants' consent by asking them the same questions as those posed in the consent form just prior to interviews and recording their responses.

### **Ethical reflections**

This study is not simply the “product of research”; rather, it is a fixed point in an ongoing personal journey that began in 2007, when I first visited Mexico. While volunteering in a deprived area of Valle de Chalco, Estado de México, my host charity organized a visit to

Chiapas to show my group of British volunteers the projects it had been running there. On this trip, we stayed in a rural village located in the heart of the Chiapas jungle that lacked a supply of clean water, and learned about the recent history of the state, the Zapatista uprising, and the disastrous economic effects of the 1994 NAFTA treaty on Mexico's agricultural sector. Both my experiences volunteering in Valle de Chalco and this trip to Chiapas revealed to me a world of injustice and poverty from which I had been largely shielded during my upbringing in the East of England. It was largely as a result of reflection on these "conscientizing" (Freire, 1970) experiences that I chose, after completing my undergraduate degree, to take a postgraduate degree in Rural Development rather than pursue further studies in composition. During this course, I rediscovered the Zapatistas in an academic context, and was drawn back to Mexico, and Chiapas, to study for a doctorate. From the very beginning, therefore, my interest in this subject matter was rooted in experience, as well as a personal sense of social injustice.

Partly as a result of this background, during my doctoral studies in both Mexico and London, I often found myself situated somewhere between "researcher" and "activist", hoping that circumstance would not bring these categories into tension with one another. Some of my most precious memories from Mexico result from having temporarily discarded the former category. Although Zapatista communities are difficult to access for the purposes of academic research, they can be very welcoming to activists, something I discovered as one of the 2,000 activists who stayed in Zapatista territory for almost a week as part of the 2013 Zapatista Escuelita. Participation in the Escuelita allowed me to gain a far more personal insight into the local dynamics of Zapatista life than that afforded by my interviews. Elsewhere, I found my status as a "researcher" affected in a personal manner by my identity as "activist", especially in Mexico City, where many activist musicians were often struggling to make an impact on transient, inattentive audiences. If this dissertation paints a sometimes critical picture of these musicians' awareness-raising activities, it is from a position of sympathy with their aims. Indeed, since the government of current President Enrique Peña Nieto (2012-) chose to "solve" Mexico's problems with a public relations strategy designed to stop negative news about Mexico being reported in the national or international press, the dissemination of information about state-sponsored mass murder, torture and intimidation of protestors in the country has taken on renewed importance and has occupied much of my attention as an activist in London.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> See Vite Pérez (2015) and <http://narcosphere.narconews.com/notebook/bill-conroy/2013/11/mexican->

During my research I also found time to engage in activities that can be categorized as “applied” research. As already outlined, some of these activities were proposals rejected by Zapatista JBGs. Nonetheless, as described in Chapter Seven, I also participated in independent media collective Radio Zapatista’s endeavour to create a physical compact disc of their compilation album *Las voces rebeldes del otro lado*, which is discussed in Chapter Seven of this dissertation. This activity gave me a particular insight into the ways that pro-Zapatista activists weighed up a number of pragmatic considerations concerning whether to raise awareness or economic capital, and how to avoid the charge that they were making money from the Zapatista image. It also gave me the opportunity to link together my activities as “researcher” and “activist” across continents, promoting this album in the United Kingdom at awareness-raising events, and leading me to reflect upon my own position within this transnational movement. Since 1994, researchers have played a key role in drawing attention to and, ultimately, supporting the Zapatista movement; they are mobile, relatively wealthy and highly educated actors without whom Zapatismo would be very different. As this episode indicates, I was no exception. In fact, it became clear to me on several occasions that some of my pro-Zapatista activist consultants lent value to my work in the same language as to their own, as another means through which the “Zapatista word” could be “spread”. From one perspective, then, this dissertation is part of a “feedback loop” of political communication, itself reflecting the same interactional patterns that I discuss within it.

Moreover, these experiences have brought me to reflect more deeply on the ethics of ethnographic research, and my own position within the research “field”. An increasing number of researchers, both within anthropology (and related disciplines such as ethnomusicology) and in other disciplines of the social sciences, now recognize that the figure of the “objective observer” is – or, optimistically, was – the self-interested result of a great deal of work of self-erasure on the part of the researching subject (Haraway, 1988). Further, especially in ethnographic studies, the researcher’s institutional position gives them great power to represent their research subjects, placing the latter in a potentially vulnerable position (cf. Said, 1985). Among many, therefore, recognition of the often hierarchical power relations between researcher and researched has given way to acceptance of the impossibility of withdrawing from these relations and, therefore, of the imperative to use research in a proactive ethical manner (Scheper-Hughes, 1995). However, such an endeavour is beset by what some may see as a paradox: while we must

be well-informed about a situation in order to act ethically within it, “activist research” may lead to “politically induced analytical closure” which stymies further attempts to achieve understanding (Hale, 2006: 101). Moreover, what is deemed to be ethical behaviour varies tremendously across societies (Graeber, 2001: 36-43; Strathern, 2004: 11-16). While there are no easy solutions to these problems, it is invaluable to openly and honestly engage with them.

I was often confronted with ethical dilemmas reflecting these debates during the course of my research. Suspicion of the researcher’s “gaze” was particularly acute in Los Angeles, where I stayed for three weeks in Spring 2013. In this setting, one musician I got to know expressed a concern to me that their community be protected from critical research that I might carry out; others were suspicious that I might be a spy, with one suggesting that even were I not to be, my research would unwittingly provide intelligence that benefited the government. (I have every sympathy for these suspicions in light of Latino communities’ experiences with the Los Angeles Police Department [LAPD], which has a long history of infiltrating Chicano activist groups [cf. Chávez, 2002].) While it is relatively straightforward to respond to concerns that research data not be misused – researchers have an ethical obligation to ensure, through various means, that consultants are not disadvantaged or compromised by their participation in research – the other charge, concerning research “critique”, is more difficult to address, since thinking critically is indispensable for any researcher.

This issue has been thoughtfully discussed by Charles Hale in an exploration of tensions between “activist research” and “cultural critique” in anthropological practice (2006). Faced with a reality in which “positivist” research is simultaneously a pragmatic necessity for advocacy for subaltern or disempowered peoples and a practice that is, in itself, insufficient for the interest of these peoples, Hale suggests the following:

Rather than attempt to disentangle these two modes of analysis, the activist researcher must do both: deploy positivist social science methods and subject them to rigorous critique while acknowledging with acceptance the cognitive dissonance that results. (2006: 113)

For Hale, it is in embracing these tensions – even at the cost of coherence – that research can be truly empowered to work ethically (2006: 115). Such tensions were a constant presence during my fieldwork. On the one hand, faced with the challenge to “critique”, it is vital to respond by reaffirming the importance of thorough, critical fieldwork as a means of understanding the ways that people negotiate particular situations. Several chapters of this dissertation paint, at certain moments, a critical picture of some of my

consultants' activities which I hope will be tempered by an understanding of the restrictive contexts in which they operated. On the other hand, as noted, this dissertation itself may be positioned as part of the project of "spreading the word" which was, for many consultants, an empowering and vital contribution to the Zapatista movement.<sup>12</sup> Just as the topic of this study is communication, so communication may constitute a standpoint from which this research may be vindicated.

Another manner of responding to the tensions outlined by Hale has emerged in the work of David Graeber. Graeber argues that "the use of ethnography by European colonial governments is something of an anomaly", and that, in broader historical perspective, "[p]eriods of great ethnographic curiosity have tended to be periods of rapid social change and at least potential revolution" (2005: 200). There is an important slippage here between professional "ethnography" and a more informal "ethnographic curiosity", which could mean the work routinely performed by people in low social situations: "Servants, hirelings, slaves, secretaries, concubines, kitchen workers – anyone dependent on the whims of someone living in a different moral or cultural universe is, for obvious reasons, constantly trying to figure out what that person is thinking" (200). Positioning "ethnographic curiosity" as a fundamentally subaltern practice allows us to rethink ethical ethnography as a process of standing shoulder-to-shoulder with individuals as they act within networks of power relations. This may only work, however, as "a form of auto-ethnography – in the sense of examining movements to which one has, in fact, made some kind of commitment" (200). Only from this committed activist standpoint, then, may meaningful cultural critique be conducted.

It is at this point that my own background – as volunteer and activist, as well as researcher – may become truly significant. First, it may lend a personal perspective from which to perceive the "constrained agency" that activists and politically engaged musicians encounter in the course of their activities (Hesmondhalgh, 2013: 40). Second, it provides a platform through to cultivate sustained engagement with the communities involved, and thus reach a greater awareness about the possible consequences of research in the "field". This is to open up, rather than close down, an ethical debate, since this dissertation focuses on a diverse range of people with perspectives and interests that differ to varying degrees. Nonetheless, I hope that this piece of research might contribute to a valuable discussion about the difficulties and disjunctions associated with "communication" (in a broad sense of the term) within transnational social movements,

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<sup>12</sup> Indeed, Hale characterizes dissemination as a key component of activist research (2001: 14).

and open up routes through which they might nonetheless be cherished as productive factors in the achievement of shared objectives.

### **Chapter outline**

This dissertation is arranged into two parts: Part One, which is focused on Chiapas, and Part Two, which concentrates on Mexico City. Part One, consisting of Chapters One to Three, traces Zapatista-authored music as it is performed in different settings within the broader sociocultural context of Chiapas. Thus, Chapter One builds on existing scholarship concerning the “neo-Zapatista corrido” to put forward a history of the emergence of Zapatista song during the EZLN’s clandestine period between 1983 and 1994, following a methodology not dissimilar to that outlined by Estrada Saavedra (2007) in his important history of the organization. Drawing from the field of genre studies, in particular the work of Mikhail Bakhtin and Richard Bauman, I argue that Zapatista song, as represented by the music of Comandante David, presented considerable hybridity between the liturgical music associated with the Catholic Church and the revolutionary corridos that were most associated with the EZLN. The implications of this argument for “communication” and “community”, then, are significant. While the *prima facie* purpose of these songs was the dissemination of messages and stories encouraging armed struggle as a solution to the problem of injustice and oppression, these songs’ hybridity may have communicated something less overt: that a majority of the EZLN’s members always perceived its struggle to be simultaneously religious and political. Continuing the focus of Chapter One on the music produced in Zapatistas communities, Chapter Two examines the case of Zapatista recording projects that emerged after the 1994 uprising, concentrating on a music label created in 2002 entitled Producciones Radioinsurgente. Taking as a starting-point the claim made by this label to be the “official voice of the EZLN”, in this chapter I analyze Producciones Radioinsurgente as a representational institution whose stated aim was the dissemination of messages and stories about Zapatismo. I highlight the ways that, in this context, Producciones Radioinsurgente was used as a means of mediation between the Zapatistas and their supporters and allies, facilitating a dialogic mode of musical expression in which Zapatista musicians began to perform in an idiom already identified with the pan-Latin-American political Left. Therefore, in this chapter I posit that we should use the example of Producciones Radioinsurgente as an opportunity to recognize the ways that Zapatista actors, rather than

providing privileged access to some “authentic” indigenous Other, play with self-representation in their interactions with the outside world. Finally, in Chapter Three, employing observational ethnographic fieldwork as my methodological base, I look at performances of this body of song in commercial spaces in San Cristóbal de Las Casas, a city hosting a tourist economy with a thriving live music scene. Here, Zapatista revolutionary songs were performed in a restaurant with ideological links to the Zapatista movement, bringing about a tension between the strategic pro-Zapatista goal of the performers – who sought to use these songs to “raise awareness” about the Zapatista movement – and the commercial imperatives to provide background music to complement the atmospheric profit-making strategy of the space. In this chapter I link the use of music in this setting to an ongoing process of so-called “gentrification” in the centre of San Cristóbal de Las Casas, consisting of an expansion of capital into space. Concomitantly, I argue, this restaurant was a site for the stylistic transformation of these songs, as the rhythmically jarring and unevenly structured revolutionary songs emerging from Zapatista autonomous communities became reworked into a style more familiar to the cosmopolitan audience that frequented this space. Taken together, then, the first three chapters of this dissertation may be read as an “archaeology” of Zapatista revolutionary song (Foucault, 1969), but they also demonstrate that the act of “dissemination” of the Zapatista “word” through music may take highly distinct forms in different settings, even when the same songs are used to achieve this goal.

In Section Two (Chapters Four to Seven), my study relocates to Mexico City, examining the use of music in the so-called “Other Campaign” (*La Otra Campaña*), a campaign of solidarity with the Zapatistas that emerged from the EZLN’s Sixth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle (2005). In Chapter Four I examine Other Campaign groups’ use of music within public spaces, such as parks, squares and streets. Taking my cue from Lefebvre’s theory of the social production of space, I highlight ways that, acting in order to disseminate pro-Zapatista messages, pro-Zapatista activists used sound to defy city regulations concerning permits for the use of public spaces. Nonetheless, by emphasising ways in which these actors’ emic discourse privileging “text” came up against the affective and material reality of sound, this chapter locates the limits of the declared “right” to urban space, and the productivity of what Lefebvre labels “abstract space”. In Chapter Five, I look at the same activity from the perspective of musicians. Linking the discourse of “dissemination” to John Durham Peters’ discussion of communicative “waste”, I use the examples of two professional musicians who frequently participated at

Other Campaign events to highlight some of the difficulties and limitations of this performance environment. The seriousness with which musicians and activists took the task of “spreading the word”, and these actors’ corresponding neglect of affect, emotion and pleasure, effectively created a marginal position for these events, making it more difficult for musicians to gain an income from their work. As I show in this chapter, this led some musicians to rethink their practice.

In Chapter Six I examine “dissemination” in a different kind of space: home studios created by bands linked to the Other Campaign who sought to use their music to raise awareness of the Zapatista movement. In this setting, Zapatismo became musically allied to the Mexican nation in sound, connected as themes allegedly discarded by Mexico’s mainstream media. Thus, in the intimate environment of the home, the digital home studio, as a communication technology facilitating “intimacy” and “authenticity”, became a means of preservation of the post-revolutionary nationalist heritage of “regional music”, and of dissemination of information about the Zapatista movement’s objectives and history. Finally, Chapter Seven connects the themes of the previous six chapters in its focus on pro-Zapatista compilation albums. Drawing on theories of media hybridity and highlighting the links between complex “composite” identities and travel between different settings, I look at the ways that albums like *Rola la lucha zapatista*, created in 2012, became a catalyst for travel between the different sites for pro-Zapatista expression already traced in Chapters Two to Six. As will be seen, not only was this album a product of spontaneous solidarity with the Zapatistas expressed in music in different sites, but it also brought together many of the musicians participating in it, converting distanced “weak ties” into co-present strong ones, and creating new communities in sound. Moreover, as this chapter documents, participation in this initially online project brought opportunities to musicians expressing such solidarity to give live performances in Zapatista autonomous communities as part of the festivities concerning the tenth anniversary of the creation of the Zapatista *caracoles* (cultural and administrative centres) in August 2013. This chapter concludes by appealing to musical co-presence facilitated by travel as an important factor in the survival of a coherent, shared “Zapatista identity”, despite a plethora of potentially disconnected interpretations of Zapatismo emerging in different settings.

Overall, the argument of this dissertation is that activities of dissemination through music – using music to communicate stories, information and messages about the Zapatista movement – are deceptively complex; that this simple aim masks much



variety and unpredictability in practice that can only be understood by using a multiplicity of research methodologies, central among which is ethnography. For James W. Carey, “ritual” and “transmission” communication may be perceived in the same communicative activities, and the typically dominant ideology of transmission may mask the ways that these activities have served to create mass-scale social entities. Equally, a viewpoint privileging another one-way mode of communication – dissemination – may obscure the ways that communication within Zapatista circles that is understood to be distanced and non-reciprocal actually serves to construct the Zapatista network as a meaningful entity. Indeed, as well as highlighting the importance of music to the Zapatista movement at its most influential moment – the late 1990s – in this study I contend that music can be understood as an important social practice which functions to hold this geographically and socially diffuse movement together.

## PART ONE:

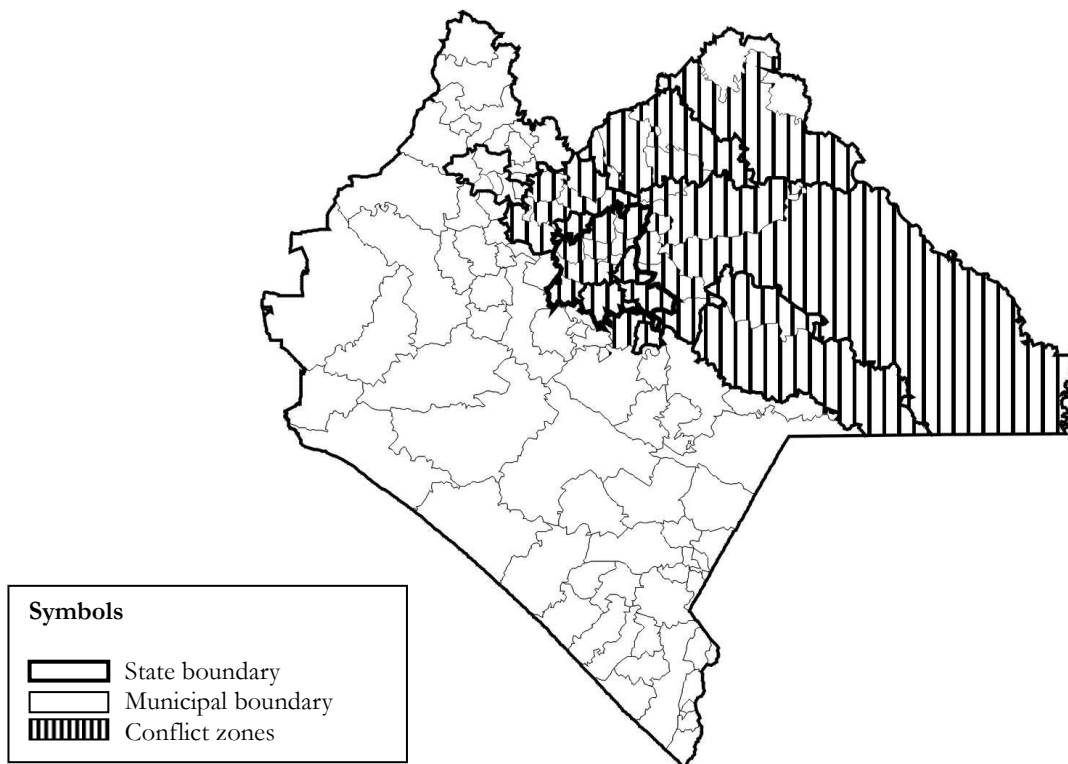
# SONIC TRACES OF A REBELLION

The Zapatista rebels swept across vast swathes of eastern Chiapas in the first few days of January 1994, taking over much rural land, as well as occupying seven towns and cities in the state (Harvey, 1998: 1-15). In Ocosingo, Zapatista soldiers burned documents, robbed grocery stores for food, and opened up shops for local people to loot appliances, before the bloodiest violence of the rebellion saw the Zapatistas forced out of the city (Tello Díaz, 1995: 20-22). In San Cristóbal de las Casas, meanwhile, a media scrum formed around newly-appointed spokesperson Subcomandante Marcos, who was able to communicate the EZLN's demands to the world, before the city was subjected to heavy bombardment by government troops and the rebels retreated into the countryside (Bob, 2005: 128-33). While it may have been strategically important to take cities in the short term, allowing the EZLN to communicate directly with journalists based in these cities, the rebels' invasion of rural space left a more lasting legacy, as the Zapatistas took territory from many large landowners as well as from other indigenous groups. Suddenly coming into ownership – however precariously – of this land made a transition from rebellion against the government to a constructive project of self-rule an obvious next step. In other words, the Zapatistas now had to put the land they had just won to good use.

In the months and years that followed, academics and journalists desperately sought to understand the circumstances that had provoked the uprising. Meanwhile, there were a series of dynamic developments on the ground. A new social movement was taking shape, and with it a new activist ritual life. In San Cristobal de las Casas, there was an economic decline which the government decided to tackle by investing heavily in tourism – but in the meantime many of those travelling to the city were pro-Zapatista activists (Pitts, 1995). Symbols and slogans representing the EZLN were developed and sold to its supporters in the city: on t-shirts, posters, stickers, and all manner of other types of merchandise. *Zapatismo* soon became *chic*; not long afterwards, it became *passé*. Throughout this time, pro-Zapatista activists based in San Cristobal had to consider the ways that they were representing indigeneity as they sought to raise awareness of the Zapatista movement. Moreover, many had to learn to negotiate capitalist arrangements within this city, especially as tourism increased and its centre became increasingly

gentrified.

In Part One, which consists of Chapters One to Three, I contend that this is a story that can be told through music. Based on research conducted in and around San Cristóbal de Las Casas and Ocosingo between May and October 2013, I trace Zapatista-authored song as it travels between contexts – from the clandestine EZLN prior to the uprising, to the civil Zapatista “autonomous communities” established after 1994, and to the centre of San Cristóbal as it became increasingly commercialized in the 2000s. I suggest that, across these contexts, songs have been used as a means of communicating messages advocating political change, and that these songs must be understood in relation to the specific social settings in which they arose, as well as the communities they helped to construct.



*Figure 1: Map of conflict zones in 1994 Chiapas uprising (Source: Instituto Federal Electoral)*



*Figure 2: Map of eastern Chiapas (source: Google Maps)*

## CHAPTER ONE

### HYBRID SONGS: CONTEXTUALIZING MUSIC IN THE CLANDESTINE EZLN, 1983-1994

After the Chiapas uprising of 1994, scholars and activists soon realised that the Zapatista rebels were producing their own music. In 1995, director Othello Khanh made an hour-long documentary entitled *Corridos sin rostro* (“Corridos Without A Face”) which featured footage of a balaclava-clad Zapatista band performing Spanish-language “corridos” in an unnamed village located on a cloudy Chiapas hillside. This documentary appears to have caught the attention of Héau-Lambert and Giménez, who wrote a short critical commentary on these songs two years later, coining the phrase “neo-Zapatista corrido” (1997; also see Héau-Lambert and Giménez, 2004). More recently, de la Garza (2013) has provided an overview and analysis of “neo-Zapatista corridos” which takes into account more contemporary manifestations of the nascent genre. She identifies many of these songs as rewritten versions of older corridos whose music relates contemporary Zapatismo to past histories – thus creating a “semantic snowballing” effect in which new significations are added onto old ones (de la Garza, 2013: 105).<sup>13</sup> For example, the important Zapatista song “Himno Zapatista” (Zapatista Hymn) is based on “Carabina 30-30”, a corrido from the Mexican Revolution whose first verse goes as follows:

Carabina 30-30	Carabina 30-30 [a make of rifle]
Que los rebeldes portaban	That the rebels carried
Y decían los maderistas	And the <i>maderistas</i> <sup>14</sup> would say
Que con ellos no mataban	“You won’t kill a thing with those”
(“Carabina 30-30”)	

This revolutionary corrido contains a message of sacrificial empowerment for under-equipped revolutionaries who, it contends, are capable of triumphing in war despite their limited resources (“The mercenaries are fleeing [...] the guerrillas chased them off”) but have to be willing to pay a heavy price (“If they ask for my blood, I’ll give it to them/for

<sup>13</sup> With her reference to “semantic snowballing”, de la Garza is citing Turino (2008: 19).

<sup>14</sup> That is, supporters of Francisco I. Madero (1873-1913), who led an armed movement to overthrow the government of Porfirio Díaz at the beginning of the Mexican Revolution.

the exploited people of our Nation”). This song’s emotional themes are ambivalent and conflicting, as well as triumphant; the rebels (in this case, followers of revolutionary leader Pancho Villa) launch themselves into a war whose odds are stacked against them, gaining victory on the basis of a conscious decision to forfeit their lives for a larger cause. Using this tune as the basis of the “Himno Zapatista” links the contemporary Zapatista movement to the Mexican Revolution of 1910-20, during which Emiliano Zapata – the revolutionary leader whose name and slogan “Land and Liberty” were appropriated by the EZLN – met with a tragic end. Further, this melodic connection recalls self-sacrifice, righteousness and military disadvantage, themes invoked by the Zapatista rebels after the Chiapas uprising in 1994 (Conant, 2010: 97, 156-7). The lyrics of this rewritten version of “Carabina 30-30” begin as follows:

Ya se mira el horizonte	Now the horizon can be seen
Combatiente zapatista	The Zapatista combatant
El camino marcará	Will mark out the path
Pa’ los que vienen atrás	For those that come afterwards
Vamos, vamos, vamos vamos adelante	Let’s go onwards
Para que salgamos en la lucha avante	To go forward in the struggle
Porque el pueblo grita y necesita	Because the people cries out and needs
De todo el esfuerzo de los zapatistas	All the efforts of the Zapatistas
(“Himno Zapatista”) <sup>15</sup>	

In addition to depicting the neo-Zapatistas as representatives of “the people”, these lyrics contain a subtle sense of self-sacrifice, just as in “Carabina 30-30”. That is, the rebels of “Himno Zapatista” are laying the foundations for future advances in the struggle (“marking out the path”), implying that they may not see these advances themselves. The lyrics of this song, then, strongly reflect the links between past and present made by the musical sound in which they are suspended.

When I began my doctoral studies I became enchanted by these songs, which not only evoked rich, compelling histories of social struggle spanning almost a century, but also brought into play many questions concerning the corrido genre itself. Historically, the genre “corrido” has been highly contested within scholarly literature. Most corrido scholars in the early twentieth century sought to produce definitive literary formulae for the genre, such as the following, by Duvalier (1937):

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<sup>15</sup> Although some minor variations exist, the vast majority of performances of “Himno Zapatista” utilize these verses. The song likely dates to the second half of the 1980s, as will be explored below.

(1) an initial call from the *corridista* to his or her public; (2) the place, date, and name of the protagonist; (3) a formula preceding the protagonist's arguments; (4) the message; (5) the protagonist's farewell; and (6) the *corridista*'s farewell. (Translated in Herrera-Sobek, 1993: xix)

Meanwhile, Mendoza's definition of the genre consists of a similar list of features, but focuses more on poetic structure:

[The corrido is] an epic-lyrical-narrative genre with four-line strophes of variable rhyme scheme, with either assonant or consonant even verses; a literary form supporting a musical phrase usually comprising four parts, which recounts events that powerfully impact upon the sensibility of the masses. (Mendoza, 1954: ix)<sup>16</sup>

Mendoza also argued that one further characteristic was typical to corridos: they tend to be organized by syllable count, most commonly into octosyllabic lines (1954: xiv, xvii-xviii, xxiv-xxvii, 1939: 167-74. Finally, Duvalier's literary formula may be best understood in light of the most commonly accepted feature of the genre: that it is composed and performed as a medium of communication, narrating stories that matter to people in a manner that facilitates memory (Hernández, 1999: 69-81; Simmons, 1957: 33; Serrano Martínez, 1963: 13).

These attempts to produce formulaic definitions for the genre, however, have been severely questioned in recent years. Some, for example, have pointed out that Mendoza often deliberately altered the corridos in his extensive compilations in order to fit his four-line strophe formula, and omitted other songs commonly considered corridos that deviated from it (H. de Giménez, 1991: 18). Thus, although the scholar claimed to study the genre in its "crystallized form", he himself was involved in producing the corrido as such (Mendoza, 1954: xiii). Just as recent studies have examined different aspects of these formulae in detail (Beusterien, 2007; García and Provincia Garrigos, 1993), formulaic schema have also been strongly critiqued (McDowell, 1972; Alemán, 1998; Chamberlain, 2003). Chamberlain, for instance, eschews attempts to provide an "absolute definition" of the corrido, suggesting that it should be characterized instead "as a borderline or frontier phenomenon that both differentiates and incorporates cultural phenomena" (2003: 78).

Yet Chamberlain himself does not abandon all attempts to place limits on the genre, asserting that in the corrido,

the balladeer's narration is supported by the stable structure of the composition's rhythm, that is, its repetition of beats in keeping with a set time signature [...] What would be inconceivable is a corrido, whether sung or recited, devoid of a signature of time. (Chamberlain, 2003: 80)

It is certainly tempting to suggest, with Chamberlain, that attention ought to be paid to

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<sup>16</sup> All translations from Spanish to English in this dissertation are mine unless otherwise stated.

non-literary aspects of the genre, such as sound. In a recent (and, for the purposes of this chapter, highly useful) study of the corrido, Alviso (2011) has explored the sonic features of the genre on the basis of a quantitative analysis of a large sample of twentieth-century recordings. He discusses a number of musical characteristics typical of the genre, of which I highlight several. First, Alviso suggests that corridos are based on “a straightforward regular rhythm that rarely divides the pulse” in either triple or duple metre, with the first beat of each bar being emphasised in the accompaniment by the bass and the remaining beats played by chords, as in the triple-metre “bass-chord-chord-bass-chord-chord” pattern (2011: 76, 62). Second, he points out that within his survey, corrido dynamics vary little – from medium-loud to loud – as the singers strongly project their voices throughout in order to communicate their stories (63, 76). Third, he argues that corrido tonality is exclusively major and hierarchical, emphasising the tonic and dominant over the less frequently used subdominant:

Corridos invariably begin on the tonic (main chord and key center). From there the harmony moves to the dominant (the next most important chord) by the end of the second line only to resolve back to the tonic at the end of the fourth line of each stanza. (Alviso, 2011: 64)

Finally, corrido melodies tend to rise and fall in step, often forming an “arch-shaped contour”, and are very often sung in duets, with one singer harmonizing at an interval of a third above the other (63-4).

The advantage of Alviso’s quantitative study is that, as well as taking seriously the musical aspect of the genre, it relates to a large body of corridos as they actually exist, not according to an abstract formula constructed by scholars. Nonetheless, both Alviso and Chamberlain appear to presume a relatively stable context in which this genre is taken as a given, and fail to address emic discourses about the topic. This contrasts sharply with the emphasis of much recent scholarship on genre both within and outside the field of ethnomusicology, in which genre is treated as a socially negotiated construct (Tuohy, 1999; Guest-Scott, 2008; Sparling, 2008; Bakhtin, 1986: 60-102; Bauman, 2004). Much of this scholarship draws, in turn, on the work of Mikhail Bakhtin, who advanced a fluid and localized understanding of genre in which utterances – the basic unit of communication – become more or less stabilized into particular forms, what he calls “speech genres” (1986: 60). For Bakhtin, speech genres are related to “spheres of [human] activity” which each contain “an entire repertoire of speech genres that differentiate and grow as the particular sphere develops and becomes more complex” (60). Bakhtin makes a distinction between “primary” and “secondary” types of speech genre. The former category refers to simple utterances that tend to arise in everyday “unmediated speech communion”; the latter,



meanwhile, refers to complex forms such as “novels, dramas [...] and so forth”, which “absorb and digest various primary (simple) genres” by distancing them from situations of unmediated interaction (62). Building on Bakhtin, Richard Bauman seeks to understand genres as they relate to social contexts, emphasising ways that different “constituent features of the generic framework” are strategically invoked as genre is contested (2004: 7-8). The challenge is clear: the corrido should be studied as a genre whose very framing as such occurs in relation to particular social contexts which are, in turn, characterized by relations of power between different actors. Bakhtin’s theoretical work implies that, since “speech genres” always connect to “spheres of activity”, changing social settings may be especially fertile sites for such contestation and re-definition (1986: 60-2). Moreover, within the field of ethnomusicology, contexts in which groups from different backgrounds are brought together (such as diasporas and cities) have been identified as especially fertile sites for the emergence of hybrid musical forms (Stokes, 2004: 59-60; Allen, 2003: 243).

There are few resonances, however, between these approaches and the work of de la Garza (2013) and Héau-Lambert and Giménez (1997), scholars who principally use literary analysis, rather than conducting direct research with producers and consumers of music. In the absence of such research, these contributions raise a series of interesting questions. For instance, Héau-Lambert and Giménez assert that the corrido genre “is clearly linked to *mestizo*<sup>17</sup> culture, [and is] completely alien to traditional indigenous culture” (1997: 227). With this essentialist statement, the pair evade the question of the real-life history of the genre in Chiapas. In fact, corridos had been consumed by indigenous groups in many rural parts of Chiapas since long before 1994, especially in places with access to electricity and therefore the ability to power radio.<sup>18</sup> Nonetheless, their statement should not be dismissed entirely. After all, it *is* unusual that participants in an indigenous rebellion should be singing Spanish-language songs, and the background of these songs *is* therefore worth studying. In particular, it is worth exploring what ethnographic and historical research methods can contribute to our understanding of this

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<sup>17</sup> *Mestizo* is a term used to refer to people with a mixed ethnic background incorporating both *indígena* (indigenous) and *criollo* (Spanish) heritage. In Mexico, the vast majority of people define themselves as such.

<sup>18</sup> Some of my consultants had grown up in indigenous communities in rural Chiapas listening to corridos, *música norteña* and *música ranchera* on the radio. Furthermore, Zapatista support was not only drawn from rural areas, but also from cities, where cassettes of corridos were available (Interview, Hernán, 08-06-13; Interview, “Fernando”, 11-07-15). Hayes (2000: 44) points out that in the early twentieth century “[g]overnment programs that distributed radios to rural schools and communities made it possible for [state-sponsored radio] to reach some rural listeners”. In turn, this radio broadcasted genres of music from all across the Mexican Republic as part of a project to foster national sentiment, bringing corridos to listeners in Chiapas. For more information about the long (and often reactionary) history of corridos in Chiapas, see Orozco Zuarth (2010).

body of song, however it is to be defined.

At the time I began my research, then, a number of questions about these songs stood out. Through what set of historical circumstances has the (so-called) “neo-Zapatista corrido” come to exist?<sup>19</sup> How did a group of indigenous rebels among whom almost nobody spoke Spanish as a first language come to sing Spanish-language songs, and how were these songs emically defined? What types of social function did they serve in a context of rebellion, both prior to and after 1994? Finally, how was the communicative function typically ascribed to corridos translated into a clandestine context? In short, I became interested in the histories of these songs themselves, as well as the histories that they told.

As I explain in the introduction to this dissertation, however, it is difficult for researchers to gain access to Zapatista communities in order to conduct ethnography. Therefore, my research took a different route, in which I aimed, as in Marco Estrada Saavedra’s invaluable sociological study of the EZLN, to “study Zapatismo from its ‘periphery’ [...] to then approach, albeit in an indirect manner, its ‘centre’” (2007: 38). Just as Estrada Saavedra interviewed many former members of the EZLN in order to gain a perspective on the organization “from below” (38), so I sought out former participants in this organization in order to gain insights into musical and cultural life under the EZLN. A breakthrough in my research came after a chance conversation on a bus with a Tzeltal-speaking man from the city of Ocosingo who knew a number of former Zapatistas, some of whom had performed songs for the EZLN, with whom I subsequently conducted interviews. Once guaranteed anonymity within my study, they spoke with relative freedom about their experiences, and many even talked openly about the trauma they had suffered during the 1994 rebellion, something that gave me a new perspective on the horrors of conflict, even that instigated for the noblest of causes. These interviews drew me towards a different body of music to that examined by de la Garza, Héau-Lambert and Giménez: the small number of existing recordings of songs written during the EZLN’s clandestine period, between 1983 and 1994.

In this chapter I use these interviews, in conjunction with evidence concerning the early history of the EZLN, to provide background for an analysis of Zapatista songs composed in clandestine circumstances. Corresponding to the theme of this study as a whole, I am interested here in shedding light upon the ways that songs reinforced certain narratives and thus constructed particular forms of community and organization. For

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<sup>19</sup> Héau-Lambert and Giménez themselves answer this question by invoking a general sense of “obligation” to play the corrido among Mexican revolutionaries (1997: 227), an argument that I find unsatisfactory.

Stohl and Stohl, studying ways that clandestine organizations can be constituted through communicative practices presents a particular challenge, given that such organizations’ “foundational principles of secrecy and concealment” tend to undermine “official” narratives, instead privileging “local communicative processes” (2011: 6). In this chapter, I highlight ways that musical performance may be understood to have aided the constitution of the clandestine EZLN by encouraging particular narratives distinguishing it, often subtly, from other organizations with which it competed.

This chapter is structured as follows. First, I provide an overview of the socio-political and cultural context in which the EZLN appeared, highlighting the confluence of Marxist, religious and indigenous factions from which this organization emerged and outlining some ways in which musical performance and composition may have played a role in the rebels’ drive to war. Second, I examine the music of Comandante David, an indigenous Zapatista producing music in the clandestine period, drawing out ways that this music reflects the social context in which it was composed. Here, my purpose is to argue that many songs from the EZLN’s clandestine period present considerable hybridity between features associated with both corridos and Catholic liturgical song, and connect this analysis to an argument concerning these songs’ communicative and ritual functions in this highly fluid context. Finally, I discuss an occurrence in the early 1990s which may have led to the emergence of the “neo-Zapatista corrido” as the scholars discussed above define it.

### **Music and expansion in the clandestine EZLN**

In 1983, following years of exploration of Chiapas and a number of month-long training sessions in the state in 1982, six members of the Fuerzas de Liberación Nacional (FLN), a *mestizo*-dominated *guerrilla* organization set up in 1969, arrived to the Lacandon Jungle, close to the southern border with Guatemala, and established a camp.<sup>20</sup> In this location they created the EZLN on 17 November 1983, a date still celebrated within the movement up until the time of writing (Muñoz Ramírez, 2008: 20-1).<sup>21</sup> According to an account given by Subcomandante Marcos (who arrived to the Lacandon Jungle in the summer of 1984 and would go on to become the EZLN’s spokesperson after the 1994

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<sup>20</sup> A brief history of the FLN can be found in Castellanos (2007: 242-6).

<sup>21</sup> This account draws heavily on Muñoz Ramírez (2008: 43-99), who includes a number of testimonies from former Zapatista fighters and members of the organization during its clandestine period concerning the development of the EZLN between 1983 and 1994.

uprising) the insurgents attracted new recruits very slowly during the EZLN's first years, dedicating themselves to "the tasks of survival: hunting, fishing [and] collecting wild fruits and plants" (Muñoz Ramírez, 2008: 22). Despite their meagre resources, according to Marcos, the group "led a very active cultural life" (22) to which one may find a few passing references in his account of events; for example, he states that the clandestine EZLN created a "group of insurgent youth" who would meet each week "to sing, dance, read, practice sports and participate in contests" (27). Marcos also recounts with characteristic self-deprecation his experiences leading a camp temporarily comprised of four insurgents: "There were songs and poetry. One of us would sing or declaim and the others would clap with a boredom worthy of a better cause" (27).

The EZLN were establishing themselves within a sociocultural context that had already been strongly shaped by the Catholic Church. In the mid-twentieth century the Lacandon Jungle, a harsh environment which had remained largely unoccupied for decades, was colonized by indigenous groups migrating from other parts of Chiapas in search of habitable terrain (De Vos, 1994: 348). The Catholic Church (as well as, to a lesser extent, various evangelical churches also operating in the region) became "the first and principal organizing focus of social life" in these newly-created communities (357). It trained indigenous catechists in Spanish and literacy, in addition to theology, and encouraged them "to study and reflect on their personal and collective problems" (357). Prospective catechists also received some musical training from the Church. Leyva Solano cites the testimony of "Don Eustaquio", who trained as a catechist in the 1960s when, along with "prayers and songs" (*rezos y cantos*), his group was taught to play "various instruments: some learnt violin, others guitar, flute. I knew a bit of the drum (*tambor*), so we quickly formed a group" (1994: 396-7).

As indigenous migrants colonized the Lacandon Jungle, certain biblical narratives were privileged within an emerging "liberation theology" worldview. Indigenous settlers to the jungle

perceived themselves as individuals with an "exodus status", similar to that of the biblical Jews. This notion opened up the perspective of a future in a "promised land" [...] This prophetic vision made the building of the "Kingdom of God on earth" seem possible. (Leyva Solano, 1998: 41-2)

Jan de Vos describes succinctly some of the precepts of *teología de la liberación* (liberation theology) in comparison to mainstream Catholicism:

(1) a different point of departure: an unjust world; (2) a different interlocutor: the poor or marginalized; (3) different tools: the social sciences; (4) a different analysis: a society in conflict; (5) a different manner to commit oneself: the alternating dialectic between reflection and praxis; (6) a

different theological centre: the preferential love of God for the oppressed. (de Vos, 1997: 92)

In line with these precepts, liberation theology implied focusing on sections of the Bible with “an explicit message in favour of the oppressed: the book of Exodus, the Prophets, the Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, and the book of Revelation” (de Vos, 1997: 93). In Chiapas under the guidance of Samuel Ruiz García, the Bishop of San Cristóbal de Las Casas,<sup>22</sup> a particular sub-branch of liberation theology was created by indigenous religious authorities allied to the Catholic Church. Corresponding to continent-wide trends towards a more activist Catholicism, Bishop Ruiz García moved the Catholic Church in Chiapas towards a “preferential option for the poor” (Hernández Castillo, 1994: 419). As part of this process, indigenous Catholics began to take a far greater role in the creation of religious doctrine. In 1972, indigenous catechists in the parish of Ocosingo produced their own catechism which, after a consultation, was printed in Tzeltal in a booklet containing 62 lessons. These lessons placed great moral emphasis on collectivity (“Only if we help each other do we believe in God; we can only find God in the community”) and escaping oppression by “seeking new forms to work in community” (de Vos, 1997: 97). They took the biblical Exodus story as a point of departure, making it relevant to the history of indigenous settlers to the Lacandon Jungle (“God wants us to achieve our freedom, like the Jewish people of old”) (Leyva Solano, 1995: 70). Further, they combined these discourses with emphases on notions of “injustice” and the importance of land:

When the Israelites lived like slaves they had to go out and fight [*pelear*] to win their freedom. When our ancestors lived as *mozos* [“farmhands”], they also had to struggle [*luchar*] together to win their lands. Those were men of great faith, and they demonstrated it with their work. Thanks to their faith and their struggle [*lucha*], today we have land and we live free [...] but true liberty has still not come [...] we must struggle against poverty, hunger and injustice. (cited in Leyva Solano, 1995: 70)

There is an important slippage in this passage between the word *pelear* (“to fight” – a straightforward reference to physical violence) attributed to the Israelites and the more ambiguous *luchar* (“to struggle”) attributed to the protagonists of this passage. This reflects a notable reticence, among the Catholic Church in Chiapas, to openly advocate violent solutions to injustice. Importantly, these discourses were also reflected in songs introduced by the Church to the Las Cañadas area, such as “Iglesia bonita” (Beautiful Church), “Va a ser tan bonito” (It will be so beautiful) and “Cuando el pobre crea en el pobre” (When the poor man believes in the poor man) (see Appendix 2).<sup>23</sup> For instance,

<sup>22</sup> This diocese is very large, covering much of eastern Chiapas, including the Lacandon Jungle.

<sup>23</sup> Estrada Saavedra (2007: 269-71) reproduces the lyrics of three songs sung in the Lacandon Jungle as part of the liturgy of the Catholic Church at this time. These songs come from a compilation dating from 1999

“Va a ser tan bonito” affirms the importance of non-violence, echoing the biblical prophet Isaiah<sup>24</sup> with the line “when finally arms are exchanged for ploughs, hospitals and classrooms, I’ll sing”.

A very large proportion of the indigenous members of the EZLN were Catholics who followed these “liberation theology” teachings (Legorreta Díaz, 1998: 219-3; De Vos, 1997).<sup>25</sup> “Oscar”, an indigenous Tzeltal who had participated in the Zapatista organization as a young man during the clandestine period, told me that “[t]he Bible speaks of liberation, of freedom from oppression [...] from the mistreatment of imperialism [...] I sat down to read the Bible and I saw if it was necessary to form that army of liberation”.<sup>26</sup> Meanwhile, “Martín” told me how, when he joined the clandestine organization, a colloquial name for the EZLN had been *ejército de Cristo* (“Army of Christ”).<sup>27</sup> Followers of liberation theology – locally known as *palabra de Dios* (“word of God”) Christianity – had become disillusioned with the local Church’s pacifism, one of Estrada Saavedra’s consultants saying that “with only prayer, with only kneeling, we’re never going to achieve anything [...] the solution was to join the struggle” (2007: 376). The book of Exodus describes the people of Israel engaging in military warfare to reach the Promised Land, a story invoked to legitimise the notion of violence for those thinking of joining the EZLN. Even at the time of my research, almost all of my former Zapatista consultants still perceived the Zapatista struggle in religious terms, some comparing the Zapatistas’ suffering with that of biblical figures such as Moses, Isaiah, Jesus and Samuel (“they struggled, and they suffered too”).<sup>28</sup> Zapatistas who were practising Catholics – the vast majority – were therefore already familiar with a tradition of Spanish-language liturgical song by the time they joined the EZLN.

However, the mostly *mestizo* leaders of the EZLN did not replicate the religiosity of the majority of their supporters. In the second half of the 1980s, the EZLN began to expand rapidly, making clandestine links with many indigenous communities and developing a presence in the Los Altos and Norte regions of Chiapas (Muñoz Ramirez, 2008: 27-8). According to some accounts, during this period the strong religious belief which motivated the majority of indigenous people in the EZLN occasionally came into

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entitled *Fortaleciendo las bases vivas de nuestra casa*, put together by Father Alberto Rafael Gómez Sánchez. During my fieldwork I also encountered an undated book of Catholic hymns in Tzeltal whose lyrics emphasised messages of collective solidarity and (peaceful) struggle (see Appendix 5).

<sup>24</sup> Specifically Isaiah 2: 3-4.

<sup>25</sup> “María”, one of my former Zapatista respondents, told me that “the people that were Zapatistas, the majority were part of the Church”. Interview, 15-06-13.

<sup>26</sup> Interview, “Oscar”, 29-09-13.

<sup>27</sup> Interview, “Martín”, 28-09-13.

<sup>28</sup> Interview, “Eduardo”, 15-06-13.

conflict with the hostility towards religion held by some of the organization's leaders. One of my consultants recounted how the EZLN's leaders had sometimes entered church services to demand that Zapatista militants attend their training instead, characterizing this as a short-sighted decision that alienated many deeply religious supporters of the EZLN.<sup>29</sup> Legorreta Díaz (1998: 223-4) provides a witness account of an occasion in 1989 during which Subcomandante Marcos, who had been left in charge of the organization, challenged its members to leave behind religious practice (“[God] did come into the world, but they killed him, so there’s no God now”). Marcos’ decision to openly reject religious belief may have been a response to anti-EZLN preaching on the part of the diocese – who had become alarmed at the organization’s advocacy of violence – and led to significant desertions from the organization (Legorreta Díaz, 1998: 219-25).

Music played an important role during this period of expansion. Testimony given by “Compañero Raúl” gives some insight into the social use of music within the EZLN at this time. Raúl used to bring supplies to EZLN camps:

When we arrived they were happy to see us and we’d have a little party there. If there was a guitar, well, we’d dance, since there were *compañeras* there we could dance with them. So they began to trust us and we them. (Muñoz Ramírez, 2008: 49)

A link between music and dance and the cultivation of relationships of trust appears to have been crucial for the expansion of the EZLN in the clandestine period. When a village joined the organization, a *fiesta* would be held:

When the town is all *compa* [Zapatista] then the insurgents visit the village. All the *compañeros* [friends] of the community meet them, and we organize a party and a dance. The village provides food, coffee, and we all socialize together. There is a lot of political talk that orients us about the situation. (Muñoz Ramírez, 2008: 50)

Ritual events such as these were described to me by consultants from the municipality of Ocosingo who had been part of the Zapatista organization during this period. Several, now middle-aged, had attended many such *fiestas* held in discrete locations in this municipality while they were teenagers, with one describing them as follows: “first they would start to sing their hymns. Then after that they started to play around [...] we would dance there with the Zapatistas, dressed in their *capuchos* [hoods] [...] they were armed, too”.<sup>30</sup> “Juan”, now a middle-aged man who had grown up in the west of the Ocosingo municipality, even performed in a trio at one such event, held to celebrate the anniversary

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<sup>29</sup> Interview, “Martín”, 28-09-13.

<sup>30</sup> Interview, “Julia”, 02-08-13.

of the creation of the EZLN.<sup>31</sup> Some also noted that Zapatista anthems were sung during EZLN military training sessions.<sup>32</sup> These songs, then, appear to have been used as part of an emerging ritual life which served to establish a shared set of beliefs.

Not all of those that supported the EZLN were training insurgents or militants. Many (called *bases de apoyo* or “support bases”) simply contributed food, supplies, and logistical support to the rebel organization. Indeed, the rebels’ training created a significant burden on many EZLN-affiliated families and villages, who were obliged to support the training insurgents while coping with their withdrawal from the labour force (Legorreta Díaz, 1998: 214). This was not, however, purely military training. Although the insurgents learnt techniques of guerrilla warfare, the EZLN also promoted cultural education in a number of areas, teaching Spanish, as well as literacy, mathematics, geography, history, and Marxist philosophy (Estrada Saavedra, 2007: 379-82). During this period the EZLN’s *mestizo* leadership brought songbooks containing corridos to the region, introducing and performing them to the organization’s members; moreover, they started to encourage these members to write music.<sup>33</sup> “Oscar” told me that while he attended an EZLN training camp in the eastern region of the Ocosingo municipality “they gave us [the task] to write songs, but unfortunately we couldn’t write even one then. But some did”.<sup>34</sup> In other instances, trainees would be divided into small groups to write down what they had learned, and at the end of each session these notes would be passed onto a select group of Zapatistas to “compose a song [*canción*]” on this basis. This composition process tended to be text-based and iterative; once one verse had been written, training Zapatistas would seek to write verses following a similar poetic structure, adding the tune, harmony and accompanying rhythm later.<sup>35</sup> Composition also tended to be organized collectively, rather than individually, with specific tasks (such as composition of lyrics, writing or finding an appropriate tune, and identifying an apt rhythm) delegated to certain individuals within a given group.<sup>36</sup> This mode of organization was often made necessary, since many of those who played musical instruments could not read or write, and vice versa.

While writing songs accompanied and reinforced the training insurgents’

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<sup>31</sup> Interview, “Juan”, 16-06-13.

<sup>32</sup> Interview, “Eduardo”, 15-06-13.

<sup>33</sup> Interview, “Luis”, 20-08-15.

<sup>34</sup> Interview, “Oscar”, 29-09-13.

<sup>35</sup> Interview, “Fernando”, 11-07-15.

<sup>36</sup> Interview, “Luis”, 20-08-15. This Tzeltal-speaking consultant told of an occasion upon which Subcomandante Marcos gave him pre-written lyrics (themed around the death of Emiliano Zapata) to arrange to music.



education in other areas, particularly literacy and Spanish, songs were also used as a didactic and communicative tool. Especially in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when the EZLN had expanded beyond the Ocosingo municipality into the Los Altos and Norte regions of Chiapas, the lyrics of songs written by Zapatista insurgents were carried from one place to another on sheets of paper or in notebooks and performed in encounters between Zapatistas from different regions across Chiapas.<sup>37</sup> These songs reinforced shared beliefs, and created a common sense of belonging to this increasingly geographically dispersed revolutionary community. Writing songs in Spanish had particular value in this context, since supporters of the EZLN from different regions spoke a variety of indigenous languages. Equally, these songs had to contain subtle, rather than overt, messages in favour of armed revolution, reflecting the revolutionary army's clandestine status.<sup>38</sup> Between 1983 and 1994, therefore, Spanish-language songs became part of an emerging revolutionary ritual life that created bonds between and within EZLN-affiliated communities, as well as reinforcing the advances in literacy and Spanish made through its educational program.<sup>39</sup>

Nonetheless, such apparently secular activities form a comparatively small part of the picture. In fact, most root-and-branch members of the organization perceived their struggle in simultaneously religious and political terms. In the accounts given by Estrada Saavedra (2007) and Legorreta Díaz (1998), the clandestine EZLN is depicted as an organization that competed with the Catholic Church for members, partly by performing the pedagogical role previously played by the Church in the teaching of Spanish and literacy, as well as poetry and music. Notably, despite the internal conflict within the EZLN over the role of religious belief referred to above, and the fact that the organization's official rhetoric has always deployed secular language, *palabra de Dios* Christianity has remained a key element of the narrative of struggle within Zapatista communities in Chiapas until the present day. One of my consultants, after spending a week living in a Zapatista community in August 2013, described his Zapatista friends as “dyed-in-the-wool Catholics”, and revealed that:

They told me that their religion, in this case Catholicism, has to do with politics. Because they, in

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<sup>37</sup> Interview, “Fernando”, 11-07-15; Interview, “Oscar”, 29-09-13. Notably, this mode of transmission corresponds to what H. de Giménez calls the “mixed tradition” between oral and written media that predominated in corrido culture in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, especially during the Mexican Revolution (1991: 49-56).

<sup>38</sup> Interview, “Fernando” and “Suzi”, 11-07-15.

<sup>39</sup> After 1994, songs continued to function as a means of educating newcomers and children about the Zapatista movement. As Barmeyer notes on the basis of ethnographic fieldwork, Zapatista schools are equipped with booklets full of “songs, stories and political discourse in Spanish” (2009: 169-70).

their religious services, are sending out political messages, not strictly religious ones.<sup>40</sup>

In another interview, an elder whose community had until recently been affiliated to the EZLN told me that “for whatever you sing, for whatever you do, whatever you plan, the word of God has to be there first”.<sup>41</sup>

Thus, the history of the clandestine EZLN I have re-constructed in this section emphasises two things. First, the EZLN fulfilled many of the same organizational and educational roles as the Catholic Church, to the extent that the two competed for supporters. For some of its members the EZLN was understood as an “Army of Christ” with ultimately religious aims, while the fact that Subcomandante Marcos decided to openly distance the EZLN from religious belief in 1989 further suggests that, for many of the organization’s members, there was no clear line between the two prior to this time. Second, the development of a culture of performance and composition of Spanish-language song had much to do with specific interventions made by the EZLN itself. Performing music fulfilled an important role within this sociocultural milieu as a marker of the organization’s expansion into new villages and territories and as a didactic tool. However, as corridos such as *Carabina 30-30* and “Himno Zapatista” were introduced and performed in this setting, they coexisted with another tradition of Spanish-language song with which almost all *indígenas* were familiar – liturgical music associated with liberation theology Catholicism.

### **David Sings, With His Guitar**

The acoustic, rather than anecdotal, evidence concerning the type of music performed under the clandestine EZLN is rather thin. There exists an abundance of songs recorded by Zapatista groups, but most were either produced after 1994 or are impossible to date with any precision.<sup>42</sup> Much of this music consists of precisely the corridos studied by de la Garza (2013). A notable exception is an album entitled *Canta David del EZLN y su guitarra vol. 1* (henceforth *Canta David vol. 1*), which I will focus on in the remainder of this chapter. This album is the first of two volumes, the second of which (*Canta David del EZLN y su guitarra vol. 2*) contains few indications as to when the songs contained within it were written. The composer, singer and arranger of these albums is Comandante David, a Tzotzil who has occupied a position in the higher echelons of the EZLN’s command

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<sup>40</sup> Interview, El Chava, 18-08-13.

<sup>41</sup> Interview, “Alonso”, 28-10-13.

<sup>42</sup> Some of these songs can be approximately dated according to the themes they contain. Yet others were dated by my consultants.

structure for many years (Higgins and Comandante David, 2001; de Agosti, 1997). David includes an introductory message at the beginning of *Canta David vol. 1* in which he states that the album contains “very simple *corridos* and *canciones* that I tried to arrange and compose from 1983 until the end of 1990”.<sup>43</sup> Notably, here David does not claim authorship of every song, nor does he specify when a song is his own composition. Since (as mentioned) Zapatistas would typically write songs collectively, it makes sense to understand these songs as the product of a creative community. Although it is not always easy to discern the sources of these songs, they may be considered an invaluable window into the types of Spanish-language songs performed in early EZLN circles.

Several of the album’s fourteen tracks contain rewritten versions or covers of other songs. Most notable among these is “Himno Zapatista”<sup>44</sup> (examined at the start of this chapter), but David also performs covers of “No puedo callar” (I Cannot Stay Silent), a song by Nicaraguan singer Carlos Mejía Godoy carrying a strong association with the Sandinista movement,<sup>45</sup> and “Mi general Zapata” (My General Zapata), a well-known corrido from the Mexican Revolution. The remainder, however, appear to be original compositions. The lyrics of these songs repeatedly discuss the same emotional concepts found in the Tzeltal catechism cited above, such as liberty, humiliation, injustice and misery. Within them, the value of “struggle” (*lucha*) is established in opposition to discourses of exploitation, oppression and discrimination. “Corrido campesino” (Peasant Corrido), for instance, states: “The poor *campesino* works without rest/But the fruit of their labour goes to the exploiter”; “How the *campesino* suffers/How the worker suffers/They don’t stop exploiting them”. At the root of this exploitation is an adversary immediately perceptible to the indigenous supporters of the clandestine EZLN: “Many *campesinos* have nowhere to work/Because the landowners [*terratenientes*] left the *campesino* without land”. The song “La madre tierra” (Mother Earth), meanwhile, begins “The land [*tierra*] is the mother of all those who work it/All the *campesinos* with their machete and hoe/The land produces food to feed her children”, before introducing an antagonist: “Let us not allow the landowner to exhaust our mother earth [*nuestra madre tierra*]”. As a final example, “Dios, fuente de justicia” (God, Source of Justice) contains the following verse:

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<sup>43</sup> It is highly likely, however, that these songs were recorded after 1994. My version is a compact disc that was digitized in the *Zapatista caracol* of Oventik from the initial cassette tape.

<sup>44</sup> This song is called “El Horizonte” on David’s album; however, I shall maintain its more common title for reasons of clarity.

<sup>45</sup> For the singer’s account of the composition of “Yo no puedo callar”, see <http://carlosmejagodoy.blogspot.co.uk/2008/06/y-el-verbo-se-hizo-canto-yo-no-puedo.html> (accessed 06-01-15).

Mucha injusticia y mucha maldad	Much injustice and much evil,
En todas partes	everywhere
En cada pueblo, en cada hogar	In every village, in every home
Hay opresión y explotación	There is oppression and exploitation
Muchos hermanos viven	Many brothers live
En pobreza y en la miseria	In poverty and misery
Pobres obreros y campesinos	Poor workers and <i>campesinos</i>
Que son explotados	Who are exploited
("Dios, fuente de justicia", Comandante David)	

The exploitation which underpins *campesino* "brotherhood" in this song was a common experience among *indígenas* in Chiapas. My consultants described systematic racial discrimination by landowners prior to 1994, who "humiliated" their indigenous workers, one telling me that "for them, we were like animals".<sup>46</sup> Echoing the language of *palabra de Dios* Christianity, these songs' message of "struggle" is rhetorically built upon such discourses of exploitation, as the collective experience of the latter leads into the universal advocacy of the former. Thus, in "La madre tierra", having established the land as the sacred terrain of its worker, the singer then attempts to motivate the hearer to action: "Our Mother Earth is sad and tired/From so much fertilizer, we have done nothing to protect her/When we organize ourselves and join together to struggle/She will give us all we need to continue the struggle". Deploying similar language, "Corrido campesino" envisages a time when "the people awaken, become aware of their reality" and, in turn, decide that they "want to be free/May they start to organize, all fighting together for democracy and liberty".

In *Canta David vol. 1*, the direct leap from "oppression" and "exploitation" to "struggle" thus far identified is supported by the notion of "injustice", which is built upon the self-affirmation of the indigenous peoples of Chiapas as valuable children of God. "Me voy a la insurgencia" (I'm Going to the Rebellion) makes a direct link to religious belief: "My Virgin Guadalupe will protect me in the struggle/For justice and peace that my people asks of us". Another song on this album, "Amos se llamaba" (Amos, He Was Called), tells the story of the biblical prophet Amos, who "announced the kingdom,

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<sup>46</sup> Interview, 16-06-13.

denouncing injustice”, and criticized “the powerful” and “landowners” who, “on the back of the sweat of the people, [...] live in palaces”. Perhaps the clearest illustration of this discursive connection between “God” and “injustice”, however, is found in “Dios, fuente de justicia”:

Pero Dios quiere justicia,	But God wants justice
La igualdad de todos los hombres	The equality of all men
Él con sus palabras y obra	He with his Word and works
Nos enseñó a combatir	Taught us to battle

(“Dios, fuente de justicia”, Comandante David)

This song outlines the desirability of “justice” and “equality”, but makes the singers and hearers responsible for achieving these goals through apparently physically violent means (“battling”). While, when taken together, these songs illuminate the role that religious belief played in the development of a political consciousness concerning oppression, injustice and struggle, it is also important to note that, in advocating violent action, they were subverting the approach taken by the Catholic Church in Chiapas (Legorreta Díaz, 1998: 219-25).

In these songs, “struggle” takes two forms. First, in “Trabajo colectivo” (Collective Work), David states that, in order “to advance our struggle”, the solution is “to work collectively” (*trabajar en colectivo*). Emphasising the potential of such communal work, he goes on to sing: “Improving our production is the path of liberation [...] Producing our own food, thus can we resist”.<sup>47</sup> Notably, this approach echoes discourses of the liberation theology catechism produced by Tzeltal catechists in the mid-twentieth century cited above, which emphasised the importance of communal work. Second, “struggle” is also described as the direct exertion of physical force against an enemy, adapting language commonly used within the discourse of *palabra de Dios* Christianity for violent revolution. This is evinced in “Himno Zapatista”, a song directed towards “[t]he Zapatista combatant” (evidently a figure prepared for violent action) who will represent “our people” in their desire for a “struggle for liberation”. “Me voy a la insurgencia” makes a yet clearer link to physical violence, telling the story of a Zapatista fighter about to enter the field of combat in order “to liberate my people from oppression and injustice/With weapon in hand, I will fight [*lucharé*] against the enemy”. As seen in the following extract, a strong sense of self-sacrifice accompanies this decision:

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<sup>47</sup> This struggle thus resembles “prefigurative politics”, in which one seeks to incrementally reduce exploitation by the development of ideal socio-economic relations at a local level (cf. Graeber, 2002; Holloway, 2010).

Por dignidad de mi pueblo	For the dignity of my people
voy a la guerra contento	I go happily to war
Y lucharé con valor	And I will fight bravely
hasta vencer o morir	To death or victory
Y si me muero luchando	And if I die fighting
es dar mi vida por mi pueblo	I will have given my life for my people
Mañana salgo temprano	Tomorrow I leave early
en nombre del pueblo que lucha	In the name of the peoples that struggle
Y aquí va otro campesino	And here goes another <i>campesino</i> [peasant]
que va a luchar por su pueblo	To fight for his people
Les probaré que mi raza	I'll prove to them that my race [or "people"]
sabe morir donde quiera	Knows how to die wherever it wants
("Me voy a la insurgencia", Comandante David)	

These lyrics are geared towards motivating the hearer to join armed combat within the context of pre-1994 Chiapas. "Me voy a la insurgencia" presents a protagonist content to have surrendered their personal future in order to defend "the dignity of my people". The last four lines of this excerpt reveal a perhaps manipulative rhetorical trick, narrating a competition between peoples who join together in the same armed struggle to demonstrate to one another the bravery and pride of their group. Like several of these songs, then, "Me voy a la insurgencia" functions as a persuasive tool in favour of armed rebellion.

The composition and performance of Spanish-language songs, then, supported the growing clandestine movement by fomenting shared emotional narratives subtly geared towards the use of physical force.<sup>48</sup> Elisabeth Wood notes a similar pattern among peasant insurgents of the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front in El Salvador who, she argues, initially rebelled "to repudiate perceived injustices" and "to assert – and thereby to constitute – their dignity" (2001: 268). Affirming dignity in response to injustice involved manifesting rage, something understood by many peasants as "a necessary expression of being human" (268). Self-assertive emotional concepts such as

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<sup>48</sup> See Castells: "[s]ocial movements are formed by communicating messages of rage and hope" (2013: 301). Elsewhere, he suggests: "[I]f many individuals feel humiliated, exploited, ignored or misrepresented, they are ready to transform their anger into action, as soon as they overcome their fear. And they overcome their fear by the extreme expression of anger, in the form of outrage, when learning of an unbearable event suffered by someone with whom they identify" (Castells, 2012: 15).

dignity and outrage were highly important in the music of the clandestine EZLN. Further, my consultants ascribed inherent value to the act of performing songs addressing these issues. A veteran of the movement told me that singing songs about the Zapatista struggle was an act of defiance and bravery:

To sing songs about Zapatismo [...] that reflect life, the reality of the peoples that sing them, the lack of so many things [...] requires courage. To sing songs, first you need courage [...] The government doesn't want there to be songs that express rebellion [...] Generally anonymity is maintained, although you might know who it is, although it may even be your neighbour, anonymity is maintained because of the risks.<sup>49</sup>

Emotional messages linked to a narrative promoting armed struggle appeared frequently in Zapatista song as the EZLN expanded clandestinely into rural Chiapas.

*Canta David vol. 1* must therefore be situated in a context that saw many indigenous people torn between violent and non-violent courses of action. The emotional subject they narrated – a dignified, “illuminated” and “conscientized” peasant willing to undertake collective action in order to struggle against injustice and oppression – largely resembled that found in the liberation theology discourses prevalent among Catholics in Chiapas at the time. In turn, as highlighted in the previous section, violence was a highly divisive issue in this context. These songs, then, promoted narratives supporting violent collective action which, in turn, served to distinguish the EZLN from the Church, whose leaders within Chiapas opposed violent solutions to oppression (Legorreta Díaz, 1998: 219-25).

### **Genre and hybridity in *Canta David vol. 1***

As the previous two sections have established, the clandestine EZLN was a radically new sort of community in which different factions, and indigenous groups from vast swathes of Chiapas, came into fellowship with one another. Leyva Solano has pointed out that most clandestine Zapatista supporters occupied indigenous, Catholic and revolutionary identities simultaneously (1995: 82-3). David's songs emerged in a highly conflictive and uncertain political, social and emotional setting in which (at least) corridos, some with rewritten lyrics, were part of the ritual life of the EZLN and liturgical songs part of Catholic religious services. The instability – and even novelty – of this setting, in which a new rebel organization was beginning to compete for legitimacy and power, suggest important questions about the extent to which the songs on *Canta David vol. 1* may

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<sup>49</sup> Interview, “Alonso”, 28-10-13. This interview was conducted in Tzeltal with the help of an interpreter.

themselves be understood to be “corridos”. First, how were they emically defined? Second, from which traditions did these songs tend to draw? Is it more appropriate to talk about old, stable genres that were reperformed (such as the corrido and liturgical song), or new forms built out of the resignified remains of the old?

It is significant that, in much emic discourse among Zapatista musicians, the word “corrido” is commonly conflated with the word “canción” (meaning simply “song”). This tendency goes beyond a simple subsumption of the former category into the latter – of course, the corrido is a form of song – but instead often resembles an elision of the two categories. A leaflet describing the work of Producciones Radioinsurgente, a Zapatista music label examined in Chapter Two, uses the phrase *corridos zapatistas* to refer to the entirety of its non-instrumental musical output, which includes a great many songs not typically described as corridos.<sup>50</sup> Further, Comandante David introduces *Canta David vol. 2* as an album of “corridos”, despite the fact that this album contains a cover of “No Nos Moverán”, a protest song ultimately based on the African-American spiritual “I Shall Not Be Moved”. Something similar occurs on the album *Corridos zapatistas* by Trío Montaña, which, despite its title, contains a song more often described as a cumbia (a cover of José de Molina’s “Ya comenzó”). During my interviews with former participants in the Zapatista organization, one recalled that “in the [Zapatista] camp, we sang corridos [...] there they only sang purely revolutionary songs [*canciones revolucionarias*]”, and another used these words in combination (“I never sang the Zapatista *canciones*, the Zapatista corridos”). In fact, in most of these interviews I asked questions about “Zapatista corridos” and my consultants gave answers about “Zapatista songs”. Furthermore, some hinted at an affective and musical, rather than literary, mode of defining the corrido genre. Two defined the genre in relation to the music of the well-known *norteño* group Los Tigres del Norte, and two suggested that corridos were always based on a 2/4 guitar rhythm with one downstroke.<sup>51</sup> Another, who had performed in a Zapatista band and composed songs from the late 1980s to the late 1990s, stated that the majority of Zapatista composers at the time that the songs on *Canta David vol. 1* were composed and arranged wrote corridos on the basis of sound, rather than paying attention to lyrics.<sup>52</sup>

This evidence points towards the corrido as an uncertain – and affective – emic

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<sup>50</sup> The relevant section of this leaflet reads “With PRODUCCIONES RADIO INSURGENTE, for the first time, indigenous and Zapatista music groups have the opportunity to record their music, giving in this way a broader dissemination to the traditional music of the [Zapatista] communities and to the Zapatista corridos”.

<sup>51</sup> Interview, “Fernando”, 11-07-15; Interview, “Julia”, 02-08-13; Interview, “Juan”, 19-08-15.

<sup>52</sup> Interview, “Luis”, 20-08-15.



category. In Bakhtinian terminology, David's songs reflect an emerging social order in which the secondary speech genres of "corrido" and "liturgical song" had become destabilized, leading to Zapatista musicians' creative appropriation of the literary and musical primary speech genres that constituted them. All of the former Zapatista musicians I spoke to also performed frequently in church services in the 1980s and 1990s; further, one of my former Zapatista consultants stated that Zapatista musicians often drew from liturgical song (which was sung in both Spanish and Tzeltal) as well as corridos.<sup>53</sup> Correspondingly, *Canta David vol. 1* contains many corrido tropes identified in the literary formulae of Mendoza and Duvalier, but these are often scattered among features not typically found in the genre. "Corrido campesino" begins with an initial call ("Pay attention, gentlemen, to what I'm going to sing for you"), and so does "Amos se llamaba" ("Gentlemen, I'm going to sing you the story of a prophet/Who announced the Kingdom, denouncing injustice"). "Me voy a la insurgencia" concludes with the singer going into battle: "I bid you farewell, long live liberty". Both of these songs feature heroic or tragic protagonists: Amos as the lone prophet of justice, and the narrator of "Me voy a la insurgencia" as a poor *indígena* prepared to fight and die for a greater cause. Finally, these songs contain many concluding messages of a kind common in the corrido genre, such as "long live liberty" ("Me voy a la insurgencia") and "struggling all together, we will achieve freedom" ("Corrido campesino"). Although, when taken individually, each of these characteristics point towards the corrido as Mendoza and Duvalier define it, no single song on this album provides anything resembling an "epic ballad" or even a structured narrative account of past events (Mendoza, 1954: ix; Herrera-Sobek, 1993: xi; Duvalier, 1937).

Attention to syllable count produces a similarly varied picture. Many of the songs from *Canta David vol. 1* are either octosyllabic or close to it, fulfilling one of Mendoza's key expectations concerning the genre. "Himno Zapatista" is the best example: the first verse of this song fits perfectly into an octosyllabic structure (its second does as well, with the exception of the last line, which is formed of nine syllables), while its chorus is dodecasyllabic. Further, in the first verse of "Amos se llamaba" eight of twelve lines are formed of eight syllables, just as in the first verse of "Corrido campesino". Finally, all but four of the twenty-four lines in "Me voy a la insurgencia" contain eight syllables (including two consecutive lines given an extra syllable since emphasis falls on the last syllable of the final word: "Y lucharé con valor/Hasta vencer o morir"). Equally, many of

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<sup>53</sup> Interview, "Fernando", 11-07-15.

the album's fourteen songs show no sign of organization according to syllable count (“Dios, fuente de justicia”, “Trabajo colectivo”, “La madre tierra”, “Cristo me dió todo”).

Neither do these songs fit neatly into the expectations of Alviso (2011) and Chamberlain (2003) concerning regular corrido rhythm. In “Me voy a la insurgencia”, the rhythm guitar<sup>54</sup> plays in triple metre with a single bass note emphasising the start of each bar, but this is persistently undermined by the singers, who do not follow this rhythmic structure. The connections established in this song between time signature, melody and harmony thus disintegrate over time, as shown in Music Example 1:

Music Example 1 consists of three systems of musical notation. Each system has three staves: two for guitar and one for voice. The first system (measures 1-10) shows a guitar part in 3/4 time with a bass note on the first beat of each bar, and a voice part in 4/4 time with a whole note on the first beat. The second system (measures 11-20) shows the guitar part changing to 2/4 time, then 3/4, and then 2/4, while the voice part remains in 4/4 time. The third system (measures 21-30) shows the guitar part in 4/4 time, while the voice part remains in 4/4 time. The lyrics 'Me voy a la in-' are written under the voice staff in the third system.

<sup>54</sup> It is unclear from the recording whether this is played on a *bajo sexto*, or a guitar of another type.

30  
Guit.  $\frac{8}{8}$

Guit.  $\frac{8}{8}$

Vo.

sur - gen - cia voy a in - gre - sar - me a la sel - va.....

36  
Guit.  $\frac{8}{8}$

Guit.  $\frac{8}{8}$

Vo.

Pa' li - be - rar a mi pue - blo de la op - re - sión e in -

44  
Guit.  $\frac{8}{8}$

Guit.  $\frac{8}{8}$

Vo.

jus - ti - cia Con las ar - mas en la ma - no lu - cha - ré con - tra el en -

51  
Guit.  $\frac{8}{8}$

Guit.  $\frac{8}{8}$

Vo.

e - mi - go.....

*Music Example 1: Comandante David, "Me voy a la insurgencia"*

In this extract, a seemingly simple 3/4 ostinato, played on the rhythm guitar, is complicated in interaction with the *requinto* (solo) guitar (bars 1-21) and the voices (bars 28-53), which both play a similar melody differentiated mainly by their distinct temporal relationships to the rhythm guitar. Compare, for instance, bars 15 and 45: both contain

the same fragment of melody (in *requinto* guitar and vocals respectively), but it enters on the first beat of bar 15 and the second beat of bar 45. Something similar happens between bars 8 and 39. In both instances, an initial displacement of the melody in relation to the rhythm continues throughout the subsequent passage. The pulse therefore emerges as the fundamental unit of rhythmic structure, rather than the 3/4 rhythm played in the accompanying guitar. This undermining, over time, of the structured rhythm initially presented to the listener is characteristic of the music on *Canta David vol. 1*.<sup>55</sup> It is compounded by disparities between the lengths of each line: the first line (or the first two lines, according to the song's divisions in verse) lasts eight bars (plus a three-bar pause between the end of this line and the start of the next), while the second lasts six, and the third nine. It is finally worth noting that “Me voy a la insurgencia” lacks anacrusis where the melody might, according to convention in both corridos and Catholic liturgical music, suggest one: for example, when the melody rises from dominant to tonic at the beginning of a line (see Stobart and Cross, 2000).

Instead of neatly occupying one or another category, I suggest that it is best, on an analytical level, to view many of these songs as musical and literary hybrids that draw from the traditions of Spanish-language song present in Las Cañadas in the clandestine period. “Dios, fuente de justicia” may form a good example of these creative tendencies. When I played this song to a senior ex-Zapatista in Ocosingo, he immediately began to sing a Catholic song in Tzeltal with a similar melodic and harmonic structure.<sup>56</sup> Another former Zapatista, however, categorized “Dios, fuente de justicia” as a *ranchero* song due to its 3/4 rhythm.<sup>57</sup> As seen in Music Example 2, this song opens with a guitar accompaniment in triple metre that switches between the tonic and dominant 7<sup>th</sup>, with the bass note falling on the first beat of each bar. Its melody – harmonized at a distance of a third – rises and falls in step, and each line ends with a melodic cadence also descending in step.<sup>58</sup> The first two lines of the melody (“Padre de bondad, fuente de amor”) conclude on an E and G, far from the song's tonic D, at which point the accompaniment switches to the dominant 7<sup>th</sup>; this “question” is answered at the very end of the fourth line, when the melody and accompaniment return to the tonic D.

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<sup>55</sup> There are many parallels between this musical style and that studied by Dueck (2013: 128-36).

<sup>56</sup> Interview, “Eduardo”, 10-07-15.

<sup>57</sup> Interview, “Fernando”, 11-07-15.

<sup>58</sup> Interestingly, the melodies of both “Carabina 30-30” and “Mi General Zapata” (two corridos known to have been played by EZLN insurgents during the clandestine period) descend in pitch at the end of each line.

*Music Example 2: Comandante David, “Dios, fuente de justicia” (opening verse)*

As noted above, each of these features are identified by Alviso (2011) as being (statistically) typical of the corrido. On the other hand, at no point do the lyrics follow any of the literary conventions associated with the corrido: they are not organized according to syllable count; neither do they contain any of the literary formulae typical of the genre. Instead, the first two lines<sup>59</sup> – in their succinct phrasing and direct exaltation of God – are closer to the style of the liturgical songs of the liberation theology Catholic Church in Chiapas prior to the EZLN’s arrival, such as “Iglesia bonita” (Music Example 3). These songs exhibited great variety in melodic structure, many displaying leaps in pitch and variations in line length uncommon in corridos (see Appendix 5).

*Music Example 3: “Iglesia bonita”<sup>60</sup>*

Similar conclusions can be drawn from the chorus of “Dios, fuente de justicia”, shown in

<sup>59</sup> “Father of goodness, source of love”.

<sup>60</sup> “Beautiful Church, seed of the kingdom/Simple Church, heart of the people”.

## Music Example 4:

Music Example 4 consists of four systems of musical notation, each with a guitar and a voice part. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The lyrics are as follows:

Pe - ro Dios quie-re jus - ti - cia.....

La i - gual-dad de to-dos - los hom - bres...

Él con sus pa - la - bras de o - bra.....

Nos en - se - ñó a com - ba - tir.....

*Music Example 4: Comandante David, “Dios, fuente de justicia” (chorus)<sup>61</sup>*

Like the verse, this chorus contains descending melodic cadences and vocal harmonization in thirds, and changes in the chords played by the accompaniment take place on the final syllable of each line; in addition, the melody rises and falls in step. Each of these musical tendencies are common to corridos. However, the lyrics of this chorus are more reminiscent of Catholic liturgical songs, containing a moral message emphasising divine opposition to injustice and exploitation rather than a narrative about any particular event.

Identifying this song as a hybrid form can cast in a new light the final two lines of its chorus: “He with his Word/Taught us to battle”. The word here translated “to battle”, *combatir*, is more directly associated with physical violence than its counterpart *luchar* (“to struggle”). As discussed above, the root of the rift between the EZLN and the Catholic Church in Chiapas lay in a disagreement concerning the necessity of physical violence.

<sup>61</sup> “But God wants justice/Equality for all men/He with his Word/Taught us to battle”.

Like many of the songs on *Canta David vol. 1*, “Dios, fuente de justicia” is situated squarely within this tension, as a song which draws from both corrido and liturgical traditions to both assert the worth of indigenous people in the eyes of God and subtly enjoin the hearer to violent action in order to defend it.

### **Competitions, hierarchy and EZLN leadership**

David’s songs were very distinct in style to those analysed by de la Garza (2013), which more closely resemble the formulaic corrido schema outlined at the beginning of this chapter. For example, Trio Montaña’s “Corrido del primero de enero” (Corrido of the First of January) opens with the following lines (of which the first eight consist of eight syllables):

El día primero de enero	On the first of January
del año ’94	In the year ’94
Pasaron los insurgentes	The insurgents went
por distintas direcciones	To various places
Gritando a los milicianos	Shouting to the militias
dispuestos para pelear	Ready to fight
San Cristóbal, Margaritas,	San Cristóbal, Margaritas
Altamirano, Ocosingo	Altamirano, Ocosingo
Tomaron cuatro municipios	They took four municipalities
Recuperaron armamentos	They recovered weaponry
(Trio Montaña, “Corrido del primero de enero”)	

These songs were mostly written at a later date and appear to have been influenced by two key occurrences around the turn of the decade. First, as mentioned above, some accounts state that in 1989 Subcomandante Marcos strongly attacked Catholicism, and religious belief in general, before a large audience of indigenous Zapatistas. This may have made Zapatista groups less likely to write original songs with religious themes. Although all of the accounts I gathered during my research suggested that religious belief continued to be highly important to social and musical life within Zapatista communities,<sup>62</sup> the majority of recorded Zapatista songs are secular in lyrical content.

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<sup>62</sup> These consisted of a mixture of interviews with current and former Zapatistas, as well as interviews with some outsiders who had lived in Zapatista communities, or participated in the 2013 Zapatista Escuelita. In particular, a young Zapatista I interviewed who had recently migrated to San Cristóbal de Las Casas told me that members of his community enjoyed listening to (Protestant) Christian worship music, and tended to interpret lyrics from this music to support a Zapatista worldview. The chorus of the song “Cansado del Camino” (Tired of the Journey) by Jesús Adrián Romero goes “Tired of the journey/thirsty for you/I have

Indeed, David's second album, which contains later songs than those of his first, contains very few references to the religious concepts so important to *Canta David vol. 1*. Second – and most important – in the early 1990s the EZLN made specific interventions into the compositional style of Zapatista musicians that emphasised the importance of discursive narrative over sound. One of my consultants, “Luis”, described a competition (*concurso*) that took place in 1991 for which Zapatista bands were invited to submit “corridos” to a panel consisting of four *mestizo* members of the EZLN leadership, including Subcomandante Marcos.<sup>63</sup> The competition formed part of a larger *fiesta* attended by about five thousand Zapatistas, and roughly fifty Zapatista bands took part, indicating the extent and importance of music-making in the clandestine EZLN at this time. Their submissions were to be ranked, and first, second and third prizes awarded. My consultant (who sang and played the guitar) told me that his group had been awarded second prize.

It is important to note that, according to this account, many of the participating groups were shocked and even angered by the results of the competition, and some became discouraged from composing songs altogether. Ultimately, their surprise resulted from the criteria upon which the panel's decisions were based. While the majority of Zapatista musicians had an affective and musical idea of the corrido genre – and had invested much effort in composing songs that *sounded* like corridos – the EZLN's *mestizo* leaders tended to value this genre on the basis of its narrative and literary qualities. Thus, at this competition, Zapatista groups were informed that “what counted was the word, the story told in your corrido”.<sup>64</sup> Through this process, Luis's understanding of the corrido changed. He was told that “you have to know the story, if you sing a corrido of the organization [the EZLN] you have to know when it began, who are the people that lead it and what the purpose of their struggle is”, as well as describing “the poverty of your people”.<sup>65</sup> The competition, as well as the organization that occurred in preparation for it (for instance, emissaries were sent out to communities to “give ideas” for corridos to participating groups) was thus geared towards informing indigenous Zapatistas of

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lost my strength/I come to you”. As this respondent stated, “To say ‘tired of the journey’ could also mean ‘tired of the bad government's mistreatment’, ‘tired of humiliation’, ‘tired of everything’. So for me that worship song ‘Cansado del Camino’ has a lot to do with the struggle, with Zapatismo.” This consultant also mentioned the song “Dios Manda Lluvia” (God Send Rain), also performed by Jesús Adrián Romero, the chorus of which goes “God send rain/poured out from your Spirit/today descends your fire/heal my wounds/restore me, Lord”. For this respondent, “When they talk about ‘God sends rain’, the expression [is] ‘God sends justice for the people’. Justice for the poor, for the people that have been duped [...] they open up a sense that, for us, ‘God awakens us to reality’, so that we don't live duped by the government.” (Interview, 24-10-13).

<sup>63</sup> Interview, “Luis”, 20-08-15.

<sup>64</sup> Interview, “Luis”, 20-08-15.

<sup>65</sup> Interview, “Luis”, 20-08-15.



“how the corrido should be” – a version of the genre which apparently bore many similarities to the corrido of twentieth-century *mestizo* writers such as Mendoza.<sup>66</sup>

While there is much still to discover about this competition – especially regarding how it was perceived by those unhappy with the results – this account suggests that it was highly important in a process of both musical and ideological change within the clandestine EZLN. My consultant emphasised that the EZLN’s leadership used it to effectively transmit to the organization’s core supporters the ideology of “word” examined in this dissertation as a whole. The “word-focused” corrido that this competition encouraged was privileged within the hierarchy around which this rebel army was organized, and was at odds with the Spanish-language song that most Zapatista musicians had been producing in the 1980s which – as in the music of Comandante David, who creatively borrowed from a variety of musical traditions – was built around “sound” rather than “text”. It might be suggested that, after this point, the “neo-Zapatista corrido” began to take form as an identifiable, even stable, genre. Certainly, the songs produced by Zapatista musicians in the 1990s tended to adhere more closely to the corrido literary formulae outlined at the beginning of this chapter. These occurrences attain particular relevance in light of the fact that in some Zapatista rhetoric, *palabra* (word) is naturalized as an indigenous value (EZLN, 1996; 1995: 306-8). They suggest that the importance of “word” to Zapatismo (which has become a vital part of pro-Zapatista activism across Mexico) resulted from complex intra-EZLN power relations, including the authority of the organization’s leadership over its indigenous members.

## Conclusion

The Lacandon Jungle in the 1980s was a site of dynamic communication between Marxist revolutionaries, representatives of the Catholic Church and *indígenas*. In the mid-twentieth century, the Catholic Church strongly impacted the region’s cultural landscape, introducing liberation theology-inflected liturgical songs to the indigenous settlers of this region, while the EZLN played a role in introducing and promoting corridos among its supporters. Further, the Catholic Church and the EZLN each provided education in literacy and Spanish. Both organizations, therefore, contributed to the pool of musical and poetic tropes from which indigenous supporters of the Zapatista army, encouraged and capacitated to write Spanish-language songs with revolutionary themes, could draw.

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<sup>66</sup> Interview, “Luis”, 20-08-15.

This is not to ascribe the indigenous participants in the movement a passive role; indeed, these songs also evince a complex process of cultural exchange and transmission during which tropes of rhythmic structure, such as anacruses, were reconfigured. It is, however, to take seriously the suggestion that indigenous groups whose first languages were mainly Tzotzil, Tzeltal or Tojolabal may not otherwise have been in the habit of writing and performing songs in Spanish.

There are therefore a number of complex communicative dynamics to consider when attempting to situate Comandante David's songs within the clandestine EZLN. The narratives of collective action found in these songs can help us to understand how a large group of indigenous people came to take up arms in January 1994. In them, David appealed to emotional concepts such as dignity, equality, brotherhood, injustice and pride, building up a sense of indigenous or *campesino* self-worth, and expressing hope for change through physically violent action. Further, songs such as "Dios, fuente de justicia" and "Me voy a la insurgencia" served to distance the singer from the institutional influence of the Catholic Church by proposing an armed solution to injustice, while simultaneously using theological language to persuasively frame these solutions for an audience of indigenous believers. In other words, they bound together a community by narrating a common experience of oppression, and established the boundaries of this community by advocating violent struggle as well as peaceful resistance. From this perspective, David's songs served not only to support the aims of the EZLN but to subtly constitute it as an organization, in a clandestine context in which musicians were unable to openly identify as "Zapatista".

As seen in the Introduction to this dissertation, for James W. Carey media can be understood in relation to both the transmission and ritual views of communication. The songs of the early EZLN were certainly used to transmit information in a variety of forms: messages advocating rebellion and affirming indigenous self-worth; narratives about oppression, and the genocide in bordering Guatemala. However, by the same token they may also be understood, from a ritual perspective, as creative of a common culture: that is, they established a series of shared values upon which social action could be structured, and contributed to a ritual life through which inclusion within the nascent rebel organization could be established. In this regard, the musical hybridity between corridos and liberation theology liturgical song evinced in a number of early Zapatista songs is especially notable, since it aligns with what the majority of evidence about the early EZLN indicates: that this was a *revolutionary religious* community in which armed

struggle was seen as a divine duty.

Finally, in this chapter I emphasise the direct role played by the EZLN's leadership in influencing the development of the "neo-Zapatista corrido". The emic conception of the genre that developed among Zapatista musicians in the 1980s emphasised sonic features of music, such as melody and rhythm, over lyrics. This related to a situation in which not all indigenous Zapatistas spoke Spanish, and few could read or write. While much remains to be discovered about the corrido competition held by the EZLN in 1991, its principal purpose appears to have been to produce a "word-focused" corrido in which importance was lent to linear, discursive narratives rather than musical sound. Although some Mexican writers describe the corrido as an "authentic" product of "our people" (Serrano Martínez, 1963: 9-13), the "neo-Zapatista corrido" cannot be understood as a simple expression of grassroots creativity, but as a complex genre bearing the marks of elite influence within the clandestine EZLN.

## CHAPTER TWO

### CAN THE SUBALTERN SING? REPRESENTATIONAL ANXIETIES AND THE “DIALOGIC INDIAN” IN ZAPATISTA RECORDING PROJECTS

During my field research in San Cristóbal de Las Casas, a city in Chiapas in which a sizeable community of pro-Zapatista activist migrants was based, I came across a small number of commercial outlets that sold copied compact discs of music recorded after 1994 by groups from Zapatista communities, alongside a plethora of other Zapatista-themed merchandise. What intrigued me most about these compact discs in this setting was the way that many claimed authority to represent the Zapatista movement. CDs produced by a Zapatista record label, Producciones Radioinsurgente, all came with the following phrase screen-printed onto the disc: “Producciones Radioinsurgente: The official voice of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation”. Elsewhere, in a pamphlet about the project, this label is introduced as follows:

With Producciones Radioinsurgente, for the first time, indigenous and Zapatista musical groups have the opportunity to record their music, in this way giving broader dissemination to the traditional music of the communities and to the Zapatista corridos.

Allusions to “dissemination” were not, in themselves, unusual within Zapatista circles, as I argue throughout this dissertation. What was remarkable, however, was the claim made in this project’s mantra that Producciones Radioinsurgente formed a representative voice for the Zapatista movement as a whole. Such a claim drew the project into a series of interesting and potentially problematic relationships between the Zapatista communities in Chiapas and their supporters.

Anxieties about representation have plagued scholarly responses to the Zapatista movement from its inception, particularly concerning the iconic figure that – until his

recent retirement<sup>67</sup> – was supposed to speak for the indigenous members of the EZLN, Subcomandante Marcos. After 1994, Marcos emerged as the EZLN’s unofficial spokesperson, his poetic and humorous writings capturing the imagination of many (Conant, 2010; Higgins, 2000). Equally, this character – generally thought to be the creation of a former philosophy lecturer, Rafael Sebastián Guillén – has been criticized for assuming a role as representative of the indigenous people forming the core support of the EZLN. Taking a feminist perspective, Belaustegoigoitia (2006) describes Marcos as an effective translator, a “mask” who has been able to greatly empower Zapatista voices – but mostly the male ones. Di Piramo, meanwhile, scrutinizes the figure of Marcos through a Weberian lens, identifying a “cult of personality” that has developed around this figure, and calling attention to the tension between the Zapatistas’ “anti-authoritarian progressive ideas and the personalism implied in Marcos’ charismatic authority” (2010: 176, 29). She points out ways that Marcos may have attempted to “neutralize the personalistic or authoritarian element of his own personal power”, and emphasises that the interlocutory role that the Marcos character assumed between the EZLN and a variety of global actors empowered the Zapatista movement (28-30). Nonetheless, her portrayal evinces a great preoccupation – among both the author and pro-Zapatista actors in general – with the representational hierarchy that Marcos embodies.

One of the most targeted attacks on the Subcomandante Marcos persona appeared in a polemic by anthropologist Pedro Pitarch entitled “The Zapatistas and the Art of Ventriloquism” (2004). Pitarch portrayed the Zapatistas as a typical Marxist guerrilla army which only started to emphasize the indigenous aspect of its cause for strategic reasons after the 1994 uprising, when Marcos “began to speak in a way that the urban population imagines that Indians speak: a strange mixture of expressions in archaic, Chiapanecan Spanish, the syntax of Indians in Western movies and motifs from the European romantic, pastoral genre” (2004: 298). Such an act of “ventriloquism”, Pitarch charges, emerged on the basis of the historic suppression of true indigenous voices in Mexico, and allowed Marcos to “[project] his own interests and political strategies” onto the indigenous population of Chiapas (2004: 297-9). Pitarch’s argument may be critiqued from a number of perspectives, not least the way he tends to reify categories such as “Marxism-Leninism”, “Indianism” and “nationalism” which are, in reality, combined

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<sup>67</sup> In May 2014, the Subcomandante Marcos character was publically retired and replaced by “Subcomandante Galeano”, a figure named not after the Uruguayan writer but after a Zapatista who had recently been brutally murdered by paramilitaries in the Zapatista community of La Realidad. <http://roarmag.org/2014/05/subcomandante-galeano-between-light-shadow/> (accessed 27-05-15).

within the Zapatista movement in complex ways (2004: 302-4; cf. Baschet, 2005). Nonetheless, one of Pitarch's conclusions is worthy of further attention: that Zapatismo constitutes a "mirror that reflects whatever image is projected onto it", and that "it is the Indian who acts as the mirror" (2004: 300). This statement, whose language of "mirrors" is reflected in the very discourse of the EZLN,<sup>68</sup> hints at a subtle subtext of the piece; Pitarch is speaking as an anthropologist with many years of experience conducting fieldwork among Tzeltal-speaking peoples in Chiapas. What he charges to be "ventriloquism", a superimposed pastiche of indigeneity, is therefore defined against the "authentic" Indian behind the mirror that Pitarch has discovered during the course of his own field research.<sup>69</sup>

As Rosalva Aída Hernández Castillo has pointed out, Pitarch was not the only anthropologist who, following the 1994 uprising, mobilized essentialized versions of indigenous identity in order to discredit this new revolutionary movement (2001: 15-16). By contrast, it is a far greater challenge to understand indigeneity as a fluid, contingent and socially negotiated identity that mobilizes popular cultural and religious practice of colonial origin (often denounced as "cultural imperialism") as much as continuously reworked "traditions". Indeed, Hernández Castillo herself argues in favour of "a dialogic perspective on [indigenous] cultural identities" (2012: 24), casting Pitarch's "mirror" metaphor in a different light entirely. Mikhail Bakhtin's philosophy of so-called "dialogism" holds that all meaning, including identity, adheres to particular relationships of communication between articulating subjects (1984; 1981: 263-72; 1986: 92-3). Bakhtin was suspicious of tyrannical, monological forms of communication such as ritualized or official discourse in which "everyone is compelled to speak the same language" (Holquist, 2002: 52; cf. Bakhtin, 1981: 60-1). Instead, he emphasised the dialogic, "heteroglot" nature of communication: utterances emerge through relations between bodies and can only be understood according to the positions these bodies take up (Bakhtin, 1981: 263-72; Bakhtin, 1986: 92-3; Holquist, 2002: 21). From a Bakhtinian perspective, then, there is nothing inherent to express; behind the mirror the Indian is holding lies another mirror. Here, anxieties about representation are complicated by the suggestion that meaning

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<sup>68</sup> See an EZLN communiqué from May 1995 entitled "La historia de los espejos" ([http://palabra.ezln.org.mx/comunicados/1995/1995\\_06\\_09.htm](http://palabra.ezln.org.mx/comunicados/1995/1995_06_09.htm) [accessed 28-05-15]).

<sup>69</sup> See Pitarch (2004: 304): "It is clear that this 'ethnic' display was largely based on a fiction, whose purpose was to conceal not only the Zapatistas, but also the Tzotzil, Tzeltal and Tojolobal indigenous groups in general. In fact, it did not need the indigenous population, which did not really participate in this deployment of the 'ethnic' factor, but rather an unreal indigenous figure".

inheres in the act of representing oneself or others.<sup>70</sup> In turn, Bakhtin's philosophy tends to depict "ventriloquism" not as a trick designed to confuse or mislead, but as a basic tendency of all human communication (cf. Cooren, 2010: 1-11; Cooren and Sandler, 2014: 225-6).

The questions that ought to be asked about organizations or spokespeople representing indigenous peoples thus go far beyond the problem of authenticity that appears to preoccupy Pitarch. To some extent, this reflects the argument made by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in her article "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988), which situated the intellectual spokesperson of political struggle within a broader architecture of domination. Spivak critiqued the British (mis-)representation of Indian practices of *sati* (widow-immolation) for the principal reason that it legitimized colonial power (297-302); she further critiqued "the intellectual" as a figure established to "consolidate the international division of labour" by producing knowledge as "concrete experience" (275). Acts of political representation (what Spivak calls "speaking for" [275]) should therefore be understood according to the (epistemic) relations of power in which they are embedded; conversely, it might be suggested that even inaccurate depictions of oneself or others may be empowering for some. In this chapter, I propose an analysis of Producciones Radioinsurgente as a representative institution producing sonic depictions of Zapatismo which, on various levels, may only be understood within a context of interaction between the autonomous communities in Chiapas and their supporters from elsewhere in Mexico and around the world. Instead of looking to critique this depiction as inauthentic or misleading, I emphasise, it may be more appropriate to consider it in terms of the power relations that this project both represented and effected.

Although it has received almost no mention in the scholarly literature on the EZLN, the bold claim made for Producciones Radioinsurgente lent this music label great significance. Many of the songs appearing on Producciones Radioinsurgente CDs contained stories with a level of detail not found in, for example, the slogans on Zapatista-themed lighters, keyrings, aprons and t-shirts. It seemed clear to me that the Producciones Radioinsurgente project had the potential to communicate in a manner distinct to that effected through other Zapatista-themed merchandise, and during my time in Chiapas I sought to collect as many of these CDs, and find out as much about this

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<sup>70</sup> See Schultz (2008) for a critical engagement with Bakhtin's notion of dialogue from within the field of ethnomusicology. Also see Rose (1994: 146-55) and Lipsitz (1990: 99-132). Elsewhere, see Magallanes-Blanco (2008) for a study seeking to understand the activities of pro-Zapatista filmmakers within a framework of Bakhtinian dialogism.

label, as I could. The argument made in this chapter thus mobilizes a variety of sources, including interviews with a number of consultants as well as material (interviews, recordings, and literature) produced by Zapatista organizations. This chapter is structured as follows. First, I construct a brief history of music recording in Zapatista communities in the late 1990s and early 2000s, arguing that the transition from cassette to compact disc that took place in this period made some level of centralized organization important for the production of music. Second, I provide an introduction to Producciones Radioinsurgente, looking in particular at the interactions between indigenous Zapatistas and pro-Zapatista outsiders in which its creation was grounded, and highlighting the outward-oriented mode of organization that this project took up. Finally, I examine some of the music produced by this label in light of this background, arguing that much of this content may be best understood in the context of interactions between the EZLN and its sympathizers from across Mexico and around the world.

### **Music and networks of solidarity, post-1994**

Pitts (1996: 221) describes how, in San Cristóbal de Las Casas after the 1994 conflict,

[s]ome entrepreneurs took advantage of the excitement and sold guided tours of the “Zapatista homelands” for around US\$500. War souvenirs also became popular among both journalists and war tourists. Zapatista dolls, Mexican Army dolls, black ski masks, T-shirts, lighters, pens, and other conflict ephemera could be purchased at often exorbitant amounts. (Pitts, 1996: 221)

Nonetheless, those distributing Zapatista-themed wares were not only vendors with commercial aims. During this period, informal pro-Zapatista networks of collaborative action developed that were built upon personal relationships of trust between activists and some of the Zapatistas that frequently visited San Cristóbal.<sup>71</sup> One of my consultants, a tour guide from Michoacán who had lived in the city since the mid-1990s, recounted how he had participated in a solidarity group that maintained a stall in San Cristóbal’s central square, aiming to disseminate information about the Zapatistas to interested visitors, in part by distributing cassette tapes of Zapatista music that the group’s contacts in civil Zapatista communities brought to the city.<sup>72</sup> A significant number of independent recordings of Zapatista groups were made in rural areas in the few years after 1994,

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<sup>71</sup> For studies of these solidarity networks, see Leyva Solano (1998, 2003) and Olesen (2005).

<sup>72</sup> “After you’ve built up trust, you tell me “ah, I belong to this secret organization” [...] the Zapatistas trusted us. They never saw us as people who wanted to benefit personally from it” (Interview, Victor, 21-10-13).



making use of flexible and cheap cassette recording technology (cf. Manuel, 1993). These included recordings by Comandante David and Trío Montaña,<sup>73</sup> an ensemble consisting of solo voice, violin and guitar. Cassette tapes of music by Zapatista bands would be brought to pro-Zapatista groups in San Cristóbal de Las Casas by contacts from Zapatista communities, where they were copied and played using a cassette player at pro-Zapatista groups' stalls in the square, before being subsequently distributed.<sup>74</sup> My consultant's solidarity group aimed to hand out cassettes of Zapatista music to as many people as possible in exchange for a voluntary donation, only setting a price (usually around ten pesos) for the cassettes when donations would not cover the cost of making more copies. He told me that cassette tapes of Zapatista songs tended to attract the interest of people local to Chiapas. By contrast, outsiders, for whom the language barrier was often a difficulty, preferred to purchase artefacts of Zapatismo with symbolic value. Equally, he emphasised that music was useful as a communicative tool for local people who sought information about the conflict but had not learnt to read.<sup>75</sup>

After the turn of the millennium, cassettes started to be challenged by the emerging compact disc format. With compact disc technology, a separation between the means of performance and reproduction emerged that had been less prevalent with the cassette format; one tended to require different technological tools (a CD player and a personal computer) to play a CD and to make new copies of it. This technology was less portable than the cassette technology that preceded it. In the early 2000s in Chiapas it was therefore more economically and practically viable to copy CDs *en masse* than *ad hoc*, necessitating a consolidation of organizational capacity to continue the production of music. The entry of compact disc technology to Chiapas also coincided with a period of important political change in Zapatista circles which altered the relations between Zapatista autonomous communities and the disparate groups of supporters working in "solidarity" with them. After 1994, the EZLN began to lend increasing priority to a demand for "autonomy", a discourse which peaked in intensity during the San Andrés Dialogues in 1996 (Harvey, 2005; Díaz-Polanco, 1997; Mora, 2003; Burguete, 2003). However, after failing to secure concrete commitments from the government, the EZLN

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<sup>73</sup> My collection contains one album of Trío Montaña material, a digitised compact disc version of an original Trío Montaña tape. Whilst this album contains no indication as to the date it was recorded, its content refers to occurrences up to August 1995 (the EZLN's national democratic consultation concerning strategy), so it is likely to have been recorded in late 1995 or 1996.

<sup>74</sup> "The first productions were on cassette, on a cassette that they recorded in a [Zapatista] community, that they brought to the city and handed to us, and we made copies of them... often we were making a copy of a cassette at the same time as we played [*poníamos a difundir*] it to everyone in the square" (Interview, Victor, 21-10-13).

<sup>75</sup> Interview, Victor, 21-10-13; 12-06-13; 09-10-13.

sought to create its own autonomy outside the Mexican state (Aubry, 2003; Stahler-Sholk, 2007). Although they had already begun to encourage the proliferation of NGO-run development projects in their communities, towards the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s Zapatista autonomous municipalities moved to develop their own institutions, such as hospitals and schools, as well as community co-operatives such as Mut Vitz, which produced and sold coffee (Barmeyer, 2009: 136-45, 151, 160). A growing number of such co-operatives acquired income from selling goods in nearby towns, such as footwear and textiles (160). Development projects were increasingly driven forward on the initiative of Zapatista institutions of governance (164). These projects, however, often relied on outside sources for funding and aid, and sometimes depended upon outsider volunteers, especially in schools (161-4). Indeed, it is notable that while the impact of outsider activity is evident throughout many Zapatista “autonomous communities”, this topic is avoided in much of the scholarly literature on Zapatismo, even that dealing with the concept of “autonomy”.<sup>76</sup>

In the early 2000s, then, Zapatista organizations sought to take greater control over the activities of solidarity groups and NGOs, as well as developing community projects run by indigenous people, just as technological trends began to privilege the centralization of musical reproduction. As these two developments coincided, the role of solidarity groups in this musical supply chain diminished; while such groups distributed CDs, they had no hand in their reproduction. Instead, the EZLN created Producciones Radioinsurgente, a record label that concentrated musical production in Zapatista territory.

### **“The official voice of the EZLN”: Producciones Radioinsurgente**

In February 2002, the EZLN-created organization Radio Insurgente (“insurgent radio”) began to operate. It consisted of FM and high-frequency radio, a website, and a music

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<sup>76</sup> See, for instance, Baronnet and Breña (2008); Reyes and Kaufman (2011); also Stahler-Sholk, who makes an explicit conceptual division between different levels of the Zapatista movement (“solidarity networks” and Chiapas-based “support base communities”), analyzing the “sustainability” of the construction of autonomy without considering the varied contributions that solidarity networks have made to this enterprise (2007: 50). Symbolic of this erasure of solidarity in accounts of the creation of Zapatista autonomy, Barmeyer provides the example of a group of activists who, whilst working in a Zapatista community in the late 1990s, in order “[t]o support the communication of political and social messages to the outside world [provided] paint and brushes, so the indigenous communities could create their own murals. However, often it was the activist volunteers who ended up painting the icons of the Zapatista revolution at the villagers’ request” (2009: 144). Some might perceive a level of irony in this anecdote: murals such as these are an internationally recognizable symbol of Zapatismo, and yet many were painted by outsiders, in an act resembling Pitarch’s “ventriloquism”.

recording and production arm made up of two labels: Producciones Radioinsurgente and Producciones La Voz de Los Sin Voz (“The Voice of the Voiceless Productions”).<sup>77</sup> As has been documented elsewhere (Hernández Rodríguez, 2010), the purpose of Radio Insurgente was “dissemination”, both within the region and outside it. According to the organization’s website:<sup>78</sup>

From several radio transmitters in the mountains of the Mexican south-east, Radio Insurgente has made known [*dado a conocer*] the advances of the process of construction of autonomy in the Zapatista zones, and has promoted the dissemination of the word and the music of the indigenous communities.

The purpose of Radio Insurgente’s FM programming broadcast was to disseminate information within Chiapas, a purpose made clearer when this programming was decentralized in 2005 so that content could be tailored to regionally specific contexts and languages.<sup>79</sup> The station’s high-frequency programme, however, was broadcast weekly (usually with a runtime of an hour) and placed online to be downloaded by not just “the peoples of Mexico and the Americas, but also the civil society of Europe, Africa, Asia and Oceania”. The EZLN also encouraged community radio stations in different parts of the world to re-broadcast this program free of charge, “so long as [its] contents [...] are not altered”.<sup>80</sup>

As part of this project, Radio Insurgente developed a digital studio, almost certainly located in the Zapatista *caracol* of Oventik,<sup>81</sup> with the capacity to digitally record, mix, and master music, and manufacture it in compact disc format. The studio was soundproofed using rugs and eggboxes, equipped with seven microphones connected to a 16-track mixing desk and an iMac computer running a version of the Logic “digital audio workstation” for production and mastering. This recording technology was expensive, so it was unsurprising to discover that the studio had been funded and put together by

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<sup>77</sup> Radio Insurgente’s FM broadcasts were devolved to a municipal level in 2005.

<sup>78</sup> [www.radioinsurgente.org](http://www.radioinsurgente.org) (accessed 24-06-14).

<sup>79</sup> Radio Insurgente has even addressed threatening messages during broadcasts to paramilitary fighters. See a short message entitled “Mensaje a los paramilitares en español” on <http://www.radioinsurgente.org/index.php?name=muestras-FM> (accessed 04-07-14): “We want to send a message to the paramilitaries walking around, that are threatening our support bases, I tell you clearly that it’s no longer going to happen like previous occasions, we’re no longer going to be just watching or crying [about] the killings you perpetrate, now we’re going to make you pay the price, we’re going to make you pay a really costly price [...] Listen to Radio Insurgente, the voice of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation, that also broadcasts for the indigenous people [*indígenas*] that are not Zapatistas, and explains the struggle [*lucha*] to them so that they too can get organised and fight”.

<sup>80</sup> [www.radioinsurgente.org](http://www.radioinsurgente.org) (accessed 24-06-14).

<sup>81</sup> One CD on the Producciones La Voz De Los Sin Voz label, of marimba music from Santiago El Pinar in Los Altos, entitled *Ecos de América*, states that it was recorded in Oventik. The most recent Zapatista recording project of which I am aware, by a group called “Originales de San Andrés”, was released in 2013 and was organized by the Good Government Council at Oventik. While I did interview a participant in this project, they were sworn to secrecy concerning its location.

outsider supporters of the EZLN, who not only paid for this equipment but purchased and transported it.<sup>83</sup> This studio was principally used to record music released under the Producciones Radioinsurgente label, while the Producciones La Voz de Los Sin Voz label mostly released compilation albums of material donated by musicians with Zapatista sympathies or old recordings of songs with some connection to contemporary Zapatismo (for instance, corridos from or about the Mexican Revolution). Producciones Radioinsurgente itself recorded music which broadly occupied two categories: bands singing a mixture of corridos and other genres of Spanish-language song, and groups playing instrumental music from different regions of Chiapas, such as that played on the marimba or with a harp, violin and vihuela ensemble.

After this studio was constructed, one pro-Zapatista activist from Europe spent a year teaching recording techniques to a handful of Zapatistas who had volunteered to participate in the project. In an interview, this outsider “instructor” mentioned a number of obstacles to learning that arose in this context. The participants this activist instructed “had never seen a computer before in their lives”, and had to be taught the basic principles of the operating system from scratch.<sup>84</sup> In addition, Zapatista musicians tended to lack experience with recording, meaning that a number of fundamental principles of sound recording had to be explained or demonstrated to them during the recording process; many, for instance, needed to be shown how to position themselves near a microphone. Since the majority of participants spoke only basic Spanish, instruction was structured around a common activity – producing a CD recording – instead of the transmission of a set of ideas. All of these difficulties considered, participants learned rapidly. After a year of instruction the Zapatistas working on the project were regularly producing albums without supervision, and the outsider overseeing the process withdrew, feeling that they had learned enough to manage the studio independently. In his own words, this instructor took a “simpler the better” approach to using the studio in which groups recorded each song together as a group instead of recording separate parts individually.<sup>85</sup> It would take one to two days to record an entire album, after which recordings were mixed and a final version of each track produced, a process which tended to last for about a week. Then, the project’s participants created physical compact discs.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Indeed, the fact that these groups donated equipment rather than financial capital was connected to the fact that good sound recording equipment was only available in some of the larger cities of the country, such as Mexico City.

<sup>84</sup> Interview, 09-01-14.

<sup>85</sup> Interview, 09-01-14.

<sup>86</sup> The account at the end of this paragraph is partly drawn from a description of the process on a pamphlet

In a documentary made for Radio Insurgente in 2005,<sup>87</sup> participants in Producciones Radioinsurgente introduce the intricate process of manufacturing a CD. First, they describe cleaning the master disc with thinner and baking its glass in an oven to ensure this disc's cleanness and quality, before "burning" the album onto blank compact discs using a copying tower and hand-painting the Producciones Radioinsurgente logo onto them in the colours of green, red and black. This logo consisted of a microphone (black), "wave" lines representing the broadcasting of sound from the microphone (red), and a leaf "representing the jungle" (green). Participants subsequently screenprinted the disc, marking the phrase "Producciones Radioinsurgente: the official voice of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation" around its edges.<sup>88</sup> Then, they made designs for a colour front and back cover, printed out copies and placed them into a plastic case along with the disc.



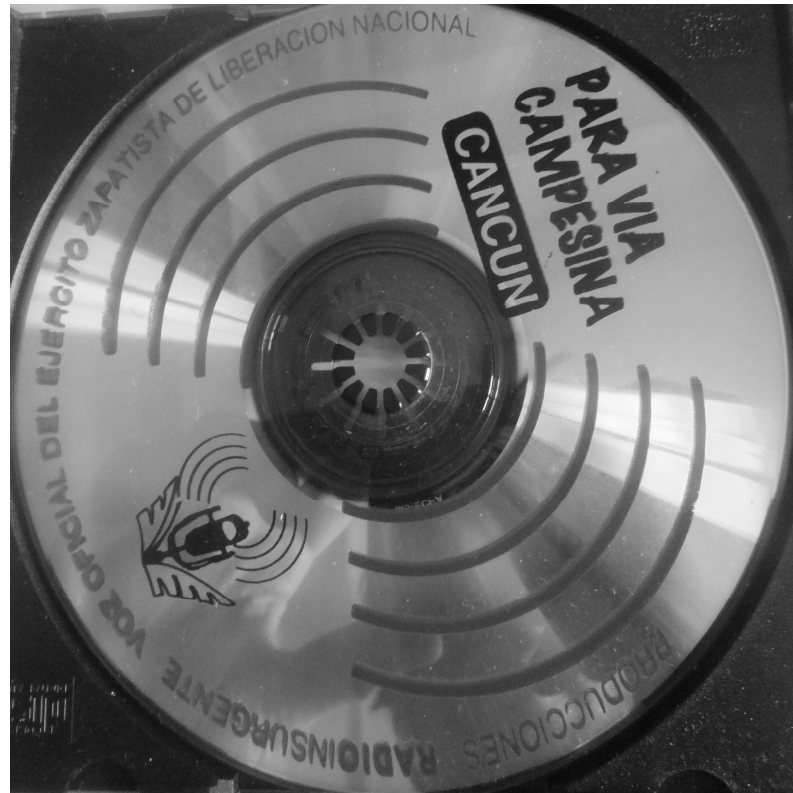
Figure 3: Front cover of Producciones Radioinsurgente CD "Por un mundo donde quepan muchos mundos"

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about Producciones Radioinsurgente available on the Radio Insurgente website.

<sup>87</sup> See <http://www.radioinsurgente.org/index.php?name=archivo> (accessed 04-07-14), two programs in mp3 format entitled "reportaje sobre Producciones Radio Insurgente 1ra parte" (broadcast on 21-01-05) and "reportaje sobre Producciones Radio Insurgente 1ra parte" (broadcast on 28-01-05).

<sup>88</sup> On the CDs produced by the other Radio Insurgente label, Producciones La Voz De Los Sin Voz, this space was instead occupied by the phrase "Important: this material is of the people and for the people. It is authorized to reproduce, copy and distribute it" [italics added].



*Figure 4: CD of Producciones Radioinsurgente CD "Por un mundo donde quepan muchos mundos"*

These recording and manufacturing procedures could be quickly forgotten, however. In an interview conducted with members of Producciones Radioinsurgente for Radio Insurgente in 2007,<sup>89</sup> it transpired that the project had entered a period of crisis precipitated by equipment failure (the interviewees alluded to having had to replace the project's computer) and a subsequent break in activities during which participants in the project lost the skills necessary to use the studio. When it was repaired, then, those volunteering to work there sought a new activist instructor who could re-teach these lost skills.<sup>90</sup> However, the instructor they found, unlike his predecessor, aimed to teach complex multitrack studio production techniques.<sup>91</sup> Speaking after one month's training, those learning to use the studio repeatedly described this process as "difficult to

<sup>89</sup> On <http://www.radioinsurgente.org/index.php?name=archivo> (accessed 04-07-14): "Recorrido de la Comisión Sexta del EZLN por el norte de México como parte de la Otra Campaña, en Aguascalientes y Coahuila. Palabra del Comandante David y cuento del subcomandante insurgente Marcos del 10 de abril en El Mayor. Y una entrevista sobre producciones radioinsurgente" (broadcast 21-04-07).

<sup>90</sup> It is unclear whether the same people continued working with Producciones Radioinsurgente from 2002 to 2007, or whether (and to what extent) personnel changed during this period. The 2007 Radio Insurgente interview was with two women and one man; most of the quotes used here are spoken by the man, who spoke the most fluent Spanish of the trio.

<sup>91</sup> It seems, from the sound of this instructor's voice, that he was young, male and from Spain.

understand”; it required, one says

getting to know more about music, which for us has not been easy, it’s difficult, because we do not know what a sound is, all that music is.

The new instructor, they said, had started to show them how to use computer software “to get rid of noise, make sure that everything that is garbage gets eliminated, to start cutting [up the tracks] so that the voice, or the instruments, can sound cleaner”, as well as equalisation (“to get rid of the deep [sounds], or get rid of a high [sound], or make it a bit higher. It all depends on how we hear it”). Finally, participants in the project were being taught to multitrack record:

[W]e are also doing it in a form that we call “dubbing” [*doblar*]. So for example we can dub the voice, the guitar, or the *vibuela*, to then be able to put it all together [*panoramizar*]. So that it sounds better, no? It has been a bit difficult for us, to understand all that.

The sections of this interview highlighted here raise a series of interesting questions that are important for understanding Producciones Radioinsurgente’s position within a network mostly comprised of indigenous Zapatistas and pro-Zapatista activists. Although the speaker does not explain the reason for this difficulty in comprehension, it certainly appears that the simple studio techniques introduced by the project’s first instructor caused less confusion than this complex multitracking approach. The most intriguing and elusive part of this interview, however, is the speaker’s statement that “we do not know what a sound is”: what might he mean?

Théberge (1997: 214-41) examines the changes in thinking about sound that accompanied the adoption of multitrack studio recording technologies in the late twentieth century. In this context, he argues, music-making became “fragmented – both spatially and temporally”, accompanying “a subjection of recorded sound to rational processes” (1997: 216, 221). The divorcing of sound from social context occurred alongside the hierarchization of sound production, and the development of a superstrata of producers and labels upon which this process came to depend (216-7). Théberge’s argument may have relevance to the context of Producciones Radioinsurgente, especially in light of the fact that, although the interviewee above discusses “sound” (the Spanish word *sonido*) as an abstract concept, ethnographic research suggests that concepts of “sound” and “music” in indigenous societies in rural Chiapas are often inseparable from the environment and manner in which they are produced.<sup>92</sup> Equally, this point can be

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<sup>92</sup> For example, Alonso Bolaños (2012: 246), writing about the Zoques in Chiapas with whom she has carried out extensive ethnographic fieldwork, states that in the context of Zoque festive music “a linguistic term to designate musical sound as such does not exist”. Instead, the term *sünajcuy* refers to “the sonic matrix of the fiesta, that is, the festive occasion on which there is music [and] dance” (Alonso Bolaños,

overstated; after all, the inhabitants of rural Chiapas have ample experience of sound divorced from context through cassette tapes and radios, and learning multitrack recording concepts and practices can be challenging for individuals from any background. Nonetheless, we may draw some conclusions from these excerpts with some certainty. Principally, this interview points toward the development of a hierarchical mode of producing music in which producers gain greater control over sound, and an apparently novel ontology of sound is imparted from “solidarity” to “autonomy”. This is remarkable, given the importance lent to indigenous knowledge, culture and worldview by Zapatistas and Zapatista supporters alike (Aubry, 2003; Higgins and Comandante David, 2001: 375).<sup>93</sup>

Producciones Radioinsurgente, then, was the result of a collaboration between indigenous Zapatistas and European solidarity activists that complicates its self-defined status as “official voice” of the EZLN, and raises questions about the kinds of sonic representations of Zapatismo that were promoted by this label.<sup>94</sup> The following section will explore these questions further by looking at the ways that Producciones Radioinsurgente oriented its praxis and discourse towards a global audience.

### **Dissemination in the music of Producciones Radioinsurgente**

The problems described in the previous section might lead us to ask why it was necessary to use this difficult-to-master technology at all. Why undertake a painstaking procedure involving multitrack recording, mixing, mastering, and producing CDs with handpainted logos and original designs? An interviewee in the documentary mentioned above stated the following:

We know that there are other[ CDs] in other places, but they don't have this logo on them. So that's not original [...] they're copies [...] We're artesinally stamping the disc. So that means that it is an original from Producciones Radioinsurgente.

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2012: 246). In the Tzotzil language predominant in the Chiapas Highlands, the word for “to sound” is *majel*, which also means “to hit” or “to strike”, reflecting an implicit association between sound and bodily movement. For Alonso Bolaños (2009: 18-19), this is characteristic of many indigenous groups in Mexico, for whom “music is irreducible to its sonic expression” and “occurs through sight, hearing, and touch”.

<sup>93</sup> In particular, see Higgins and Comandante David (2001: 379-80) for an interview with the EZLN's Comandante David, who states: “One of the strongest and greatest forces of our struggle is our culture, our language, our forms of living, our forms of thinking, our forms of organizing [...] Since the first uprising, we have revived many of our cultural values [...] since 1994, we have revived, reconstructed, and improved our cultures.” In the context of Producciones Radioinsurgente, the importance of “indigenous culture” is discussed further below.

<sup>94</sup> Although in recent years Zapatista groups have recorded a small handful of albums, the Producciones Radioinsurgente label is, to my knowledge, no longer in use.



Hand-painting the label's logo marked out these CDs as non-pirated material for their target market: outsiders looking to support the Zapatista movement who were keen to purchase genuine products made by Zapatistas. This fragment of information is part of a broader picture suggesting that Producciones Radioinsurgente was organizationally oriented towards a national and international audience, something reflected in two key ways in the label's musical output. First, while many Zapatistas in rural Chiapas (including, as noted, participants in the project itself) speak only indigenous languages, almost all of the label's sung musical output is in Spanish. Second, cassette players continued to be far more prevalent in rural Chiapas than CD players throughout the 2000s (Alonso Bolaños, 2008: 68-9), such that Producciones Radioinsurgente had to make cassette copies of its CDs "so that [people in rural communities] can buy it"<sup>95</sup>. Finally, Producciones Radioinsurgente even placed a request on its webpage for "distributors" of their CDs based around the world who had the "technical capacity to copy [...] CDs and their covers", as well as those with the "capacities to administrate accounts and to commercialize the CDs".<sup>96</sup>

It is unsurprising, therefore, that in the sources on Producciones Radioinsurgente upon which I base this chapter, the objective of "dissemination" [*difusión*] is highly valued. For instance, in the 2007 Radio Insurgente interview discussed above<sup>97</sup> one male indigenous participant describes the purpose of Producciones Radioinsurgente as follows:

For us, we see that the struggle [*lucha*] is also in various forms, no? And one of them is, for example, music. We can give [in music] the information or the message to [our] friends [*compañeros*], about what the struggle is like, how we carry out the struggle, how the people are learning to organise. It is a very good way of getting out [*sacar*] [information about] the Zapatista struggle [...] to disseminate the culture and history of the peoples, through their music.

This interviewee also expresses an interest in recording the music that

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<sup>95</sup> From "reportaje sobre Producciones Radio Insurgente 1ra parte " (broadcast on 28-01-05). <http://www.radioinsurgente.org/index.php?name=archivo> (accessed 04-07-14). Meanwhile, these CDs were being sold by solidarity groups in nearby San Cristobal de las Casas for around 50 pesos each (\$5USD).

<sup>96</sup> This request was subsequently fulfilled by Schools For Chiapas, a San Diego-based non-profit organization organizing a broad programme of pro-Zapatista advocacy. On Schools For Chiapas' website, there is a section headed "The Market Of The Others", an online store where visitors can buy craft items, clothing, Zapatista-themed accessories, "Gifts Of Change" (donations to specific projects in indigenous communities in Chiapas), and even trips to visit Zapatista territory in Chiapas. "The Market Of The Others" contains a section entitled "Media" containing much Zapatista-produced music, available for sale at \$12USD per CD.

<sup>97</sup> <http://www.radioinsurgente.org/index.php?name=archivo> (accessed 04-07-14): "Recorrido de la Comisión Sexta del EZLN por el norte de México como parte de la Otra Campaña, en Aguascalientes y Coahuila. Palabra del Comandante David y cuento del subcomandante insurgente Marcos del 10 de abril en El Mayor. Y una entrevista sobre producciones radioinsurgente" (broadcast 21-04-07).

the elders, oldest friends [*compañeros*] know [...] They have lots of ideas, experiences, and we have given them the invitation to come so that we can record them [...] so that it doesn't get lost; the objective of the struggle is that the culture of the people can be rescued, no?

There are two connected aims at play in these statements: the dissemination of messages through music to a spatially dispersed audience and the “rescuing” of ancient “tradition” for the future. For this interviewee, the act of rescuing “the culture of the people” involves dissemination as well as preservation, marking a point at which these two objectives intersect with one another. Above all, however, it is important to consider the interlocutory position that this indigenous speaker constructs for Producciones Radioinsurgente. Examining the role of professional indigenous activists in Ecuador, Janet Lloyd highlights the ways that these activists, through communicating and presenting themselves according to normative modes of behaviour, perform “the acceptable face of the indigenous world” to the *mestizo* and international audiences that fund their organizations (2002: 136). Indeed, Manuel Castells has suggested that successful mediation between “global” and “local” is vital for social movements in general:

[T]he most influential social movements are, at the same time, rooted in their local context and aiming at a global impact. They need the legitimacy and support provided by their reliance on local groups, yet they cannot remain local or they lose their capacity to act upon the real sources of power in our world. (Castells, 2001: 143)

For the interviewee cited above, through recording and disseminating music, Producciones Radioinsurgente performed a role that was similarly betwixt and between, both a means of preserving and creating value for local tradition, and a medium for representing the EZLN on a global stage. The label fulfilled the former role by recording a small number of Zapatista ensembles playing instrumental music in styles considered “traditional”. Nonetheless, while there is much to be said about these albums of instrumental “traditional” music concerning their reception, local ritual function and role in processes of social and musical change, I will not address these issues in this chapter. Instead, in the remainder of this section, I will discuss three albums whose contents reflect the latter, representational position. Just as Lloyd interprets the mannerisms of professional indigenous activists as a response to normative international expectations, I use these examples to highlight ways that Producciones Radioinsurgente’s output may be understood dialogically, in relation to the transnational networks of solidarity in which the label hoped to operate.

Grupo Liberación’s first album with Producciones Radioinsurgente, performed

with an ensemble made up of guitar, *vibuela*, *guitarrón*,<sup>98</sup> percussion, and voices, was recorded in December 2003, and opens with a spoken introduction expressing a goal of global communication:

Friends, support bases of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation [in other words, Zapatistas] [...] we march on in the struggle. But the struggle is not carried out on one level only, but on various levels [...] We are here, we want to struggle. But like this, through our songs, singing and playing our instruments. We want you to listen, wherever the sound of our voice reaches [...] for those that want to listen, yes, you can listen, friends, whether you are Zapatista or not. This is for everyone: revolutionary songs, not just for Zapatistas, but for everyone: the poor *indígenas* [indigenous people] of Mexico and of the entire world.<sup>99</sup>

Three concepts are prominently linked in this introduction: “struggle” [*lucha*], which is embodied in this case by musical performance, “communication”, particularly in the call for the audience to listen [*escuchar*], and “everyone” [*todos*], the global audience to which this band’s music is to be disseminated. The mention of “poor *indígenas*” in the final line of this introduction appears not to be an attempt to circumscribe the audience, but instead emphasises the shared interest of the album’s global listenership in marginal ways of life.

We may read Grupo Liberación’s album in light of this introductory statement. Among the songs that appear on it are “Himno Zapatista”, a cover of Jorge Veloz’s cumbia “La Lora” (The Parrot),<sup>100</sup> Victor Jara’s “Samba de Ché” (Samba for Ché), two corridos about military leaders during the Mexican Revolution, “La Tumba de Zapata” (Zapata’s Tomb) and “Corrido de Ruben Jaramillo” (Corrido of Ruben Jaramillo), and a song narrating the creation of a new rebel municipality “Magdalena de la Paz” on the 19<sup>th</sup> of December, 1994. Whilst the latter song is in all likelihood intended to accompany this municipality’s anniversary festivities, the remainder link Zapatismo to revolutionary struggles in other places and at other times. “La Lora”, for instance, is a Colombian cumbia featuring a parrot that convinces the singer of the need for collective struggle (“We must join together, everyone, workers and peasants, because if you want to be free, that is the path to take”). “Samba de Ché” is a eulogy to Ché Guevara, and constructs a united working-class struggle (“They exploit the peasant, miner and worker, so much pain

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<sup>98</sup> The *vibuela* is a small, high-pitched six-stringed guitar-shaped instrument usually strummed with the fingers, while the *guitarrón* is a large, low-pitched guitar-shaped instrument with six strings that the player usually plucks.

<sup>99</sup> A similar phrase is heard in a message given by Comandante David on the 2003 Producciones Radioinsurgente CD *Por un mundo donde quepan muchos mundos* (For A World In Which Many Worlds Fit), which is addressed to David’s “Brothers and sisters, peasants and *indígenas* of Mexico, Latin America and of the world”.

<sup>100</sup> “The Parrot”. This song is also known as “La Lora Proletaria” (“The Proletarian Parrot”).

is their destiny; hunger, misery and pain”). Grupo Liberación’s performance of “La Tumba de Zapata”, meanwhile, draws a link between the modern-day Zapatistas and their spiritual forebears who fought under Zapata in the Mexican Revolution.<sup>101</sup> Many of these songs carry strong associations with twentieth-century pan-Latin-American leftism, creating a unified discourse of struggle against oppression – workers and peasants exploited by the boss [*patrón*] – which is, in turn, mapped onto Zapatismo. For the most part, different identity discourses associated with Zapatismo in other contexts but which have a history of creating intra-Left division across Latin America – for instance, religion and indigeneity – are avoided here (cf. Morris [Nathaniel], 2014).

Much music recorded by other Zapatista groups reflected similar dynamics. Grupo Nuevo Amanecer was an ensemble constituted of vocals, percussion, guitars, *guitarrón*, and keyboards that recorded three albums with Producciones Radioinsurgente. A member of this band, talking to Radio Insurgente in a documentary produced in 2005, placed great emphasis on the communication of Chiapanecan realities to the outside world:

It’s very important to send or disseminate [*difundir*] messages through CDs, for other countries, so that they can know about how we are living, as indigenous people from the state of Chiapas.<sup>102</sup>

In fact, Grupo Nuevo Amanecer not only broadcasted local stories to global ears, but also began to sing of occurrences that had befallen actors in other parts of Mexico, expressing a relationship of solidarity with these actors. The band’s first album contains several corridos narrating stories of incidents from Chiapas and elsewhere in Mexico. For example, two songs – “La matanza de Unión Progreso” (The Killing of Unión Progreso) and “La masacre de Chabajebal” (The Massacre of Chabajebal) – discuss Army and paramilitary attacks on Zapatista communities in 1998. Among those focused on incidents outside Chiapas are a song relating the story of a human rights lawyer murdered in Mexico City in 2001 and “Atenco”, a song about the 2002 conflict in San Salvador Atenco in Estado de México over land upon which the government had planned to build an airport. In particular, the chorus of this latter song explicitly addresses those fighting for land rights in San Salvador Atenco:

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<sup>101</sup> See director Francesco Taboada Tabone’s “Los últimos zapatistas: héroes olvidados” (2002), a moving documentary based on interviews with survivors from the Mexican Revolution, including performances of revolutionary corridos from the period.

<sup>102</sup> From “reportaje sobre Producciones Radio Insurgente 1ra parte” (broadcast on 28-01-05). <http://www.radioinsurgente.org/index.php?name=archivo> (accessed 04-07-14).

Compañeros y compañeras	Friends,
Allí en San Salvador Atenco	Over there in San Salvador Atenco
Yo les mando estos versos	I send you these verses
Soy originario de Chiapas	I am a native of Chiapas
Porque Chiapas está con ustedes	Because Chiapas is with you
Y aquí estamos, los zapatistas	And here we are, the Zapatistas
(Grupo Nuevo Amanecer, “Atenco”)	

In this case, as with the music of Grupo Liberación, songs are addressed towards audiences situated outside rural Chiapas that are variously particular or general, reflecting Producciones Radioinsurgente’s outward-oriented mode of organization and the corresponding awareness amongst Zapatista musicians that their listenership extends over national and international terrain.

This outward-oriented and mostly secular lyrical language contrasts with the body of song examined in the first chapter of this dissertation, in which a religious idiom was deployed to persuade an audience of mostly Catholics to join armed struggle in a clandestine context. It is also likely, however, that it reflects the material circumstances of the musicians performing these songs. Barmeyer argues that Zapatista development, at least until the mid-2000s, proceeded in hierarchical fashion and was concentrated in sites commonly visited by outsiders (2009: 156-74). Producciones Radioinsurgente appeared to follow this trend, tending to record bands from the most visited areas of Zapatista territory in Chiapas. A 2005 Radio Insurgente documentary lists the municipalities of the groups recorded by this label.<sup>103</sup> Each of these municipalities is located in the Los Altos region of Chiapas, and all are administratively tied to the same JBG: that based in the *caracol* of Oventik (cf. Ross, 2006: 194). This *caracol* is situated in an accessible location, about an hour and a half by taxi from nearby city San Cristobal de las Casas (thought of as the “cultural capital” of Chiapas), and this JBG’s status as a site of mediation between Zapatista communities and the outside world is reflected in its extended name: “Central Heart of the Zapatistas Before the World”.<sup>104</sup> The comparatively proximate relationship that inhabitants of these communities have enjoyed with travelling outsiders since the 1990s contrasts sharply with that experienced in other areas of Zapatista territory in Chiapas, such as La Realidad, a Zapatista *caracol* located a ten-hour journey from San Cristóbal de Las Casas where a group of university students recorded an album of songs

<sup>103</sup> From “reportaje sobre Producciones Radio Insurgente 1ra parte” (broadcast on 28-01-05). <http://www.radioinsurgente.org/index.php?name=archivo> (accessed 04-07-14).

<sup>104</sup> “Junta de Buen Gobierno ‘Corazón Céntrico De Los Zapatistas Delante El Mundo.’”

by a Zapatista band in 2008 equipped only with a portable cassette recorder (see Appendix 3). It is unsurprising that groups from the Los Altos region of Chiapas should perform repertoires incorporating so many songs written by outsiders, like José de Molina and Andrés Contreras, who had frequently travelled to the region, as well as songs from various parts of Latin America reflecting a pan-continental leftist political stance. The fact that these songs appear to have been established in the Los Altos region to an extent apparently not mirrored in more remote areas of Zapatista territory (see Appendix 3) may reflect the same concentrated patterns of travel that strongly influenced the decision to construct a recording studio in the Los Altos region to begin with.

As well as recording original music, Producciones Radioinsurgente created a number of compilation albums containing music produced outside Zapatista autonomous communities, such as *Viva la vida, muera la muerte* (Long Live Life, May Death Die) and *Esta es nuestra realiti* (This Is Our Reality), which contained a combination of music and speeches by EZLN leaders. Several of these albums were linked to particular events: for instance, speeches from the event held to celebrate the creation of the five Zapatista *caracoles* on the 9<sup>th</sup> of August of 2003 appear on *Esta es nuestra realiti*, and the thirteen speeches from EZLN comandantes found on *Viva la vida, muera la muerte* were recorded during a march in San Cristóbal de Las Casas, Chiapas, on the 1<sup>st</sup> of January, 2003. Most included a variety of music, both that recorded by Zapatista musicians and Zapatista-sympathetic ones, as well as recordings of corridos from the Mexican Revolution, and several were explicitly addressed to specific audiences. For instance, the sub-heading on the front cover of the 2003 CD *Por un mundo en que quepan muchos mundos* directs the album towards the Vía Campesina, a transnational, anti-neoliberal farmers' rights movement which protested in Cancún in September 2003 to coincide with the World Trade Organization (WTO) meeting taking place in the city at that time. Correspondingly, it contains addresses given by Subcomandante Marcos, Comandante David and Comandanta Esther which condemn neoliberal economic policy and call for a collective, global effort to create local autonomy. David's message, for example, declares that

we will defend our lands, our natural resources, culture, and our forms and manners of government, that is, our autonomy [...] to remove the autonomy from a people is to remove its right to life, to creativity, to organization and to development.

Meanwhile, on the same compilation CD, Subcomandante Marcos addresses the Vía Campesina "brothers and sisters from Mexico and the world" who had travelled to protest against the 2003 WTO meeting in Cancún. In his address, Marcos rhetorically unites the Zapatistas and the Vía Campesina in condemning the forces of neoliberal

globalization, saying that “in our hearts, you and we have a tomorrow to come, that is, to construct; they have only a past that they want to eternally repeat. We have life; they have death”.

Nonetheless, some of the songs on *Por un mundo en que quepan muchos mundos* complicate the inclusive “we” that Marcos here seeks to construct, representing Zapatista indigeneity to outsiders in musical languages most familiar to the movement’s outsider supporters. The final track on the album contains a song by Mexican *mestizo* singer-songwriter Arturo Meza entitled “La rebeldía de la luz” (Rebellion of the Light). This song cuts oblique references to Zapatismo (“Our blood and word lit a small fire in the mountains”) across ethnic lines, praising the “brothers and sisters of another colour, another race, and the same heart” that “protected our light”, before concluding by naming sixty-four indigenous ethnic groups from Mexico. Musically, this song combines a backing section and vocals reflecting a pop-rock aesthetic with several solos played on instruments carrying associations with Chiapanecan indigeneity, such as the violin and marimba. In particular, the violin solo opening the song seems to pastiche the detached, open playing style of violinists in indigenous *ranchera* ensembles (such as Zapatista band Trio Montaña) while performing a melody otherwise conforming to a pop-rock style.<sup>105</sup> We might apply some of the criticisms levelled at “world music” to Meza’s arrangement: while claiming representative authority in sound over disempowered groups, it presents a romanticized and unfaithful imitation of these groups’ musical practices (cf. Taylor, 1997, 2012).

Arguably, however, we ought to pay attention to the ways that Meza’s poetic and musical depiction of indigeneity (which echoes the “ventriloquism” of indigenous voices critiqued by Pitarch at the beginning of this chapter) complemented Producciones Radioinsurgente’s broader “official” musical self-presentation of Zapatismo. As demonstrated in this section, much of this label’s output was strikingly outward-focused. Zapatista musicians participating in this project frequently manifested a refusal to self-represent as “Indian”, and instead embraced “the mirror”. The representational dynamics of *Por un mundo donde quepan muchos mundos* are complex; here, the EZLN variously broadcasts to a global public, speaks directly to certain factions of it, and takes the guise of external voices, such as that of Arturo Meza, that purport to represent both Zapatista and broader Mexican indigeneity. This is music for “international Zapatismo” (Olesen,

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<sup>105</sup> I would suggest, based on a number of interviews as well as personal experience, that this genre is atypical of the music consumed and produced in Zapatista communities themselves, although this topic deserves further research.

2005), tending to narrate a non-specific, geographically dispersed struggle against injustice and oppression recognizable to a transnational audience. Although Bakhtin defines authoritarian, official rhetoric in opposition to fluid, dialogic discourse (1981: 60-1), Producciones Radioinsurgente's "official voice" found itself constantly in dialogue with other, external voices. Only by paying attention to the relationships between the movement and its outsider supporters, then, may much of this label's musical production be understood.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has highlighted the ways in which the EZLN's "official voice" in music, Producciones Radioinsurgente, can be seen to have represented the Zapatista movement in relation to the transnational audience to which many of its productions were explicitly directed. It has taken as a starting-point Pitarch's metaphor of the "Indian behind the mirror" as a way of investigating some of the anxieties around representation that have surrounded Zapatismo since an early stage in its public existence. Producciones Radioinsurgente, it is argued here, reflected local spatial hierarchies as it created and participated in global music distribution networks. This is seen in the content produced by the label, much of which contained narratives of struggle from other places and times, pushing to the margins the local and the "Indian". Furthermore, Producciones Radioinsurgente's recording studio was paid for by pro-Zapatista outsiders, and participants in the project were dependent on outside support for instruction concerning how to use it. Such dependencies undermine visions of the "autonomous Indian" running the project independently, and suggest that Producciones Radioinsurgente's products were often influenced at a fundamental level by ideas (especially concerning the ontology of "sound") transmitted from "solidarity" to "autonomy". Corresponding to the general argument made in this dissertation, then, the "dissemination" through music that Producciones Radioinsurgente and its musicians claimed to be performing was associated with a variety of complex interactions with external, non-Zapatista actors that formed part of the strategic self-presentation of the EZLN.

In *Communication, Culture and Hegemony: From the Media to Mediations*, Jesús Martín-Barbero critiques the historically romanticized image of indigeneity in a Mexican context, stating that: "In the search for national identity, the Indian has been seized upon as the only authentic thing left, the secret abode of the [sic] pure cultural roots. Everything else



is contamination and loss of identity” (1992: 189). While Martín-Barbero calls for a “reconceptualising” of this figure “from the perspective of *mestizaje*, as part of the impurity of the relations between ethnicity and class, between domination and complicity” (189), it is also vital to pay attention to the specific ways that indigenous groups characterize themselves and others in (communicative) practice. The case presented in this chapter is held up as a challenge to the anxieties about representation that have emerged in some of the scholarship on Zapatismo. In this context, the development of dialogic relations across the transnational sphere, in which Producciones Radioinsurgente was organized to participate, contributed to the formation of a network of solidarity which has greatly empowered the Zapatista movement as a whole. Further, the critiques of the Marcos character referenced at the beginning of this chapter allege that Marcos was providing international audiences with what they wanted to hear – a romantic representation of “the Indian” – without apportioning to indigenous voices the possibility of performing the very same trick, in acts of what Spivak might term “strategic essentialism” (1990). There are several reasons, therefore, to emphasise the potential for empowerment inherent in the dialogic musical communication between the Zapatistas and their supporters. If Producciones Radioinsurgente aimed to “spread the word” through recording and disseminating CDs of revolutionary song, one could be forgiven for wanting to discover precisely whose “word” this was. As argued throughout this chapter, however, simple answers to this question bely the wholesale complexity – and polyvocality – pertaining to this “word” in practice.

This chapter has examined the self-representation of Zapatista musicians located in rural Chiapas. The remainder of this dissertation focuses on musical ventriloquations of Zapatismo by pro-Zapatista actors located in cities. As will be seen, such acts of external representation emerged from contexts with little in common with that of rural Chiapas, yet were inspired by the same overarching goal: to “spread the word”.

## CHAPTER THREE

### REVOLUTIONARY SONGS IN A GENTRIFYING CITY: STYLISTIC CHANGE IN SAN CRISTÓBAL DE LAS CASAS

In the previous chapter I argued that much of the music produced by Zapatista record label Producciones Radioinsurgente was intended for an audience of EZLN sympathizers from across Mexico and around the world. Correspondingly, as mentioned, this label's CDs had been sold for over a decade by various Zapatista-affiliated groups in San Cristóbal de Las Casas. At the time of my research, one could buy Zapatista merchandise from a small handful of shops, such as Nemi Zapata, a gift shop located in a central pedestrianized street where copies of Producciones Radioinsurgente CDs were sold for about fifteen pesos each (\$1.50USD). As they were introduced into this type of commercial exchange – constituting a sale creating surplus to pay ground rent, typically to a private landlord – these CDs became drawn into a process of gentrification taking place in this city's historic centre. This was a process with which pro-Zapatista musicians, if they wanted to perform Zapatista songs in this city, had to engage in one way or another.

As the term “gentrification” has become a key part of mainstream debates about capitalism, housing and urban development, its usage within academic discourse has evolved. Although early urban geographers used the word to describe the movement of middle-class families out of suburbs and into urban, working-class areas, later scholars such as Neil Smith sought to define gentrification as a process of capital expansion into urban areas, facilitating property development geared towards the middle- and upper-classes, and leading to price rises and displacement of these areas' poorer former inhabitants (Smith, 1979: 541-7; Lees et al., 2008: 9). What is described as “gentrification” may have distinct effects in particular contexts, being “linked to the redevelopment of urban waterfronts for recreational and other functions, the decline of remaining inner-city manufacturing facilities, the rise of hotel and convention complexes and central-city office developments, as well as the emergence of modern ‘trendy’ retail and restaurant districts” (Smith and Williams, 2013: 3). However, it is also strongly linked to broader political processes involving the reconfiguration of industry towards services, the

implementation of neoliberal economic policies encouraging globalization of capital and concentration of its ownership, increased privatization of public services and stronger property rights (3). More directly, gentrification is produced by two dynamics that work in tandem, corresponding to social forces of “demand” and “supply”: as gentrified spaces are consumed by wealthy classes, they are produced by developers seeking large “rent gaps” (differences between the value of current and potential ground rent for particular spaces) to exploit (Lees et al., 2008: 50-59, 83-128). Finally, two tendencies associated with gentrification were particularly relevant to the context of San Cristobal. First, it often has a racial or ethnic aspect, and has historically tended to favour the displacement of so-called “minorities” in favour of wealthy whites, especially in the United States (Atkinson and Bridge, 2013). Second, gentrification often involves the increased regulation of space by the police, who reinforce property values by enforcing a model of discipline that goes beyond law, “ceaselessly observing and investigating nuisances until perpetrators are so bothered that they stop” (Pattillo, 2013: 332). Instead of a “market-driven” process that the government might seek to restrict, then, gentrification is often the result of coordinated private and public action.

Significant scholarly interest has been dedicated to the relationship between music and commercial spaces, both within the fields of musicology (DeNora, 2000; Kassabian, 2004, 2013; Sterne, 1997; Krims, 2001; 2007) and consumer psychology (North, 2012; Milliman, 1982; Milliman, 1986; Areni & Kim, 1993). This literature emphasises music’s power to control mood and create environments aimed at manipulating consumer behaviour. For instance, Jonathan Sterne (1997, 1998) has examined the use of programmed music in the Mall of America. Here, “music becomes a form of architecture” and a means of “organizing space in commercial settings” (Sterne, 1997: 23). In *Music in Everyday Life*, Tia DeNora looks at the ways that background music is utilized in shopping centres in order to encourage sales (2000: 138-46). DeNora discusses ways that in recent decades, music has been increasingly used in commercial outlets as a “device of scenic placement”, to contribute to brand identity, and build a profitable atmosphere (138). This literature suggests that, if gentrification constitutes the reproduction of space by capital, music has an important role to play within this process. Equally, it also implies that gentrifying settings may often privilege particular styles of music, as well as audience responses to it.

The realities of gentrification may, in many contexts, present politically engaged musicians with a difficult choice: refuse to engage with this economic process at the risk

of being economically and spatially marginalized, or engage with them at the risk of being dismissed as a so-called “sell-out”, or having to make compromises within one’s music. In another way, however, this latter option may prove difficult, since performing in commercial spaces can entail a lowering of expectations regarding audience engagement. Faulkner and Becker, in a highly personal study of the experiences of “ordinary musicians” such as themselves – that is, musicians who play “whatever the people who hire them [...] want them to play, within the limits of their knowledge and abilities” (2009: 15) – describe how live music in commercial spaces may function in practice as “background noise for those drinking and socializing” rather than attentively listening (6). Such a setting might be seen to constrain the agency of the performer, complicating or undermining possibilities for music to be used to heighten political awareness among their audiences. While the process by which capitalist arrangements grant some musicians and not others access to audiences is eminently criticable, ethnomusicologists have a duty to sympathetically listen to those musicians involved in them.

In this chapter, I will argue that, in San Cristóbal de Las Casas, performances of Zapatista songs which were perceived as a medium for spreading messages intended to foment revolutionary change also served to increase the monetary value of commercial space. In the first section I will provide a broad background to San Cristóbal, highlighting particular features of this city’s recent history of gentrification, and pointing out ways in which this process intersected with the development of a cultural scene in the city. I will then go on to discuss attempts on the part of one San Cristóbal-based singer with whom I conducted extensive research to use Zapatista songs as a tool for “spreading the word” in this gentrifying setting, an activity which brought into play underlying tensions concerning the Zapatista movement’s relationship to capitalism, as well as prompting significant stylistic changes in the performance of these songs.

### **A gentrifying city: San Cristóbal de Las Casas**

During my stay in San Cristóbal in 2013, I had a series of experiences that provided different insights on the process of gentrification which had become part of everyday life in this setting. Not only did interviews and conversations with activists, musicians and business owners reveal some of the financial realities of the city, but a relationship with a local waitress working long hours for little pay gave me a more intimate insight into the effects of the labour exploitation that accompanied them. Further, while living in the city I gave a number of solo concerts as a singer-songwriter in commercial spaces, as well as

performing as the frontman of a band, which inducted me into some of the complications and contradictions involved in making a living from music in this setting. Although I was never financially dependent on the San Cristóbal economy, I came to share the pessimism of many of its inhabitants concerning the increasing costs of renting commercial spaces in the city centre, and the poverty wages typically paid to those working at the lowest strata of the city's service sector.

This city's past was written into its present. For much of its history, the population of San Cristóbal had been dominated by *criollos* (people of Spanish descent), who inhabited the centre while comparatively small numbers of *indígenas* occupied the peripheries (París Pombo, 2000: 90-1; Aubry, 2008: 31-5). However, events in the second half of the twentieth century radically altered the city's demographic constitution. In the 1970s and 1980s, religious conflicts between Protestants and Catholics in rural Chiapas led to a mass exodus of *indígenas* from the countryside, who formed a "belt of misery" of 20,000 inhabitants in poor neighbourhoods around the city (París Pombo, 2000: 91). Furthermore, the city began to attract tourists after the construction of the Pan-American Highway in the 1950s connected the city to the rest of Mexico, and its population expanded from 17,500 inhabitants in 1950 to almost 90,000 prior to 1994 (Berghe, 1994: 76-7). During this period San Cristóbal proved particularly attractive for tourists seeking out an "exotic" indigeneity within a framework of "ethnic tourism" (104).<sup>106</sup> In the 1980s, not only did many outsiders, particularly from Mexico City, move to the city centre to set up businesses, but *indígenas* from the peripheries began to occupy spaces that had been historically denied to them, such as the cathedral and pavements in the city centre (París Pombo, 2000: 93). In response, many families of *coletos* (a contemporary term used to describe *criollos* or *mestizos* from this city [cf. Rocio Bermudez, 2011; Nash, 1997: 264]) who tended to perceive such migration as a threat to their "territory", left San Cristóbal (París Pombo, 2000: 92-4).

After the 1994 uprising this community of outsiders, neither *coleto* nor *indígena*, expanded and became established more deeply in the city. During the conflict San Cristóbal was a strategically important location, and briefly occupying it enabled the rebel Zapatistas to effectively communicate with the outside world through the small population of journalists stationed there (Bob, 2005: 128-33). In the few years afterwards,

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<sup>106</sup> Perhaps another form of such "ethnic tourism" in the city went by a different name. Chiapas attracted a large number of researchers, many of whom were anthropologists that had arrived in order to study the local indigenous population (for instance, those working on the decades-long "Harvard Chiapas Project") and who would stay in nearby San Cristobal whilst away from "the field" (Vogt, 2002).

the city became a hub for pro-Zapatista activity, as NGO workers and activists from elsewhere in Mexico and around the world descended upon Chiapas (Barmeyer, 2009: 215-22; Coronado, 2008). But the government response to the Zapatista uprising also significantly affected the city's course of development. According to data collected by Pitts, the conflict had a negative impact on the economic health of Chiapas in general, and San Cristóbal in particular (1996: 221-2). In response to a state-wide drop in tourism, the Chiapas state government took several courses of action designed to revive the area's tourist sector. First, they sent one million letters to business leaders across the country, asking them to "consider holding conferences or other meetings in Chiapas" (226). Second, State Minister Francisco Pedrero Pastraña started to push for tax breaks and subsidies for tourism in Chiapas. Third, the state government launched marketing campaigns intending to portray Chiapas as a "peaceful and enticing" place, and demonstrating to "potential customers that officials in Chiapas wanted peace" (226).<sup>107</sup> But a final part of this push to attract tourism came with later policies encouraging concentrated urban development. After the year 2000 two roads in the centre of the town were pedestrianized, making them particularly attractive hubs for tourist activity, and San Cristóbal was designated an official *pueblo mágico* ("magic town") in 2003, lending it a greater profile (Garza Tovar and Sánchez Crispin, 2015: 197-8).<sup>108</sup> Further, the federal government established annual festivals of culture in the city, such as Festival Cervantino Barroco, a yearly week-long event sponsored by the National Council for Culture and the Arts (CONACULTA).<sup>109</sup>

These policies, then, were designed to attract both consumers and producers of gentrifying space, and correlated with increased tourism to the city.<sup>110</sup> Ironically, the government's response to the Zapatista uprising reinforced in economic terms the spatial marginality *indígenas* had suffered in previous eras; growing tourism was concentrated in

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<sup>107</sup> For an argument concerning the importance of image to processes of gentrification, see Harvey (1989: 14).

<sup>108</sup> See <http://www.sancristobaldelascasas.mx/san-cristobal-de-las-casas/> (accessed 18-08-14), [http://www.colegiomexsur.edu.mx/rm\\_scdlc.html](http://www.colegiomexsur.edu.mx/rm_scdlc.html) (accessed 18-08-14) and <http://www.informador.com.mx/suplementos/2011/289162/6/despertar-en-san-cristobal-de-las-casas.htm> (accessed 1-08-14).

<sup>109</sup> The eleventh Festival Cervantino Barroco took place at the end of October 2013, and was advertised online with a video containing the tagline "*el más mágico de los pueblos mágicos te espera*" ("the most magic of the magic towns awaits you": <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qnFiA8PaGeM> [accessed 19-03-14]). Its extensive lineup included a number of local groups, as well as musicians well-known both nationally and internationally, such as Grammy award-winning singer Ely Guerra and Cuban songwriter Amaury Pérez. Also see <http://www.sancristobaldelascasas.mx/los-mejores-eventos-de-san-cristobal-de-las-casas/> (accessed 18-08-14).

<sup>110</sup> Between 1991 and 2005, the number of tourists to the city increased by 11.57%, the second highest rate of any Mexican tourist destination for this period (Propin Frejomil and Sánchez Crespin, 2007: 154).

the centre while the mostly indigenous peripheries continued to suffer deep poverty (Garza Tovar and Sánchez Crispin, 2015: 205-6). In turn, indigenous families were often driven by poverty to beg (or sell craft products in an exchange similar to begging) in commercial spaces in the city centre (203-5), something to which some businesses responded by repeatedly refusing entry to people in indigenous dress,<sup>111</sup> thus resurrecting colonial patterns of discrimination in a less explicit form. The process of gentrification occurring in this city, then, was not simply about increasing rents, although my consultants agreed that this was a problem for tenants of both commercial and domestic property.<sup>112</sup> It was also involved with the creation of a normative image of the middle-class, clean-cut, light-skinned consumer.<sup>113</sup> Meanwhile, many shops and restaurants in the city centre (which were often run by people from outside Chiapas and typically owned by a small handful of local landowning so-called *coletos* [Sulca Báez, 1997: 82, 92-3, 112]),<sup>114</sup> produced indigenous culture as commodity, deploying a commercialized, general image of indigeneity in order to appeal to tourists.<sup>115</sup>

Besides *coletos* and *indígenas*, then, in the 1990s and 2000s a new social class of people were attracted to San Cristóbal who were born outside Chiapas, many of whom ran businesses and many of whom supported the Zapatistas. By the time of my research in 2013, although it was common to see restaurants and bars displaying Zapatista-themed posters, only a small handful of commercial spaces in the city openly identified themselves with the Zapatista movement, including shop Nemi Zapata, bars Café Bar Revolución and El Paliacate, and restaurant Tierradentro. Some of these outsiders – in whose community I was most closely located – complained of hostile treatment by *coletos*, although the social division in the town was complex.<sup>116</sup> When graffiti written in the town centre reading *¡fuera los invasores!* (“invaders out!”) provoked the response (also in graffiti)

<sup>111</sup> See <http://www.proceso.com.mx/?p=357788> (accessed 13-05-15).

<sup>112</sup> It was difficult to find official data concerning historical property values in the city, but there was a consensus among my consultants who had lived the longest in San Cristóbal that they had drastically risen in recent years (Interview, Manik, 11-06-13; Interview, Victor, 12-07-13; Interview, Ricardo, 21-06-13; Interview, Fabricio, 16-07-15). Meanwhile, Manik told me of a commercial space in the centre that was rented for \$3,500MXN per month 8 years prior to our interview, and now cost \$17,000MXN per month. Fabricio, who ran a café on a pedestrianized street, explained this rise in part as the result of a recent wave of property speculation driven principally by foreign capital.

<sup>113</sup> Manik-B, a reggae soundsystem musician working in the city who ran a business close to the centre selling CDs, t-shirts and posters, told me that his tattooed, dreadlocked appearance had led to difficulties with previous landlords which had caused his business to relocate (Interview, Manik, 11-06-13).

<sup>114</sup> Consultants with many years' experience running businesses in the city agreed that much of the valuable property in the city centre was owned by predominantly *coletos* families (Interview, Fabricio, 15-07-15; Interview, Ricardo, 21-06-13).

<sup>115</sup> Among many potential examples, one might cite a local commercial space called Mexica Tours with an image of the sun on its logo.

<sup>116</sup> Interview, Ricardo, 21-06-13.

*¿quién invade a quién?* (“who’s invading whom?”), the question seemed apt. Although the *coleto* community in the city had a history of referring to *indígenas* in this fashion (París Pombo, 2000: 93), this allusion to “invaders” could also have denoted the presence of *coletos* who were supposedly descendants of the Spanish invaders of Chiapas, or the new social class of recent migrants to the city with no family history in the area. Nonetheless, for many it was the latter group that formed the visible face of gentrification in San Cristóbal, while a small number of *coleto* landowners benefited behind the scenes.<sup>117</sup> One of my consultants, who had grown up in San Cristóbal, told of discontent in the city due to government resources being used to create an architectural “colonial image” in the centre.<sup>118</sup> The influence of the city’s new class of cultural cosmopolitans (Turino, 2000: 10-12) could be further heard every night in commercial spaces in the city centre, where transnationally popular genres of music such as ska, rock, pop, salsa, jazz and cumbia crowded out Mexican popular music like boleros and corridos.<sup>119</sup>

In this setting, the spatial organization of commerce according to rent was striking; one business owner told me that shops in the best locations on the city’s pedestrianized streets could pay up to 1000 percent of the rent of an equivalent space located just ten or fifteen metres from these streets, while another estimated the same difference at 200 or 300 percent.<sup>120</sup> This reflected the ways that gentrified space in San Cristóbal was both consumed and produced. Wealthy tourists had little time to get to know the area and thus tended to visit the spaces most immediately visible to them, while the pedestrianization of particular streets resulted from top-down government intervention which marked these streets out as spaces worthy of visiting. On the other hand, spaces further out from the centre paid less in rent, but found it difficult to attract custom.<sup>121</sup> El Paliacate, for instance, was a bar and “cultural space” hosting an eclectic mixture of music, theatre, and other forms of entertainment which constituted an important locus for the city’s small pro-Zapatista activist subculture. Although the owners of this business paid low rents, they claimed to receive such little income that they were

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<sup>117</sup> “There’s a lot of resentment because the centre for example is now taken [*tomado*] by foreigners” (Interview, Victor, 28-05-13); “in San Cristóbal centre honestly I don’t know exactly how it works, but I know there are four or five really rich families [...] and 300,000 people in poverty” (Interview, Ricardo, 21-06-13).

<sup>118</sup> Interview, Miguel, 28-08-13 (also see Garza Tovar and Sánchez Crispin, 2015: 203).

<sup>119</sup> “Lots of Mexicans here are tired of foreign music. They say ‘why don’t they play Mexican music?’” (Interview, Alicia, 15-05-13).

<sup>120</sup> Interview, Manik, 11-06-13; Interview, Ricardo, 21-06-13; Interview, Fabricio, 15-07-15. Ricardo, a middle-aged man from Mexico City who owned a jewellery shop in the city, told me: “we pay \$3,500 pesos but [in the *andador* or pedestrianized street] they pay 7,000, 8,000 pesos, for a place the same size [...] double or triple. So we’re lucky to be located half a block away from the *andador*.”

<sup>121</sup> Interview, Manik, 11-06-13; Interview, Fabricio, 15-07-15.



generally unable to afford remuneration for their performers (Green, 2015). The cultural vibrancy of the venue was, therefore, largely a product of the community of mobile and economically independent activists that tended to frequent it, which included several musicians (including myself) who were able and willing to perform for free.

Local professional musicians, however, were often less happy to have travellers undercut their income.<sup>122</sup> A few years prior to research, I was told, the professional musicians in the city had gathered together and agreed to charge a minimum price of two hundred pesos (\$20USD) per performer for each concert.<sup>123</sup> In practice, however, this collective action was difficult to enforce in a city which so many musicians visited to perform, and at the time of research even professional musicians would occasionally give concerts without being paid. Nonetheless, many of my consultants were positive about the opportunities for musicians in San Cristóbal, pointing out that the city's scene was eclectic and broad, that there was a plethora of commercial spaces seeking musicians, and that, even if pay was typically low when compared to elsewhere in Mexico,<sup>124</sup> the cost of living in the city was comparatively cheap.

Finally, it is necessary to highlight that political issues and opinions were rarely given explicit voice in public spaces in San Cristóbal's gentrified historic centre. Occasionally, large-scale protests took place in the city, such as one organized in the central square by protest movement YoSoy#132 in June 2012 prior to the national election of that year. Within San Cristóbal's activist community, however, publicly expressing one's political views was felt by many to be a dangerous activity, since there was a long history of government spying on Zapatista supporters in the city (cf. Barmeyer, 2009: i-xvii).<sup>125</sup> In addition, people wishing to perform music in public spaces were required to gain a permit from the local government in advance. Songs with political themes were noticeably absent in San Cristóbal's central streets, and there was a perception among many activists that it was illegal to perform them in this context. A consultant who worked at a local restaurant told me that pro-Zapatista music "is prohibited by the government, they don't allow, for example, people to be singing the

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<sup>122</sup> Interview, Victor, 28-05-13.

<sup>123</sup> Interview, Oriana, 28-05-13.

<sup>124</sup> See a chart displaying the lower minimum wage in the poorer states of Mexico, including Chiapas, in comparison to the richer states located further north:  
[http://www.conasami.gob.mx/pdf/salario\\_minimo/sal\\_min\\_gral\\_area\\_geo.pdf](http://www.conasami.gob.mx/pdf/salario_minimo/sal_min_gral_area_geo.pdf) (accessed 03-06-15).

<sup>125</sup> In fact, an acquaintance of mine had reportedly "outed" a government spy during a recent journey with a group of activists, and a hostel at which I stayed had also recently discovered that a man purporting to be a photographer was also a spy.

music of the Zapatistas in the street [...] there can even be violence, they can jail them”.<sup>126</sup>

Another, who ran a local bar, stated that if musicians set up to play in the street,

they get rid of you. It’s about keeping the image clean [...] I think it has to do with the tourist’s appreciation rather than making sure that those public spaces are public spaces for the people that live here. It’s focused more on being an attraction – like a commercial centre in the street – than an integral part of the dynamic of the whole town. (Interview, Chui, 16-10-13)<sup>127</sup>

Public security, meanwhile, had high visibility in the centre, where this consultant complained that there were “two police officers on every street corner”.<sup>128</sup> These officers wore a casual-looking uniform with a t-shirt and baseball cap, tended not to carry firearms, and a comparatively high number were female. Not only, then, did they exert control within public space, but they also conveyed an image of safety for those visiting the city’s centre. Importantly, the government regulation of public space tended to push cultural and political expression into the private realm, where it was increasingly subject to commercial imperative.<sup>129</sup>

In San Cristóbal, therefore, a number of tendencies worked in conjunction as the centre was gentrified. Ground rents had been increasing in property for both domestic and commercial use. This was driven simultaneously by a demand for gentrified space among wealthy tourists to the city and a push on the part of local government to produce such space, most ostensibly by the creation of two pedestrianized streets in San Cristóbal’s centre. Finally, this process of gentrification was also built upon the regulation of public space, driving cultural expression and consumption into commercial space and increasing the economic value of the latter.

### **Music and *difusión***

Although San Cristóbal was a hub of pro-Zapatista activity, few pro-Zapatista activists listened to the music produced in Zapatista communities (such as that released on the Producciones Radioinsurgente label). The local market was home to a great array of stalls selling popular music from all over the country, yet I was unable to find Zapatista songs

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<sup>126</sup> Interview, JC, 10-07-13.

<sup>127</sup> Notably, this atmosphere was markedly different in the late 1990s, when “at times some solo musicians or groups of *indigenas* sing Zapatista corridos with their guitars in the central park” (Vargas Cetina, 2000: 74).

<sup>128</sup> Interview, Chui, 16-10-13.

<sup>129</sup> Although local rules regarding street music were often unclear – and the interests of respective departments of local government differed – in interviews local government officials emphasised the importance of maintaining clean and tranquil streets as a means of attracting tourism to the city’s centre. Interview, Oscar Chávez, 13-07-15; Interview, Aldo, 22-07-15.

on sale there. This music was also noticeably absent from most of the commercial spaces in the city that promulgated a Zapatista image. Neither El Paliacate, Tierradentro nor Café Bar Revolución used Zapatista-recorded albums as background music, for example. Meanwhile, these albums also appeared to have limited appeal among pro-Zapatista activists in the city. At one point, a Spanish activist I had got to know decided to buy a CD of this music out of curiosity, but reacted negatively when he played it for the first time during a car journey, and switched it off almost immediately. Other activists I spoke to appeared to agree that this music was not made for their consumption (despite the evidence to the contrary presented in the previous chapter) and was better-suited to a rural context than an urban one:

[Activists that] listen to this music at home, just to listen to it, I think there are not that many of them [...] let's say that it doesn't go with the typical urban taste. It's very *campesino* [peasant] music, very tied to its context, no? So we love it in its context, but we probably listen to other things outside of that context. (Alejandro, 29-10-13)

Its use for us is different [...] that music can function for when we're making a radio programme, or a short feature, or in very specific moments. But [...] the idea that [people] arrive home and, while they're cooking, say "put that music on", I don't think [it happens]. We live in different aesthetic worlds. (Rita, 19-10-13)

In San Cristóbal I conducted a series of formal interviews with about fifty pro-Zapatista musicians and activists, of whom only four owned any copy of Zapatista music (in digital or physical form). These four individuals either belonged to independent media collectives or had been involved in selling these CDs in the late 1990s and early 2000s (see Chapter Two). Those working for independent media organizations used Zapatista songs in their radio programmes: as an aural signature, as a means to "create atmosphere", to accompany particular narratives, or as a means of calling the attention of a particular audience.<sup>130</sup> Here, then, music made and recorded in Zapatista communities was used for its affective and signifying properties, suggesting a preconscious and immediate response rather than a considered apprehension of the Zapatista "word" (cf. Kassabian, 2013: xi-xiii). In these radio programmes, music was used to accompany the broadcasting of pro-Zapatista information, narratives, and messages through speech. Recorded music was assigned a secondary role in this communicative enterprise, even though, as mentioned in previous chapters, Zapatista revolutionary songs themselves were also composed as media

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<sup>130</sup> Interview, Alejandro, 29-10-13; Interview, "Eustakio", 23-10-13.

for such information, narratives and messages.<sup>131</sup>

Nonetheless, during my research I got to know one singer, Hernán, who frequently performed Zapatista songs in commercial spaces in the city.<sup>132</sup> Hernán was in his early thirties and came from a Tojolabal-speaking family living close to Comitán, a small town in south-east Chiapas; the fact that he himself did not speak Tojolabal meant that Hernán defined himself as *campesino* (“peasant”) rather than indigenous. At the time of writing, he lived on the outskirts of San Cristóbal, a city he had inhabited since arriving in the mid-1990s to study at a *preparatorio* (“sixth-form” or pre-university education). Hernán had found employment in the city doing a variety of things, such as working at the museum and tourist attraction Na Bolom (Izotzil for “House of the Jaguar”), and studied law at a local university in the city in the early 2000s. The singer, then, had a highly diverse cultural background incorporating both “popular” and “elite” culture, and this was reflected in the genres of music he had grown accustomed to throughout his life. While Hernán had been raised in the countryside listening to *norteña* and *ranchera* music, as well as boleros and corridos, he became familiar with genres of music with more bourgeois connotations in San Cristóbal. In this urban setting, he had been introduced to the work of *nueva trova* singers such as Pablo Milanés and Silvio Rodríguez and *nueva canción* artists such as Alí Primera by a fellow worker at Na Bolom, who also taught him basic guitar-playing technique.<sup>133</sup> In interviews, Hernán made a distinction between the former category – songs “to drink to, about women, about love and heartbreak” – which he called “Mexican songs”, and the latter category, which he categorized as “Latin American music”.<sup>134</sup> The singer described how he had become familiar with the latter genre as part of a process of political education that involved reading Eduardo Galeano’s book *Las venas abiertas de América Latina* (1971), and encountered the music of singers from Central and South America before that of *nueva trova* singers from Mexico such as Oscar Chávez (indeed, Hernán told me that he became a supporter of the Zapatista movement after listening to Chávez’s album *Chiapas*). Thus, although Hernán was of an indigenous background, his most important musical

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<sup>131</sup> Although it is not the theme of this chapter, the use of these songs in this setting is an interesting avenue for future research. I would be particularly interested to discover the associations different audiences bring to bear upon Zapatista song.

<sup>132</sup> As part of my research, I interviewed Hernan formally five times, observed him perform on a great number of occasions, and shared many informal conversations.

<sup>133</sup> *Nueva trova*, or simply *trona*, is a genre of political song that emerged in Cuba in the 1960s and subsequently spread across Latin America. *Nueva trova* artists typically have left-wing political sensibilities, and use their music to sing about “serious” issues. A highly poetic, literary genre of song, *nueva trova* can be positioned as part of the *nueva canción* genre performed across Latin America (Moore, 2003).

<sup>134</sup> Interview, Hernan, 08-06-13.

influences were transnational, even cosmopolitan (Turino, 2000: 10-12). At the time of research, as well as making money by performing music, Hernán gave classes in law at a local university. While, during our interviews, he was keen to present himself as a committed activist – perhaps attentive to the commercial environment in which he operated – it also was clear from conversations with other people that he was generally a well-respected figure within San Cristóbal’s activist community.

Although he claimed never to have had singing lessons, Hernán’s vocal production was from the diaphragm and his tenor voice full of vibrato, with a large dynamic range. Hernán had started to perform *palomazos* – informal, spontaneous concerts after which musicians would ask for donations – in commercial spaces in San Cristóbal in the mid-2000s. The singer would often perform “Himno Zapatista” in these spaces, and claimed to have gained a reputation in the city as “the only person who dared to sing” this song in public.<sup>135</sup> In an interview he recounted how, on one occasion, he arrived at Tierradentro to play a *palomazo* and was offered a concert:

So I sing, and they hear that I sing “Himno Zapatista” at the end. So then [somebody approached], I don’t know whether it was the co-ordinator or the person in charge, and they told me: “hey, well [we were wondering] if you want to sing with us, but the idea is that you also sing ‘Himno Zapatista’”. (Interview, Hernán, 09-07-13)

Tierradentro was willing to pay a good wage for Hernán to perform songs in support of the Zapatistas for their customers. As well as his arrangement with this restaurant, Hernán also performed from time to time in other spaces in the town. Although financial agreements varied depending on the venue, Tierradentro paid the singer 300 pesos (about \$30 US dollars) per performance and hired him to perform one-hour sets for three evenings each week. He was also able to earn good pay in other spaces, where he often performed sets eschewing the political themes of his concerts in Tierradentro.

Hernán’s live performances in restaurants mostly contained two types of material. The first were popular songs of love and heartbreak in the bolero or *ranchero* style. The second was a series of *nueva canción* and *nueva trova* songs that altogether formed a narrative of popular struggle (*lucha*) across Latin America (see Fairley, 1984; Tumas-Serna, 1992). These songs were written by songwriters such as Gabino Palomares (Mexico), Violeta Parra (Chile), José de Molina and Oscar Chávez (Mexico), Alí Primera (Venezuela [cf. Marsh, 2010]), Jorge Velosa (Colombia), Silvio Rodríguez and Carlos Puebla (Cuba). For example, Hernán often sang Violeta Parra’s “Gracias a la vida”, José de Molina’s “Ya

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<sup>135</sup> Interview, 09-07-13. Since I saw nobody else perform the Zapatista Hymn during my time in the city, I have no reason to doubt this claim.

comenzó”, Jorge Velosa’s “Lora proletaria”, and Alí Primera’s “No basta rezar”, as well as Oscar Chávez’s “Se vende mi país” (“My Country Is Being Sold”). Occasionally, Hernán also invented or changed lyrics to these songs in order to link them to the local political context. For example, in his performances Hernán regularly played Carlos Puebla’s “Hasta siempre Comandante”, an ode to Ché Guevara often sung in Zapatista circles, especially among the older generation. The chorus of the song goes thus:

Aquí, se queda la clara	Here lies the clear,
La entrañable transparencia	The dear transparency
De tu querida presencia	Of your beloved presence
Comandante Ché Guevara	Commander Ché Guevara

(Carlos Puebla, “Hasta siempre Comandante”)

In most versions of this song, the last two lines of the final verse go: “Y con Fidel te decimos/Hasta siempre, Comandante” (“And with Fidel we say/Until forever, Commander”). Hernán would often repeat the verse’s penultimate line, replacing it with figures, locations or groups that bore some relation to the Zapatista uprising, such as “Chiapas”, [Subcomandante] “Marcos”, or “Zapata”. In doing so, he created a relation of mutual solidarity between Zapatismo and the Cuban Revolution, using a song that had become emblematic of revolutionary struggle across Latin America. Furthermore, as well as *nueva canción*, Hernán regularly sang corridos about Emiliano Zapata, linking the present-day struggle of Latin America and the Zapatistas to one of the past. “Corrido de la muerte de Zapata”, and “Mi general Zapata” both eulogise Zapata, a “brave warrior, blessed son of the people”, a hero who died “for land and liberty”.

Nonetheless, some of the songs that Hernán regularly sang had more direct thematic links to the Chiapas conflict, such as “Himno Zapatista”, which Hernán sang almost every time he performed at Tierradentro and often dedicated “to the Zapatista *caracoles* [cultural centres]” or “to the Zapatista women”. Others included Oscar Chavez’s “Siempre me alcanza la danza” (“The dance always gets to me”) and “Cuando pienso en Chiapas” (“When I think of Chiapas”), songs that contradict the sanitized image of Chiapas promoted by the government after 1994, describing the state as a place where people “die of hunger in the streets”, while “the *coletos* spend their time protecting their wealth”. In addition, Hernán often performed “Ya comenzó” (This already began), an upbeat song written by José de Molina in response to the Chiapas conflict. The lyrics of this song directly address the protagonists of the Zapatista movement, as well as a broad audience of other civil society actors, praising the courage of the Zapatista fighters and

signalling the inevitability and righteousness of the revolution:

El Zapatismo, señores	Zapatismo, gentlemen
A la larga ha de triunfar	Eventually will triumph
Porque es una lucha justa	Because it is a just struggle
De liberación nacional	For national liberation
Porque esto ya comenzó	Because this already started
Y nadie lo va a parar	And no one's going to stop it

(José de Molina, "Ya comenzó")

For Hernán, much of the value of "Ya comenzó" was communicative; it informs us about "what's happening, but also invites us, saying 'listen' but also 'come'". Its message, the singer told me, made Zapatismo relevant to a broad audience of Mexican society as it discusses, for example, the issue of the teachers that are participating in the struggle, talks about *guerrilla* fighters, talks about the unemployed, the workers. To the labourers, also to the proletarian man, the students, full-time employees, unsalaried women, space is given in this song. (Interview, Hernán, 24-08-13)

As well as being sung by Hernán in Tierradentro, many versions of this song have been recorded by Zapatista groups and released on their CDs. These covers have also featured on compilation CDs released by the movement's "official" labels, and the song was regularly featured at Zapatista festivities and ceremonies. The Zapatistas had, in Hernán's words, "adopted [Ya comenzó] as part of themselves", repeatedly appropriating the song stylistically and for Zapatista ritual contexts to the extent that "if you hear it in a [Zapatista] community, you will think that it's an anonymous folk song".<sup>136</sup>

Although he was a solo artist Hernán often performed with accompaniment, and when I arrived in San Cristobal in May 2013 he had been playing for three months with Rigo, a teenage Tzeltal-speaking guitarist from the town of Taniperla (located towards the eastern reaches of the Ocosingo municipality in Chiapas) who had come to San Cristóbal to find work.<sup>137</sup> Rigo's softly-spoken manner contrasted sharply with Hernán's natural confidence. Although he played with a red star with the letters "EZLN" stuck onto the front of his guitar, this had been placed there by Hernán, while Rigo was from a family that at this time supported the Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD).<sup>138</sup> Nonetheless, Rigo told me that he enjoyed performing Zapatista songs and appreciated them as "a

<sup>136</sup> Interview, Hernan, 24-08-13.

<sup>137</sup> Rigo left in September 2013 to search for employment in Mexico City, leaving Hernán to once more play alone.

<sup>138</sup> Interview, Rigo, 28-06-13.

reminder of what happened” in Chiapas.<sup>139</sup> There was a tension, then, between Hernán’s overtly pro-Zapatista views and Rigo’s party-political background, although Rigo stated to me that he was not against the EZLN, saying that: “they aren’t doing anything wrong, it’s for people’s good, they aren’t fighting and killing people, they’re fighting in an oral way, in a manner of speaking”.<sup>140</sup>

While Rigo might, therefore, have been less enthusiastic about the endeavour, for Hernán the purpose of their concerts was to use music to “disseminate” (*difundir*) Zapatismo, thus contributing to what he perceived as one of the most important tasks “that the *compas* [Zapatistas] are carrying out right now”.<sup>141</sup> In particular, he sought to “carry a message to the people”<sup>142</sup> which could, in turn, play a role in “awakening”:

It’s the political message that awakens me [...] I want to be a participant in that awakening of everyone else. In other words, I don’t want to see them live asleep, and die without understanding what had happened. (Hernán, 09-07-13)

The singer described his music as a means of “awakening hearts” through transmitting messages, thus constituting “a form of doing politics from below”.<sup>143</sup> In turn, Hernán also showed himself capable of acting in pragmatic, even opportunistic ways in order to achieve this goal. Soon after I first got to know him, Hernán invited me to accompany him and Rigo to a primary school located about an hour’s drive from San Cristobal at which the pair had been invited to perform at a celebration of Día de las Madres (“Mother’s Day”). The pair arrived and sang the “Mañanitas”, a song performed in Mexico on the occasion of a birthday, after which they received a warm round of applause. After a series of numbers by other contributors, Hernán and Rigo returned to sing a few songs more. Notably, the first was “Corrido de la muerte de Zapata” (“Corrido of the Death of Zapata”). Although Hernán dedicated the song to his maternal grandmother, introducing it as “a sad song, but one of history for the boys and girls who are listening, and who know about the heroes of our Fatherland [*Patria*]”, this corrido was out-of-place in Hernán and Rigo’s set, which was dominated by popular boleros mostly containing themes of love and heartbreak. During our journey back to San Cristobal, I asked Hernán about his decision to sing “Corrido de la muerte de Zapata”. In response, he commented abstrusely that he had used “a small dose, an exact dose” (*una dosis pequeña, una dosis exacta*), deploying a medical metaphor that simultaneously painted himself as

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<sup>139</sup> Interview, Rigo, 28-06-13.

<sup>140</sup> Interview, Rigo, 28-06-13.

<sup>141</sup> Interview, Hernan, 22-09-13.

<sup>142</sup> Interview, Hernan, 09-07-13.

<sup>143</sup> Interview, Hernan, 09-07-13.



knowing doctor doing what was best for his audience (also see Chapter Five) and suggested a strategy of compromise, in which Hernán communicated Zapatista messages in small, innocuous measures while fulfilling audience expectations for the majority of the time.

In San Cristóbal, however, Hernán found himself negotiating room for such strategic dissemination in a context requiring a different set of compromises. Since this city had undergone a gentrification process in which space had been increasingly monetized, “spreading the word” within it tended to require engagement with capitalist arrangements. It is apt to point out that, although *difusión* may be understood as a process of communication, it often implies an ongoing spreading-out into space which echoes the spatial dynamic of gentrification as understood here. On one hand, then, one might presuppose a certain harmony between these two processes. On the other, the Zapatista movement had a long history of opposing capitalism that created tensions for pro-Zapatista activists perceived to be complicit in this mode of social organization, however defined.<sup>144</sup> This history went back to Subcomandante Marcos’ communiqué “The Southeast in Two Winds”, which was written in 1992 and made public shortly after the 1994 uprising (Subcomandante Marcos, 1995: 31-51), but the Zapatistas had also critiqued capitalism in the Sixth Declaration of the Lacandón Jungle, positioning it as a system based on “exploitation of the workers” and “plunder” of natural resources which “imprisons and kills those who rebel against injustice” and “makes merchandise of people, of nature, of culture, of history, of conscience” (EZLN, 2005<sup>145</sup>). Most recently, in an address given in La Garrucha in 2008, Subcomandante Marcos denounced individuals seeking material gain from pro-Zapatista activism:

Here in the indigenous zones, people talk a lot about *coyotes* [...] The *coyote* is the intermediary. It is somebody that buys cheaply from *indígenas* [indigenous people], and sells at higher prices in the market. (EZLN, 2008)<sup>146</sup>

What Marcos called “solidarity *coyotes*” were “politicians, intellectuals, artists and people from social movements” who “present themselves as emissaries of the EZLN” and from that gain “political capital”. As he paid critical attention to the EZLN’s supporters, Marcos fomented internal suspicion among these actors. In turn, this created possibilities

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<sup>144</sup> For discussion of the varying commercial success and attitude towards money of punk labels in the United States and United Kingdom (a setting that resonates with the context explored in this chapter) see Gosling (2004).

<sup>145</sup> Here, I am using the “Irlandesa” translation into English found on <http://enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx/sdsl-en/> (accessed 11-07-14).

<sup>146</sup> Available in Spanish at <http://enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx/2008/08/02/platica-del-sci-marcos-y-el-tte-coronel-i-moises-con-los-miembros-de-la-caravana-que-llegaron-al-caracol-de-la-garrucha/> (accessed 11-07-14).

for tensions to arise in the act of supporting the Zapatista movement in San Cristóbal, where pro-Zapatista activists had little choice but to engage in processes of gentrification. In what remains of this chapter, I will demonstrate how taking this perspective may help to illuminate some of the ambiguities and contradictions that pertained to Hernán's performances in Tierradentro, a space that, as well as providing a hub for pro-Zapatista activism, appealed to capital-rich visitors to the city.

### **Tierradentro**

Tierradentro was a upmarket restaurant located in the centre of San Cristobal which opened in 2006. Its menu catered to an international palate and its spacious interior was decorated with a number of large plants, wicker lampshades, and a few scattered red stars hanging on wires from the high ceiling. Visitors to Tierradentro could have little doubt about where it situated itself politically. It was decorated with Zapatista-themed art, and posters with pro-Zapatista slogans adorned the walls, demanding “no more hostilities against Zapatista communities!” and declaring solidarity with the Zapatistas “[y]esterday, today and forever”. Even the placemats featured quotations from Subcomandante Marcos, alongside Eduardo Galeano, Lewis Carroll and a plethora of other writers. In addition, Tierradentro provided spaces for three co-operatives run by Zapatista women to sell wares including clothes hand-woven using a back strap loom, footwear crafted by Zapatistas, and accessories such as books, mugs, aprons, t-shirts, belts, laptop covers, stickers and balaclavas. It also sponsored Rompevientos, an online independent media project providing a voice for social movements and leftist political struggles. The majority of the waiting staff were migrants from rural Chiapas who spoke indigenous languages as well as Spanish, and it was common to see them wearing Zapatista-themed t-shirts. Nonetheless, the restaurant tended to attract few *coletos* or *indígenas*, being frequented instead by a mixture of tourists, NGO workers and academics of leftist political sympathies who were typically from outside Chiapas, most being middle-aged or older.

Tierradentro declared its support for Zapatismo most unequivocally in its menu, which claimed that the venue's coffee was “of the highest quality [...] sown, cultivated and harvested by Zapatistas”. In a mission statement at the back of this menu, the restaurant affirmed that “the fair price for coffee is that which the indigenous peoples assign to their product – not the price that the official market mandates, nor that marked by the so-called ‘Free Trade’ label.” Lower down, this statement read:

consuming this coffee, or acquiring craftwork from the autonomous Zapatista co-operatives that you can see around you, allows indigenous peoples to drive forward their own projects in matters of health, education, shelter, justice, democracy, among others, as part of their own autonomy and free self-determination as indigenous peoples.

As much as, in statements such as this one, Tierradentro sought to assert the value of its particular brand of capitalist consumption, many within San Cristóbal were nevertheless sceptical about the restaurant's intentions. One of my consultants, a French professional musician who had lived in San Cristóbal for several years, spoke of a perception among many that Tierradentro wanted to "sell the image" of Zapatismo;<sup>147</sup> another, a young European activist, cynically commented that the restaurant made "a lot of money from their revolutionary symbols".<sup>148</sup> Further, the restaurant's book of customer feedback revealed a clientele preoccupied by the material links between this business and the Zapatista communities. As well as remarks about the food, atmosphere and service, many people chose to include comments supporting the EZLN that implicitly recognised Tierradentro as representative of it. Thus, some wrote comments such as "long live the EZLN!", "continue the struggle!", "long live the liberty of the people!" and even "long live anarchy!" A few comments, however, contested Tierradentro's radical political self-positioning. One comment read "Long live the *fresapatistas!*", satirizing the space's typically wealthy clientele with a pun combining the word *zapatista* with the word *fresa*, a term in Mexican slang for "posh". Another read:

Very good food, it would taste better if some of these profits went to the Zapatista communities. I thought that this café was to support the *compas* [Zapatistas], but it's not enough to just open the space for them, it would be good if you could support them with something.

The comments below this one objected indignantly (and appeared to have been written by staff): "who says that all we do is open up the space for them, who?" and "what do you mean, there's no profit given to the [Zapatista] communities?" This was a debate with high stakes, as the restaurant's credibility among its clientele depended on being seen to actively support the Zapatistas.

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<sup>147</sup> Interview, Oriana, 28-05-13.

<sup>148</sup> Interview, Lotta, 27-10-13.



*Figure 5: Hernán performing in Tierradentro*

As Hernán performed Zapatista songs in Tierradentro, then, these songs entered a situation of perceived tension between capitalism and Zapatismo that the venue's staff were attempting to defuse. In this setting, music was ascribed two roles which reflected this conflict: as a means of creating and sustaining a particular environment, and as a medium for the transmission of political messages. In interviews, senior staff at Tierradentro stated that the music played at the venue had to correspond to a broader atmosphere that the restaurant sought to cultivate. Tierradentro was “for people that want to come to work, come to talk. Sometimes – many organizations have meetings, and they ask to use the space for those meetings [...] this is a peaceful space”.<sup>149</sup> The restaurant's customers valued Tierradentro's tranquility and spaciousness, and would go there to read, study, and work, as well as to socialize.<sup>150</sup> It was important that live music be appropriate to the space's desired atmosphere. One member of staff told me that while many young rock musicians had solicited performing opportunities at the restaurant and been rejected on the basis that music making “a lot of noise” clashed with the restaurant's tranquil identity, the musicians allowed to play at the venue were “more peaceful”, and therefore more suitable.<sup>151</sup> However, the background music played in the venue also suggested attention to class. While it occasionally included boleros by well-known Mexican singers

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<sup>149</sup> Interview, José, 25-09-13.

<sup>150</sup> Interview, Steven, 25-07-13; Interview, Clara, 25-07-15; Interview, Juanito and Juanita, 08-07-15; Interview, Alejandro, 12-07-15.

<sup>151</sup> Interview, José, 25-09-13.

such as Pedro Infante and Javier Solís (cf. Ortíz, 2010: 292-301), much of this background music was *nueva canción*, and the venue's playlist also included artists with even more international reach, such as the Beatles, Beck and Manu Chao. Although such music could help to create the intended tranquil ambience, it also tended to appeal to a well-travelled, capital-rich audience of middle- and upper-class "cosmopolitans".

Besides commerce, the venue also had a political purpose: to "express the struggle", as one worker put it.<sup>152</sup> Tension between commercial and political aims was reflected in the competing logics with which Hernán's musical performances in Tierradentro were ascribed value. One senior staff member told me that they allowed the singer to perform there so that he could "communicate his protest through music", and claimed that as a result of this activity "various people have awakened".<sup>153</sup> Another told me:

We're supporting the struggle [of] the Zapatista movement. So the fact that Hernán sings Zapatista music gives us strength, here in Tierradentro, and that's what we like a lot about him. Because none of the other places allow you to sing revolutionary Zapatista music. Only here in Tierradentro is that transmitted. (Interview, José, 25-09-13)

On the one hand, this quotation suggests that José ascribed affective value to Hernán's performances (that is, they brought "strength"). On the other, it was also clear that the restaurant's staff lent value to the messages contained within the songs Hernán played which, they felt, had the potential to transform the lives of those listening.

The coexistence of these competing aims – music for atmosphere versus music for the communication of a message – created a disconnection between Hernán's objectives and audience responses to his music. In a few instances, his sets were attended by small groups of politically minded enthusiasts who paid him their full attention, applauded loudly, and sometimes requested an encore at the end of performances. However, on most occasions those present were focused on other things, while consuming the atmosphere to which the singer's music was contributing. Indeed, after finishing songs Hernán frequently had to pause and say "thank you" in a suggestive manner in order to receive any applause at all. From attending countless performances by the singer in the restaurant, it appeared to me that his audiences in Tierradentro tended to spend more time talking amongst themselves than attentively listening to the messages that he was disseminating, and after performances he often complained that those present had paid him little attention. Part of the problem, he told me, was that most of the

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<sup>152</sup> Interview, JC, 10-07-13.

<sup>153</sup> Interview, JC, 10-07-13.

audience was used to “reggaetón, salsa, rumba [...] pop”, and unfamiliar with music addressing serious themes, such as deprivation and injustice, which

bores them [...] it doesn't excite them, because they're used to noise, they're not used to the message. And the people that stay and listen to you, there'll be about ten or fifteen of them. They'll understand the message, but the multitude, the majority will leave. (Interview, Hernán, 09-07-13)

In fact, these audiences were difficult to anticipate. Some of Tierradentro's clientele clearly appreciated live music.<sup>154</sup> The restaurant's book of customer comments contained a number of positive remarks about the music, which was described as “pleasant”, and the space complemented for its “very good music and atmosphere”. I encountered a variety of opinions during conversations with customers in Tierradentro, some of whom valued Hernán's music for the messages it contained, and others who felt that it was inappropriate to perform Zapatista songs in this setting. Yet others with whom I attended his performances, however, simply understood little of what he was singing, and blamed a lack of clarity caused by the strong reverberation of sound in Tierradentro's spacious interior.<sup>155</sup>

Hernán's own views about Tierradentro appeared ambivalent. When, in September 2013, the electricity commission cut off the venue's electricity over alleged unpaid bills, Hernán suspected foul play, suggesting that the restaurant had been singled out “because of what gets disseminated here”.<sup>156</sup> Nonetheless, in interviews, the singer often sought to distance himself from Tierradentro, suggesting that it merely provided a useful “forum” in which he could use music to communicate his messages.<sup>157</sup> He could also be highly critical of the venue, telling me that “business is business, no? And it has an economic purpose [...] I don't know if they're just using the [Zapatista] image or if there's any direct contact with the movement”.<sup>158</sup> Towards the end of my stay in San Cristóbal, one of the women's co-operatives established in Tierradentro withdrew from it, prompting Hernán to claim to me (miming a telephone conversation) that this was on direct orders from Subcomandante Marcos himself and had to do with allegations that the space was profiting from the Zapatista image. Earlier in the year, the singer told me about an episode during which he had drunkenly<sup>159</sup> taken to the stage and directed fierce

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<sup>154</sup> Interview, Steven, 25-07-13; Interview, Clara, 25-07-15; Interview, “Juanito” and “Juanita”, 08-07-15.

<sup>155</sup> Interview, Tamara, 27-07-15; Interview, Daniela, 27-07-15; Interview, Caro, 06-08-15.

<sup>156</sup> Interview, Hernan, 22-09-13.

<sup>157</sup> Interview, Hernan, 09-07-13.

<sup>158</sup> Interview, Hernan, 09-07-13.

<sup>159</sup> One singer and guitarist making a living performing *folclor* in San Cristóbal told me that a challenge for musicians in the city was to avoid the temptation of alcohol, given that most venues would provide free drinks for their performers (“if you don't know how to control it you can lose yourself deeply in drugs,

criticism towards Tierradentro along similar lines, as a result of which the restaurant had cancelled his following concert. Not only did Hernán appear to harbour some negative opinions about Tierradentro, then, but his criticisms of the venue reflected discourses that were prevalent throughout the local community of pro-Zapatista activists.<sup>160</sup>

These tensions played out in interesting ways during Hernán's performances. As much as the singer may have been continuously frustrated by the inattentive audiences present during his sets at Tierradentro, the music – and, more broadly, sound – he produced for these sets reflected the fine line he had to tread between the two conflicting roles created for him in this space. The restaurant's ample interior created a great deal of echo during Hernán's performances, producing of his music a nebulous sound that occupied space while making his message difficult to make out. Further, not only was Hernán's musical style conducive to the "peaceful" or "tranquil" atmosphere that formed a key part of Tierradentro's commercial strategy, but it was also suitable for the wealthy "cosmopolitan" audiences that the restaurant sought to attract. Indeed, this was apparent to most hearers almost instantly upon hearing Hernán perform – his vocal style recalled singers of *nueva canción* and *nueva trova*, while his guitar playing was elaborate and incorporated many techniques associated with a "cultured" guitar sound, including some imported from *flamenco* such as *rasgueando* and *tremolo* strumming.<sup>161</sup> However, his approach to performance became most appreciable as the singer adapted songs whose rhythmic and structural logics were often distinct from that expected within cosmopolitan circles – songs written and played by indigenous Zapatistas. First, in his concerts, Hernán reworked Zapatista songs with tendencies towards asymmetrical rhythmic structure, playing them in a style that suited the structural norms of European art music. Second, he transformed the insistent and often uneven metre heard in Zapatista songs, producing a regular, even beat to which he often added *rubato* phrasing.

These tendencies were witnessed in Hernán's performances of "Himno Zapatista". Here, I contrast one of the singer's renditions of this song in Tierradentro in June 2013 with a version of the same song recorded by Zapatista band Grupo Liberación with Producciones Radioinsurgente (see Chapter Two), a comparison which may exemplify some of the broader stylistic changes effected in his performances. Hernán's

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alcohol and women") (Interview, Kristian, 02-07-12).

<sup>160</sup> It is possible that strong criticism of other pro-Zapatista actors for being "inauthentic" or "hypocritical" served to undergird the self-presentation of activists such as Hernán as "authentic" and "honest" towards me during research. For instance, did Hernán's critique of his capitalist surroundings reflect an uncomfortable awareness of his own position within this environment?

<sup>161</sup> By contrast, Zapatista musicians on Producciones Radioinsurgente records tend to sing more nasally, with less breath support, and play their instruments using fewer overtly virtuosic techniques.

version of “Himno Zapatista” is neatly structured, only rarely deviating from lines made up of four 3/4 bars which are organized by the appearance of the root on the downbeat marking the beginning of each phrase. The verse and chorus both consist of four lines, each containing four bars, a pattern also sustained throughout the instrumental sections (one at the beginning, and one after the fourth verse). Those parts of the melody that do not fit into a regular four-square structure form an anacrusis which is marked out as such by the fact that it begins after the downbeat, as shown in Music Example 5:

Tenor

8

I V IV V I

Ya se mi-ra el ho-ri-zon-te com-ba-tien-te za-pa-tis-ta el ca-

T.

9

I V IV V I

mi-no mar-ca-rá..... a los que vie-nen a-tra-s

Music Example 5: First verse of Hernán's “Himno Zapatista”

By contrast, as demonstrated in Music Examples 6 and 7,<sup>162</sup> Grupo Liberación's version of “Himno Zapatista” employs a much more varied structure, sometimes organizing the song in lines of five bars instead of four, especially in the instrumental section, in which the second half of each melodic line is extended over three bars. The chord sequence played on the guitar, which in both groups' versions switches between the tonic and dominant chords (in Grupo Liberación's case, the dominant seventh), also differs between the two performances. In Hernán's version, the change occurs on the third bar of each line, meaning that tension is held until the last bar of the melody sung (*atrás* in Music Example 5) and the section concludes with a perfect cadence, briefly held in a moment of tension as the melody descends from the subdominant F to the mediant E. However, in Grupo Liberación's version, the chord change occurs most often during the final bar of the line (the chord change in bar 5 of Music Example 6 constituting a notable exception). Furthermore, on many occasions this change is not immediately established by the root; in the fifth bar of Music Example 6, for instance, when the dominant chord A enters it is accompanied by its relative dominant root E in the *guitarrón*.

In addition, Grupo Liberación deploy anacruses in an inconsistent fashion during

<sup>162</sup> Note that the bass notes in the guitar part for Figures 4 and 5 are played by *guitarrón* and as such sound two octaves lower than written here.



the melody. This is demonstrated in Music Example 7: in the final three lines of the first verse, the first two syllables of each line are made into anacrusis to fit a structure of four lines containing four bars each. However, in the first line of this verse, these two syllables (“ya se”) occupy an entire bar, meaning that the anacrusis begins on the downbeat. Given the even dynamics with which Grupo Liberación perform this rhythm, this gesture makes it difficult to mark the “metametre” of the song. Correspondingly, in this band’s music the root of the tonic is not the only, nor even the most important, means of establishing structure. Thus, in the first bar of Music Example 7 one may think the tonic marks the beginning of the phrase when in fact this task appears to be performed by the dominant A, in bars 4, 8, 12 and 16.

The musical score is written in 3/4 time and consists of three systems of two staves each. The top staff in each system is for Guitar and the bottom staff is for Accordion. The first system (bars 1-6) shows the guitar starting with a whole rest in bar 1, followed by a series of chords. The accordion plays a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes and chords. The second system (bars 7-12) continues the guitar and accordion parts. The third system (bars 13-18) shows the guitar and accordion parts concluding the opening.

*Music Example 6: Instrumental opening of Grupo Liberación’s “Himno Zapatista”*

The image shows a musical score for the first verse of Grupo Liberación's "Himno Zapatista". The score is written in 3/4 time and consists of three systems. Each system includes a Tenor (T.) line and two Guitar (Guit.) lines. The lyrics are: "Ya se mi - ra el ho - ri - zon - te Com - ba - tien - tes za - pa - tis - tas el ca - mi - no mar - ca - rás..... a los que vie - nen a - tra - s". The music features a consistent 3/4 rhythm with a strong second beat.

*Music Example 7: First verse of Grupo Liberación's "Himno Zapatista"*

Hernán and Grupo Liberación also performed metrical structure differently. Table 1<sup>163</sup> shows the results of a time series analysis of rhythmic durations in Grupo Liberación's performance of the "Zapatista Hymn". It demonstrates that with very few exceptions the second beat in the bar is consistently longer than the first or third. There are points of convergence, during which the durations of all three beats come closer together (bars 148-60), as well as points of distancing, such as bars 256-68 and 169-87, during which the third beat diminishes in duration. These moments aside, this song consistently posits an unequal rhythm, which is played forcefully throughout. Such continuously uneven rhythm is found in many songs in 3/4 time performed by Zapatista musicians.<sup>164</sup>

<sup>163</sup> Tables 1 and 2 were formulated using the methodology for rhythmic analysis of audio outlined by Clayton et al. (2004: 25-6). This involves highlighting the rhythmic "peaks" in a given recording and measuring the distances between them.

<sup>164</sup> For example, Zapatista group Caracol de las montañas' rendition of "Porque luchamos", Grupo Liberación's "Mañanitas a los caracoles" and "La injusticia", and Trío Montaña's "Himno Zapatista" and "Corrido de Guerrero". The fact that a similar rhythmic tendency can be found in many Mexican *vales* may suggest a deeper inquiry into the historical influences behind these songs than that carried out here.

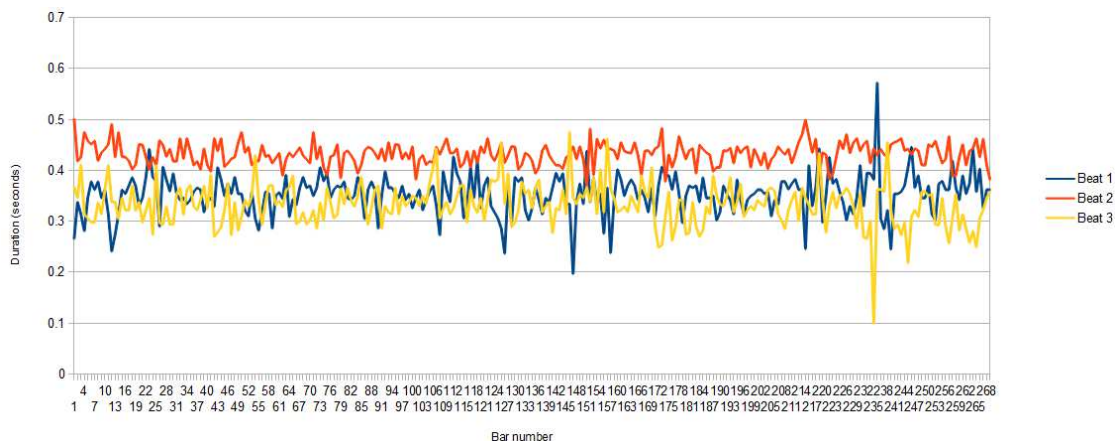


Table 1: Beat duration in Grupo Liberación’s “Himno Zapatista”

In Hernán’s performances of “Himno Zapatista”, however, the picture was less consistent. As seen in Table 2,<sup>165</sup> the singer performed the beat durations with greater parity than Grupo Liberación, with all three beats tending to hover around the 400 millisecond mark. Hernán utilized much *tempo rubato* to embellish this rhythm, and he also frequently skipped the second beat in order to add variety (the reason that there are so many gaps in Table 2). In addition to these rhythmic variations, Hernán’s production of rhythm was generally less forceful than that of Grupo Liberación, and he performed with dynamic variation that complements the song’s varied *rubato* rhythm, emphasising some beats while playing others almost inaudibly.

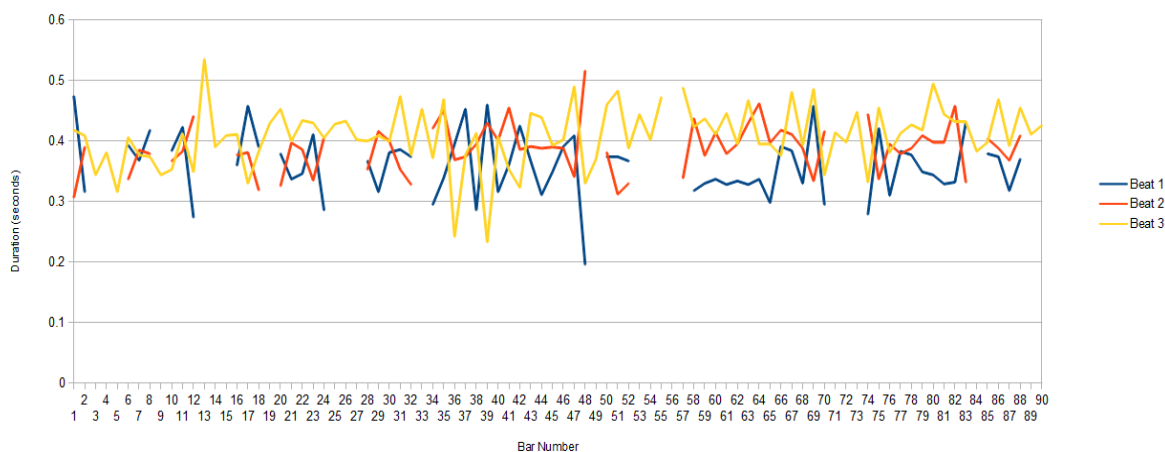


Table 2: Beat duration in Hernán’s “Himno Zapatista”

<sup>165</sup> Table 2 is based on a recording I made of Hernan and Rigo playing in Tierradentro in June 2013.

The entry of Zapatista songs like “Himno Zapatista” into the commercial space of Tierradentro, then, was accompanied by a shift away from the insistently asymmetrical metre performed by Zapatista groups themselves. In Grupo Liberación’s version of this song, beat values within the 3/4 bar are uneven, with the value of the second beat higher than that of the first or third. Meanwhile, Hernán performed the same songs with rhythms that were not so insistently asymmetrical, instead deploying much expressive, fluid *tempo rubato*.

These examples highlight how, as this song entered commercial space, stylistic changes occurred not only in the area of timbre but also in that of harmonic, rhythmic, and metrical structure. Partly, these changes corresponded to the aesthetic expectations pertaining to the “taste community” of the well-travelled, cosmopolitan audiences that Tierradentro tended to attract (Savage, 2006).<sup>166</sup> The organization of songs into structures of four lines each comprising four bars, the deployment of a wide vocal range and temporal and dynamic variation in support of a mode of personalized, sensitive expressivity, and the performance of these songs using what approximated a *bel canto* singing technique all connected Hernán’s style to a Latin American musical cosmopolitanism which the singer himself linked to *nueva canción* artists such as Víctor Jara, Mercedes Sosa, Alí Primera and Violeta Parra. As well as being situated in relation to taste, these stylistic changes also created a particular form of utility within Tierradentro. By performing with *rubato* rhythm, Hernán was producing un-danceable music which affected atmosphere more than it provoked physical responses in the hearer; his style, then, appeared to sideline mechanisms through which bodies often become entrained in sound (Clayton et al., 2004). As such, his performances allowed audiences greater freedom to respond to his music as they wished, fulfilling the restaurant’s aim to cultivate a “peaceful” atmosphere in which customers could eat, drink, socialize, read and use their laptop computers (DeNora, 2000: 59-60). As I have pointed out, at this time “tranquility” was the commodity that Tierradentro sought to offer its clientele, the key to its commercial identity in a crowded market. In this context, then, Zapatista revolutionary songs became what Sterne understands as acoustic “architecture” (1997: 22-3), filling the commercial space of Tierradentro with an affective product that complemented this restaurant’s profit-making strategy.

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<sup>166</sup> There are considerable resonances between the ways musical styles structured social groups in this context and in that studied by Dueck (2013, but see in particular pp. 128-36).

## Conclusion

It has been highlighted by Stobart and Cross (2000: 72-4) and Dueck (2007, 2013) that differing modalities of rhythm may easily go unidentified when they come into conflict with one another, or even dismissed as errant and “corrected” within performances. This reflects the fact that human beings’ learned perceptual dispositions concerning music, especially metre and rhythmic structure, tend to be highly internalized. Hernán’s varied upbringing – incorporating a rural childhood and urban education as a teenager – suggested a complex mixture of such learned dispositions, and it was impossible to definitively trace the roots of his musical style. Nonetheless, in this setting it was notable that the stylistic changes he brought to bear upon Zapatista songs lent his performances in Tierradentro value within the profit-making strategy of this commercial space. In smoothing out the asymmetrical rhythm typical of Zapatista songs in triple metre and organizing these songs into symmetrical structures of four lines of four bars each, Hernán transformed this music for the benefit of a cosmopolitan audience. Equally, these changes supported the strategy the restaurant deployed to attract custom, creating a tranquil atmosphere with few intrusions or distractions. Ultimately, for Hernán the purpose of this activity was to communicate pro-Zapatista messages through music. Although it was difficult to tell how much success this approach actually had (not least because the restaurant’s clientele was typically already well-informed about local political matters) it was clear that in Tierradentro this goal often clashed with a tendency towards the performance and consumption of Zapatista songs as background music.

In this setting, both Hernán and Tierradentro were producing a particular representation of “Zapatismo” which complemented the revolutionary identity that the restaurant was seeking to cultivate. Musically, Hernán’s repertoire was drawn from a pan-continental body of protest song that accompanied an activist cosmopolitan identity, as well as songs composed by Zapatista musicians and seen as directly representative of Zapatismo (such as “Himno Zapatista”). Much of this repertoire is also found in music produced by Producciones Radioinsurgente which, as I have argued in Chapter Two, can be seen to reflect complex patterns of travel and encounter, involving *mestizo* revolutionaries, Catholic missionaries, and leftist musicians (such as Andrés Contreras and José de Molina) whose songs found their way into Chiapas in the wake in the 1994 conflict. Instead of considering Hernán’s music as a diluted representation of Zapatista-authored “originals”, therefore, it is appropriate to understand Hernán as a participant in a complex series of transcultural musical echoes.

More broadly, the tensions between Hernán's immediate political aims and the profit-making strategies of Tierradentro occurred in a context of capital expansion into urban space that created particular kinds of constraints – as well as possibilities – for actors working to bring about political change. This process of “gentrification” involved a variety of intersecting dynamics, including ongoing increases in ground rent, the hierarchical development of space, the cultivation of a clean and safe image, the orientation of the centre towards a new class of wealthy outsiders to Chiapas (and discrimination against *indígenas*), and a heightened police presence in gentrifying or gentrified (that is, capital-rich) space. On many counts Tierradentro aligned with these tendencies, although the fact that the restaurant sold Zapatista coffee, promoted independent media and gave space for Zapatista women's co-operatives suggested a strategy of pragmatic subversion. On one level, as Hernán performed Zapatista songs in this restaurant he was opening up the aural field to monetization, facilitating an expansion of capital into acoustic space. Given this, one could argue that the real effect of the singer's musical practice of “spreading the Zapatista word” was to create profit to be channelled upwards to a private landlord in the form of ground rent, thus reinforcing the capitalist social arrangements that the Zapatista movement opposed. Nonetheless, in part due to the economic process of gentrification occurring in San Cristóbal, other options for empowered urban activism were few and far between in this setting. Communicating (or attempting to communicate) to the cosmopolitan audiences present in the city centre thus often required involvement in the economic processes they drove forward. Hernán's (self-consciously) contradictory and conflictive experience of pro-Zapatista music-making in San Cristóbal, therefore, served to highlight the power that processes of gentrification had on this city's cultural life. Perhaps here we are referring to another market “invisible hand”, beyond the one first proposed by Smith (1776): that which produces useful culture while nobody is paying attention.

## **PART TWO**

### **SOUNDS OF SOLIDARITY:**

### **PRO-ZAPATISTA ACTIVIST MUSICIANSHIP IN**

### **MEXICO CITY AND BEYOND**

After 1994, Mexico City became a vital hub for social protest in favour of the EZLN. The fact that much of this activity was focused around live concerts had to do, in part, with historical circumstance. The rock scene in Mexico City had emerged to prominence after decades of repression by a socially conservative government, and in the 1990s many members of this new, assertive cohort of Mexican rock musicians came to the forefront of pro-Zapatista activism (Paredes Pacho and Blanc, 2010; Zolov, 1997, 1999). Several high-profile rock bands, such as Panteón Rococó, Maldita Vecindad, Café Tacvba, Santa Sabina and Botellita de Jeréz, began to perform at open-air concerts in support of the EZLN, and many members of these bands began to visit Zapatista communities in Chiapas with some regularity (Anaya, 1999; Coutiño Soriano, 2014). Further, in this period musicians set up collectives such as Serpiente Sobre Ruedas and La Bola to organize concerts raising money and collecting other forms of aid to send to Chiapas (Anaya, 1999: 26-7, 33-41). These live concerts achieved a number of things. First, they presented opportunities for rock musicians and audiences to assert themselves within the urban space from which they had been historically excluded, taking advantage of the capacity for mass mobilization of the emerging pro-Zapatista movement (Cerrillo Garnica, 2012). Second, they allowed information about the Zapatista movement to be disseminated, in a context in which many distrusted mainstream media coverage of the topic. Third, they channelled financial and material resources to Zapatista communities in Chiapas. This was a period of comparative strength for the Zapatista movement, and many pro-Zapatista activists at the time of my research looked back on it with nostalgia, as a time of excitement, possibility and change, as well as of energetic, exhilarating music.

During my 2012 and 2013 research with pro-Zapatista activists and musicians in Mexico City, almost twenty years after the uprising, this history could still be felt, but the situation had changed radically. The EZLN had become increasingly marginalized in wider Mexican society, and many leftists blamed Subcomandante Marcos' hardline stance

against electoral politics for the loss of the centre-left PRD in the national election of 2006 (Ávila Carillo, 2015: 270). The EZLN now rarely made the news at a national or international level, as press coverage of Mexico increasingly focused on President Felipe Calderón's disastrous "war on drugs". But the movement had also undergone significant internal changes with regard to organization. As the EZLN lent increasing emphasis to the objective of "Zapatista autonomy", they also criticized and challenged the notion that the indigenous Zapatistas of Chiapas were dependent on outside parties to provide material aid. This approach was solidified in the Sixth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle – at the time of writing, the closest thing the Zapatista movement has to a canonical text – which called for activist sympathizers from across the world to begin to create autonomy in their own localities, implicitly suggesting that they need not visit or contribute to Zapatista communities in Chiapas (EZLN, 2005). As the EZLN released the Sixth Declaration, it also launched what it called the Other Campaign, which still structured pro-Zapatista activity throughout the time of my research (Ávila Carrillo, 2015: 267-73).

After this point, therefore, it made little sense for activists to hold fundraising concerts in support of Zapatista communities. Moreover, not only was this new vision of local autonomy difficult to implement – particularly for groups without their own spaces, and especially in urban areas – but it undermined the important symbolic connections that activists and musicians had cultivated with the Zapatista communities in Chiapas since 1994. By contrast, in organizing events featuring music whose principle purpose was the dissemination of messages and information (*difusión*), pro-Zapatista actors could manifest their support for the movement while continuing to practice an activity considered to be useful. Such awareness-raising activity was also undergirded by a widespread perception among Zapatista sympathizers that the Mexican mainstream media was refusing to provide information about the Zapatistas, or else was broadcasting false information, in what these sympathizers called a "media siege" (*cercos mediático*). While it is certainly true both that Zapatismo had dropped out of the news at the time I conducted my research and that many mainstream media outlets in Mexico were opposed to the EZLN, the discourse of a "media siege" was also significant because it established pro-Zapatista activists as marginal actors within Mexico City. At this historical moment, then, a number of trends converged to lend priority to the objective of spreading messages and information through pro-Zapatista activism rather than to sending direct material support to Zapatista communities. Thus, *difusión* became a key structuring goal for pro-Zapatista



musicianship in the city. Indeed, it affected music-making on multiple levels: in the process of composition, as music was recorded and produced, and during live performances. As I will go on to demonstrate in the following four chapters, activities of musical *difusión* began to intersect with projects which were discursively linked to the broader narrative of autonomy, and with modes of composition and performance which privileged *palabra* (“word”) and *mensaje* (“message”) over affect, emotion and sound. This, in turn, was connected to a position of marginality that pro-Zapatista activists and musicians occupied – and constructed for themselves.



Figure 6: Map of Mexico City metropolitan area (source: INEGI)

## CHAPTER FOUR

### SOUNDING THE “RIGHT TO THE CITY” IN PRACTICE: MUSIC, THE OTHER CAMPAIGN AND THE LIMITS OF PUBLIC SPACE

After the 1994 Zapatista uprising, the growing movement of pro-Zapatista solidarity in Mexico City coincided with a boom in commercial rock, a genre which had emerged from a history of repression during the 1960s and 1970s to claim increasing public visibility (Cerillo Garnica 2012; Paredes Pacho and Blanc 2010; Zolov 1997, 1999: 152-4). Benjamín Anaya (1999) and Coutiño Soriano (2014) document the rise of a pro-Zapatista rock scene after 1994, demonstrating that Zapatismo became an ideological locus of a great variety of activities that intersected with the 1990s boom in Mexican rock (Anaya 1999: 26-7, 33-41). During this time, rock musicians’ ongoing struggle for space in Mexico City became linked to the emerging pro-Zapatista protest movement. In February 1995, a free, local-government sponsored open-air concert with rock group Caifanes, in a plaza in the Venustiano Carranza district of north Mexico City, ended in riots, police repression, and multiple injuries. In response, the Mexico City government prohibited open-air concerts (Paredes Pacho and Blanc 2010: 454; Anaya 1999: 24). Rock musicians responded swiftly, organizing an open-air rock event (entitled “The First Rock Festival for Peace and Tolerance”) featuring a number of prominent bands to take place a week after Caifanes’ concert (Anaya, 1999: 24). As well as responding to a recent Army ambush conducted against the Zapatistas in Chiapas, this concert was intended to assert the right for rock concerts to be held in “open-air” public space in Mexico City. One of the event’s organisers, Santa Sabina songwriter Adriana Díaz Enciso, wrote that the event was

a demonstration of the renewed and powerful strength of the youth. It was a festive and brightly-coloured response to the macabre military actions of the 9<sup>th</sup> of February, and also to the derisory prohibition of the unheard-of ruling of the Mexico City [government] on mass open-air concerts. About fifteen thousand young people attended the concert, which was free from what is referred to with the word “violence”, and instead, a collection was made of several thousand pesos and tons of food to support the indigenous communities of Chiapas that were devastated by the Mexican army. (Cited in Anaya 1999: 24)

These organizers soon arranged a follow-up event for May 18, 1995, called 12 Serpiente, which featured performances by twenty artists<sup>167</sup> and attracted an audience of about thirty thousand people (Anaya 1999: 25). These events were only two among many pro-Zapatista concerts arranged in Mexico City in the few years after 1994. Typically, such concerts were held in defiance of local government, as activist groups refused to request a permit (in part because they presumed such a request would be denied), and they would tend to collect food and clothes, rather than money, to send to Zapatista communities. Some of the goals of this city-based movement were achieved when the leftist Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD) was elected to the Mexico City government in 1997, which simultaneously opened up public spaces to be used for similar cultural events and assimilated many pro-Zapatista activists into the ranks of local government (Prud'homme, 2003; Nivón Bolán, 2000).<sup>168</sup>

From this brief description, one may highlight a number of related themes that were at play in the 1990s pro-Zapatista rock scene. The first is the use of music as a means of providing support to Zapatista communities, in this case by sending economic and material resources recouped at concerts. The second theme has to do with music and sound as a means of asserting a right to occupy space. In organizing an open-air concert in response to a government ban, these musicians and activists highlighted an underlying supposition that such “rights” could be established in sound. The last theme, however, is music and sound as a locus of division, conflict and danger.<sup>169</sup> It is notable that Díaz Enciso (above) highlights the lack of violence at the “First Rock Festival for Peace and Tolerance”, especially given the fact that this concert was the response to a ban introduced in the wake of an outbreak of violence at a concert. In fact, in an interview, Díaz Enciso suggested to me that violence was an increasing preoccupation for the organizers of pro-Zapatista rock concerts at this time, referring to the broad lack of repression at such events as a “miracle”.<sup>170</sup>

There were, then, a number of issues at play in the pro-Zapatista rock scene of the 1990s regarding space, sound, law and governance that intersected with a practice of claiming the right to perform in public space. During my research with pro-Zapatista activist groups in Mexico City in 2012 and 2013, similar tendencies emerged: these

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<sup>167</sup> See Paredes Pacho and Blanc (2010: 455) for a list of the artists that participated in 12 Serpiente.

<sup>168</sup> Interview, Adriana Díaz Enciso, 04-02-15. The PRD had been sympathetic towards the EZLN and the pro-Zapatista solidarity movement in the 1990s, but this relationship deteriorated rapidly in the 2000s, especially as the EZLN hardened its stance towards electoral politics in general.

<sup>169</sup> Interview, Adriana Díaz Enciso, 04-02-15.

<sup>170</sup> Interview, Adriana Díaz Enciso, 04-02-15.

groups, like their predecessors, often claimed public squares and parks for the dissemination of pro-Zapatista messages while asserting a “right” to use this space, something which occasionally led to conflict. In the course of such activities, then, a series of challenges arose regarding these groups’ relationship to public spaces, the ways that they manoeuvred to occupy them, and the role that the goal of “dissemination” played in these settings. In turn, the discourse of rights these groups deployed to narrate and support their access to this urban space strongly echoed a body of literature on the “right to the city” whose foundational figure is French sociologist Henri Lefebvre.

Lefebvre’s vision of space reflects not the Cartesian scientific certainty that characterised the geographical methods of the early- and mid-twentieth century, but rather a continuous process of social negotiation and competition (1991: 1-4). Social space, he argues, is lived through the spatial practices of bodies, represented by maps and charts, and conceived through artistic, symbolic and descriptive practice (38-41). For Lefebvre, urban spaces, as sites in which power is concentrated and bodies are controlled, offer unprecedented opportunities for revolutionary change (2003: 8-16; cf. Fraser 2011: 17). In highlighting ways that the construction of space may be geared towards oppressive ends, Lefebvre “stresses the need to restructure the power relations that underlie the production of urban space” (Purcell 2002: 101). The goal, as Lefebvre (1996: 157-9) declares, and Harvey (2012) and Marcuse (2009) reiterate, is that the inhabitants of urban space claim the right to appropriate and playfully recreate it: the right to the city “gathers the interests [...] of the whole society and firstly of all those who *inhabit*” (Lefebvre 1996: 158, italics in original). In recent decades, this “right” has been repeatedly invoked by participants in urban social movements, from *autonomistas* in Italy to squatters in Spain and the Occupy movement in New York (Montagna 2006; Martínez 2007; Graeber 2013).

The “right to the city” literature thus straddles theory and practice (Marcuse, 2009: 186; Harvey, 2012: 120). Optimism concerning the potential for social transformation stems from the notion that altering urban space may consist of changes in the ways that it is used and understood (Purcell 2002: 102; Lefebvre 1991: 245). For Lefebvre, power in modern cities functions around what he calls “abstract space”, which tends to produce “homogeneity” as well as social distance between its occupants (1991: 51, 56). The contradiction of such abstract space is that it imposes “a non-aggression pact” or “communality” about its usage which is itself backed up by force (56); thus, it balances “the appearance of security [with] the constant threat, and indeed the occasional eruption, of violence” (57). It is particularly notable that, for Lefebvre, abstract space is

the historical product of violence against the non-visual senses (284-6). Citing McLuhan (1962), Lefebvre contends that “That which is merely seen is reduced to an image – and to an icy coldness” (1991: 286). Lefebvre, then, connects the construction of public “abstract space” to the dominance of “the eye” – which tends “to reduce objects to the distance, to render them passive” – and to the conquest of space by the modern state (286-8). By contrast, he contends that eighteenth-century (European) society was structured by a body-centred and fundamentally musical version of social space (1991: 284). Lefebvre’s writings on space thus raise many questions concerning the spatial possibilities associated with the production of sound; for the sociologist, “[t]he city is heard as much as music as it is read as a discursive writing” (1996: 109; also cf. Lefebvre 2004).

Recently, a number of ethnomusicologists and musicologists have built upon the Lefebvrian notion of socially produced space, discussing the ways in which urban social space may be produced and constructed through music (Bywater 2007; Baker 2006; Smith 2000; Krims 2007; Cohen 1995). Baker (2006) highlights the ways that Afro-Cubans in Havana, Cuba use rap as “a particularly appropriate vehicle not just for occupying space but also for constituting social relations within the spaces that its practitioners have claimed” (2006: 224), and forming a “communicative arena” in which discussion, debate and deliberation may occur (223, 226). Elsewhere, in an article examining buskers in the city of Bath, England, Bywater shows that the repeated sonic production of space creates a sense of ownership, such that “performers themselves are no longer ‘marginal’ in the sense of having to contend anew, on each occasion, for temporary possession of public space” (2007: 117).

Several recent studies in music, sound and space, however, complicate Lefebvre’s idealized portrayal of the aural field. Johnson and Cloonan, for instance, set out to challenge a “pervasive and tacit assumption” about the therapeutic and beneficial effects of popular music, highlighting how sound and music can be “appropriated by mutually contesting power blocs” to exert violence against particular groups (2008: 1, 4). Music, for these authors, is a morally ambivalent social force; thus, the pair state that “[e]very time music is used to demarcate the territory of self or community, it is incipiently being used to invade, marginalize or obliterate that of other individuals or groups” (4). Elsewhere, Goodman examines “sound as force”, and the use of “acoustic machines” to “modulate the physical, affective, and libidinal dynamics of populations, of bodies, of crowds” as part of strategies of “sonic warfare” (2010: 10). Goodman defines two types of

“audiosocial” forces which are key for the exertion of spatial control through sound: centrifugal, which is aligned with “repulsion and dissolution of clusters, and to the individualization of the movement of bodies”, and centripetal, connected to “the heightening of collective sensation, an attractive, almost magnetic, or vortical force [...] that sucks bodies in toward its source” (11-12). Implicitly, then, these writers contradict and complicate Lefebvrian philosophy by highlighting the ways that sound, as well as sight, can be a force of alienation and control. This should not be taken to mean, however, that the assumptions these writers critique can be dismissed. In many contexts, for instance, music’s association with “culture” means that it is often understood as harmless “entertainment”, a discourse which is often important to people’s patterns of musical production and consumption, even as ethnomusicologists indignantly object.

In this chapter, I explore tensions between (musical) sound as occupying and productive of space, means of establishing perceived “rights” to urban space, vehicle for the communication of information and messages, weapon, purveyor of “culture”, and manipulator of bodies in the “political-cultural events” of pro-Zapatista groups in Mexico City. I point out that pro-Zapatista activists and musicians perceived music as a means of dissemination of information to people passing through public spaces<sup>171</sup> such as parks and squares. However, I will also demonstrate that this aim occasionally involved a number of more ambiguous audio-social dynamics than was typically recognized in these circles, foregrounding ways in which claiming the right to urban space through sound became a contentious enterprise. I will develop this analysis by first providing an introduction to the Other Campaign concerts in Mexico City at which I conducted ethnographic research, highlighting how these events became organized around the central goal of “dissemination”. Second, I will describe and explore a number of episodes that revealed, in different ways, limits and contradictions pertaining to these groups’ claims on public space.

### **Sound and the Other Campaign in Mexico City**

In the Sixth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle in June 2005, the EZLN called for a “national campaign for building another way of doing politics, for a program of national struggle on the Left, and for a new Constitution”, which involved “alliances of non-

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<sup>171</sup> In this chapter, I use the phrase “public spaces” to refer to particular spaces created (usually by the State) for access by a general public, such as parks, pavements, streets, and squares. In this chapter, “public spaces” are opposed to “private spaces”: spaces not made accessible to a general public, or made accessible only upon certain conditions i.e. payment of a fee.

electoral organizations” and came to be called the “Other Campaign” (cf. Mora 2007). Although the Other Campaign was initially convened as an alternative to the national election campaign of 2006, it has persevered until the time of writing.<sup>172</sup> This project constitutes an example of what I wish to call “counter-hegemonic glocalization”, in an adaptation of Evans’ term “counter-hegemonic globalization” (2000): with the Other Campaign the EZLN sought, and seeks, to link together social, political and cultural struggles in different localities, while respecting the local nuances and particularities that shape these struggles.

During my research in Mexico City between October 2012 and April 2013, I carried out ethnographic fieldwork with activist groups that formed part of the Zapatistas’ Other Campaign. Joining the Other Campaign meant publically adhering to the principles of the EZLN’s Sixth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle, including an anti-capitalist, anti-neoliberal globalization stance; opposition to the Mexican “bad government”; support of indigenous rights and the San Andrés Accords; a commitment to solutions “from below”; and support for “reciprocal respect for the autonomy and independence of organizations” (EZLN, 2005). Other Campaign activist groups perceived a stark divide between mainstream electoral politics and their own grassroots, prefigurative politics, and – unlike many pro-Zapatista actors in the 1990s who also cultivated relationships with the PRD – distanced themselves from political parties of any persuasion.<sup>173</sup>

These groups’ supporters came from diverse backgrounds, but particular experiences, both historical and ongoing, informed the political views of many. First, a number of older activists had been politically active prior to the 1994 uprising, especially in the student movement of the late 1960s, and some I spoke to had also supported the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) after the end of the Somoza regime in 1979. Second, a large number of pro-Zapatista activists were students or alumni of universities in the city, and many had been involved in the 1999 student occupation of the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) carried out in protest against an announced rise in tuition fees. In this regard, current and former students of UNAM’s Facultad de Filosofía y Letras were particularly well-represented. Third, many pro-Zapatista activists self-identified as *raperos* (rappers) and *grafiteros* (graffiti artists) within a hip-hop culture

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<sup>172</sup> Although it was renamed the ‘Sexta’ in early 2013, this dissertation refers only to the Other Campaign, for the sake of simplicity.

<sup>173</sup> See, for example, an interview I conducted with singer-songwriter Fernando Medina, who told me that “there are some things I won’t do, like perform for the political parties” (24-04-13).



associated with the *barrios* (“suburbs”) on the outskirts of the Mexico City metropolitan area (incorporating both Distrito Federal and the surrounding Estado de México) in zones like Ecatepec, Iztapalapa, Texcoco, Chimalhuacán and Chalco. These activists, musicians and artists tended to root their political views not in a past episode of repression, revolution or contention, but in the everyday experience of oppression and injustice that they perceived in their own neighbourhoods. Given that many of these areas had suffered greatly at the hands of drug cartels, the political perspectives of some of these bands also incorporated a critique of the war on drugs; as the Chalco-based hip-hop group Re Crew rap on their track “Chalco”, *el gobierno y las ratas, es el mismo precipicio* (“the government and crime, it’s the same abyss”).

During the time of research, three Other Campaign groups were particularly active in Mexico City. First, Colectivo Azcapotzalco was a group located towards the north of Distrito Federal which carried out a number of pro-Zapatista awareness-raising activities including running a blog and monthly publication entitled “La Voz del Anáhuac” (see Introduction) and holding “political-cultural events” including music, theatre and poetry in the bandstands of public parks in the north of the city. This group included several students, as well as older members who had been activists since prior to 1994, and much of its financial support came from a member who owned a local business. Coordinadora Valle de Chalco (henceforth CVDC), meanwhile, was a collective whose number included several young *grafiteros* (graffiti artists) and rappers from Valle de Chalco, the marginalized district of Estado de México in which I had worked as a volunteer in 2007. This group, like Colectivo Azcapotzalco, put on political-cultural events in a variety of locations, and it also promoted a pro-Zapatista compilation album in 2012 (see Chapter Seven). Finally, Red Contra La Represión y Por La Solidaridad (henceforth RCRS) was a broad network of pro-Zapatista activists and collectives which was formed in Mexico City but extended across Mexico; it supported a range of activities, and was one of the principal organizers of Other Campaign events in the centre of the city, especially in the *explanada* (square) outside Palacio de Bellas Artes. Of these three organizations, the latter was the most closely connected to the Zapatistas, having been established by the EZLN after the Foro Nacional Contra La Represión in 2007.<sup>174</sup> It is important to note that in practice, although most Other Campaign political-cultural events were officially organized by particular activist collectives, these groups’ members frequently collaborated to put on events.

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<sup>174</sup> <http://www.redcontralarepresion.org/contenido.php?cat=9&id=9> (accessed 05-04-15).

In Mexico City I attended around twenty Other Campaign events in public spaces, where I made field recordings, took pictures and recorded videos on my digital camera, wrote field notes, and made research contacts, especially with musicians. Often, this was tiring work, since events often started in the morning and continued until the mid-evening. Most important, however, was the way that my constant presence at these events and the relationships I developed with activists and musicians during my research tended to initiate me into the mentality of the groups that ran them, particularly in relation to the police. On one occasion, together with a number of Other Campaign activists, I attended a two-day rap event held in a walled-off street in Chalco which was targeted by riot police, and after a short time my companions urged me to make a hasty getaway. Elsewhere, I was stopped and checked by armed police just before arriving at a little-attended Other Campaign event in Parque Revolución in north Mexico City, during which the police spent much time driving around the park with sirens blazing. Even had there been a reasonable pretext for this police activity, it was not apparent at the time. Moreover, the pro-Zapatista groups with which I was conducting research provided a ready narrative into which to fit such occurrences: that there was a “National Campaign of Repression” being waged by the government against all types of protest. This narrative became especially prominent after the events of December 1, 2012, when mass protests in Mexico City’s historic centre against the inauguration of Enrique Peña Nieto as President ended in riots, followed by a violent police crackdown, the arrests of dozens of protesters,<sup>175</sup> and an injury to an activist called Francisco “Kuykendall” Leal, who was struck in the head with an exploding gas canister and died over a year later.<sup>176</sup> The spectre of this conflict hung over my subsequent research in public spaces. I was, then, far from a disinterested observer at such events, but instead participated in an affective field that arose in the use and production of space for political purposes.

The three activist groups I researched in Mexico City all considered the communication of information and messages to be a high priority. On the website of RCRS, for example, the network’s plan of action includes “a permanent campaign of

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<sup>175</sup> See, for example, <http://www.animalpolitico.com/2012/12/que-paso-el-1-de-diciembre-durante-la-toma-de-protesta-de-ejn-fotos-videos/> (accessed 10-09-14), and <http://www.proceso.com.mx/?p=327615> (accessed 10-09-14). Writing in the magazine *Proceso*, Patricia Dávila and Santiago Igartua suggested that agents provocateurs had spurred on the violence, and concluded that “many of those who were arrested were scapegoats”. “Los disturbios y el siniestro montaje del 1 de diciembre”. *Proceso*, 8 December 2012. <http://www.proceso.com.mx/?p=327370> (accessed 10-09-14).

<sup>176</sup> <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2014/01/26/politica/011n1pol> (accessed 10-09-14).

dissemination and propaganda”.<sup>177</sup> Meanwhile, an elder member of Colectivo Azcapotzalco told me that the purpose of his group’s activities was “to reach more people each time, so that more people would take the word [*palabra*] with them”.<sup>178</sup> Another organiser with the same collective, a student at a Mexico City public university, said in an interview that his collective sought to put on “informative activities, because our purpose is to make the struggles [*luchas*] known”.<sup>179</sup> A member of CVDC, a young *grafitero* from Chalco, emphasised to me that “we believe the EZLN’s struggle is important, we have to defend it; we have to disseminate [*difundir*]”. He stated that, while the Zapatistas typically asked for little, one thing they had requested was that their supporters “spread the word”:

We perhaps do not have resources to attend a brigade [to visit the Zapatista communities], to send [the Zapatistas] money or to send them medicine, we are really screwed, here in the *barrio* [suburbs]. But we can disseminate. (Interview, CVDC, 24-07-13)

Dissemination of information about the Zapatistas was also highly valued by artists participating in these events. For example, El Chava, a *trova* singer who regularly played at Other Campaign public events, said of them that:

The goal is to carry the message. I believe that it is one of the most important tasks that we, the adherents of the *Sexta* [Sixth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle] have to carry out, it is just that: to disseminate [*difundir*]. (Interview, 18-02-13)

For many Zapatista supporters, these activities were made necessary because of a so-called “media siege” (*cercos mediático*) that was being waged against the EZLN, ensuring that most people were either unaware of its continued existence or believed erroneous information about it. One activist told me that “blocking information in the mass media is a counterinsurgency strategy”;<sup>180</sup> others declared that mass media “just give you one side of the coin, and don’t show the reality”.<sup>181</sup> In Mexico City, more than any other setting in which I conducted ethnographic research, visions of pro-Zapatista activism were constructed closely around these characterizations of hegemonic mass media. Other Campaign activists felt obliged to ensure that reliable information about the Zapatistas and other movements of resistance within Mexico could reach the public. In other words,

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<sup>177</sup> <http://redcontralarepresion.org/contenido.php?cat=9&id=9> (accessed 06-04-15); “Realizar una campaña permanente de difusión y propaganda”. It is important to note that in Spanish, as is certainly the case here, the word *propaganda* tends to lack the negative connotations associated with its English equivalent.

<sup>178</sup> Interview, 14-01-13.

<sup>179</sup> Interview, 02-05-13.

<sup>180</sup> Interview, José, 14-01-13.

<sup>181</sup> Interview, Luis Angel Santiago, 29-10-12.

much pro-Zapatista activism in Mexico City was focused on creating forms of “alternative mediation” (Couldry 2000; cf. Coutiño Soriano 2014: 150).<sup>182</sup>

Despite pro-Zapatista actors’ common commitment to “spreading the word”, “the message” itself was varied. During my research, I attended Other Campaign political-cultural events that represented a variety of issues with links to Zapatismo. Often, events had a specific theme – for instance, one event was arranged to celebrate Día de los Muertos on the first and second of November, and became an opportunity to commemorate those that had died “in the struggle [*lucha*]”. Another was organised in October 2012 to raise awareness about the existence of political prisoners in Mexico, and featured a live telephone interview with Alberto Patishtán, a Tzotzil-speaking teacher who was imprisoned for 11 years on what were later accepted to be false accusations of multiple homicide.<sup>183</sup> On 17 November of that year, an event was held to celebrate the anniversary of the creation of the EZLN in 1983 (see Chapter One), and on 22 December, another was held to remember the victims of the Acteal massacre in Chenalhó, Chiapas, which had taken place on 22 December 1997.<sup>184</sup> During these events, Other Campaign groups would often emphasise that the Zapatista movement still existed, and that the Zapatistas were still struggling [*luchando*] in Chiapas. At an event held on 17 November 2012 to mark the 29th anniversary of the creation of the EZLN, a young activist with RCRS described the Zapatistas as “a group of indigenous people who organized and constructed a world in which many worlds fit [...] they have been an example of autonomy, of a new way of doing politics”. These groups also disseminated messages about the disappeared women in Ciudad Juárez (Staudt 2008; Ravelo 2005), the indigenous self-defence organisations in Cherán, Michoacán, the large number of political prisoners held by the state, and the victims of the Acteal massacre. Many of the non-

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<sup>182</sup> For accounts of the EZLN’s early relationship with the press see Rovira (2009: 17-24); Bob (2005: 128-9); and Levario Turcott (1999).

<sup>183</sup> Patishtán was pardoned and freed in 2013. He had initially been blamed for an ambush in the Los Altos region of Chiapas that killed seven police officers, and sentenced to 60 years in prison, despite multiple violations of court procedure and many witnesses stating that he had been teaching at the time of the ambush. In prison, Patishtán became part of the Other Campaign, and organized a group from within prison campaigning for the wrongly-imprisoned. See <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2013/09/13/politica/006a1pol> (accessed 05-08-14) and <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-24741441> (accessed 05-08-14).

<sup>184</sup> On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of December, 1997, members of the paramilitary group Mascara Roja entered the village of Acteal and slaughtered 45 people, including 19 children. The victims were members of Las Abejas, a pacifist Catholic organization that supported the goals of the EZLN. A United States embassy cable leaked in 2009 alleges that the Mexican government had been directly supporting paramilitary groups such as Mascara Roja after the Zapatista uprising (see <http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB283/index.htm> [accessed 05-08-14]).

Zapatista groups supported in these events were adherents of the Other Campaign themselves (for example, Las Abejas in Acteal, and Patishtán).

The purpose of “spreading the word” was reflected consistently in the ways that these activists altered the physical environment, constructing public parks and squares as sites for linear communication from activist to audience. In this regard, music, theatre and poetry formed part of a complex matrix of different media that worked together to encourage one-way dissemination. The physical layout of these events tended to vary little: rows of chairs would be set out in front of the performance area (which was sometimes on top of a bandstand, sometimes under a marquee), and around these chairs various stalls would be set up to sell books, CDs, crafts and textiles, and distribute food and drink for a suggested donation in order to raise money either for the collective hosting the event or for other Zapatista-linked groups. Organizers frequently set out far more chairs than they could normally hope to fill, but the seating area also functioned to mark out the event as a focus of attention. Individual activists would walk around the space, distributing Other Campaign literature, such as newspapers, booklets and flyers, to passers-by. Behind these stalls, organizers would also lay out colourful art and banners carrying political slogans. Particularly striking was the display created for the Día de los Muertos event held outside Bellas Artes, which extended across the plaza and featured a seven-foot high rack of skulls, a ten-foot tall sculpture of the skeleton of Emiliano Zapata, and a number of *ofrendas* [‘offerings’] made with flowers that spelt out political slogans (“80,000 dead in Calderón’s war”; “In memory of our migrant brothers and sisters”, and one featuring the name of each Zapatista *caracol*).



*Figure 7: A papier maché skeleton of Emiliano Zapata outside Other Campaign Día de los Muertos event, November 2012 (photograph: Andrew Green)*



*Figure 8: An ofrenda at Other Campaign Día de los Muertos event, November 2012 (photograph: Andrew Green)*

The notion of dissemination was also reflected in the format of these political-cultural events. Typically, musical, poetical, theatrical or dance numbers were interspersed with short talks or speeches about the theme of the event given by organisers. One of the goals of music, in this context, was to draw people towards the performance area, where they would find out more about the Zapatistas and the Other Campaign through textual media.<sup>185</sup> Thus, although musicians and organizers hoped that music would fulfil a communicative role in itself, it could also contribute in other ways to the broader disseminative strategy of Other Campaign political-cultural events. In this setting, musicians appeared to have one of two strategic choices – either attract passers-by with music so that they would then be drawn in by the Other Campaign’s discourse, or incorporate this discourse into their own music, at the risk of possibly compromising or undermining its attractive qualities. While some musical numbers did fulfil the former role – for instance, outside Bellas Artes instrumental music was sometimes performed, often accompanied by dance – the majority of musicians I worked with who regularly performed at Other Campaign events tended to perceive their music as a medium or

<sup>185</sup> Interview, Bossanónimos, 26-11-12.

vehicle for pro-Zapatista messages. As well as weaving into their music particular stories or principles that supported pro-Zapatista, anti-government narratives, then, these musicians often interspersed their performances with short speeches, both in the intervals between songs and during songs themselves. At a political-cultural event to remember the 2006 Atenco conflict, singer Jorge Salinas (who had received early retirement after being badly beaten by the police during this conflict<sup>186</sup>) told the crowd that “the Zapatistas have managed a better standard of life than they had before”; elsewhere, at an event to commemorate the Acteal massacre in December 2012, young singer-songwriter Luis Angel Santiago (see Chapter Five) dedicated a song “to our Zapatista brothers” and “the memory of our brothers and sisters from Acteal” who were “killed by paramilitaries supported by the damn government”. Santiago went on to sing a song in which he assumed the voice of an indigenous woman from Chiapas encouraging her husband to take over land owned by a foreign investor (“the struggle waits for nobody; there’s plenty more to be liberated”). These concerts were also frequently punctuated by cries of *viva el EZLN!* (“long live the EZLN!”), *viva Zapata!* (“long live Zapata!”) and *¡el pueblo unido jamás será vencido!* (“the people united shall never be defeated”)<sup>187</sup> on the part of musicians and audience.

Such political-cultural events featured a variety of genres of live music, including performances of rap, *trova*, ska, reggae soundsystem, and rock, as well as instrumental music to accompany dance and poetry. At Other Campaign events held on the square outside the Palacio de Bellas Artes, rap tended to predominate, followed by *trova*, whereas in the events put on in the north of the city by Colectivo Azcapotzalco I observed many performances of *trova* and rock. In some cases, musical preferences were clearly related to the background of the organizing group; events put on by CVDC, for example, often featured many rap artists with strong connections to the Chalco hip-hop scene, such as Re Crew, XCHM, To Cuic Libre and Instituto del Habla. More generally, the predominance of rap and *trova* at these events reflects Baker’s observation in the context of Cuba that these genres, as “text- or intellect-centered musics”, fit more comfortably into the political discourse of revolution than “body centered genres” (2005: 392; also see following chapter).<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> Interview, Jorge Salinas, 29-04-13.

<sup>187</sup> Notably, this chant has roots in the *nueva canción* movement (Morris [Nancy], 2014: 42).

<sup>188</sup> Baker’s subsequent association of “text-centered genres” of music with maleness appeared to have been borne out here; almost all rap and *trova* artists I saw perform at these events were male.



Importantly, the audiences at these events were also varied. On the one hand, Other Campaign groups often advertised events online, especially via social media such as Facebook and Twitter, attracting small audiences of individuals with existing sympathies towards Zapatismo. (While Colectivo Azcapotzalco listed pre-planned events in advance in its newspaper, it tended not to advertise them online; indeed, on several occasions, I had to send the group a last-minute message to confirm that their planned events were indeed taking place.) Thus, political-cultural events often attracted small audiences of activists or Zapatista sympathizers. On the other hand, the “imagined audiences” for these events also included passers-by, present in these public spaces for innumerable reasons, some of whom stopped and began to engage with the music, but the majority of whom did not (Litt, 2012). These audiences varied according to context. The municipal parks at which Colectivo Azcapotzalco put on monthly events tended to attract Mexicans, especially couples enjoying a romantic walk, friends having a day out, or parents taking their children to visit their local playground. These parks were full of trees and greenery, each featuring benches scattered around numerous walkways and a bandstand located in the centre. Meanwhile, Palacio de Bellas Artes was a commonly-visited museum, theatre and architectural landmark located in the historic centre of Mexico City, on a route of tourist attractions including the nearby park La Alameda and the city’s Zócalo (“main square”). The cultural events this institution hosted attracted many middle- and upper-class Mexicans; equally, many visitors to this space were foreign tourists, and less likely to speak Spanish fluently or be engaged in Mexican politics.<sup>189</sup> For many individuals, Mexican and otherwise, this venue also served as a convenient meeting-place, and the steps of Palacio de Bellas Artes were often full of people waiting for friends. These venues were chosen, then, in part because they were highly visible, and gave Other Campaign groups the opportunity to “spread the word” to audiences likely to be unfamiliar with their brand of politics. At the same time, there was a great disjunction in practice between activist groups and these audiences, such that it was very difficult for activists to find out whether passers-by were really being informed by their activity. As I explore further in the following chapter, dissemination in this context was an act of faith that relied on actively imagining this audience in particular ways.

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<sup>189</sup> Rubén Gallo provides a vivid description of Bellas Artes in 1973 which is still relevant: “Bellas Artes stands in one of the liveliest and most vibrant working-class neighborhoods in the city – the Centro – but its interior is a cold, tomblike gallery. Outside there are crowds of street vendors, book sellers peddling Marxist treatises carefully laid out on white sheets on the sidewalk, Indian women begging for money with their babies in tow, young couples making out, children screaming, and all kinds of people making a racket – young and old, rich and poor, employed and unemployed; inside, there are empty galleries illuminated by crystal chandeliers” (2007: 170).

Other Campaign events lent these public spaces a different sonic character, and often gained attention from passers-by as a curiosity or acoustic presence rather than as a source of information. At various Colectivo Azcapotzalco events in parks in north Mexico City, I noted that while the audience located in the seating area was typically small, more people would be seated on the benches scattered around the park, often close enough to hear the amplified sound emanating from the bandstand, but too far away to understand what this collective's activists and musicians were saying or singing. In several conversations I had with some of these people, none professed to understand the purpose of this event. Such lack of comprehension was also related to the low quality of the sound produced by these collectives' equipment, which often undermined the potential for "text-centered musics" to deliver political messages. As a result, the live music performed at these events often sounded highly distorted and rough, something that Carlos Xeneke, a singer-songwriter whose activism long predated the Zapatista uprising, identified as a recurring difficulty:

I've become aware of the problems we have with the groups, with the organisations that put on the events in support of the Zapatistas. There are lots of problems with the audio, almost always [...] Myself, with 25 years playing music, every time I go and play it's like "what equipment is there", [I see] that there'll be poor-quality sound. Well, I go because I like to go and perform, because I like to be at the events, but I already know that there are times that the audio equipment is not in good condition. (Interview, 01-05-13)

Technical limitations made performances by larger ensembles, such as rock or ska bands, more difficult to put on. While larger ensembles, such as rock, salsa, and cumbia groups, tended to take a long time to set up, and their sound was difficult to manage, setting up for a rap or *trova* group was comparatively simple. Nonetheless, the dominant genres of rap and *trova* were also undermined by this scenario, since the messages by which they were apportioned value were often undermined by the poor-quality equipment that transmitted them.

Musicians performing at Other Campaign events tended to respond to such technical limitations with a mixture of frustration and humour, and contextualize them as setbacks typical of subversive endeavour. At an event celebrating Día de los Muertos outside Bellas Artes, the performance of El Chava, a middle-aged amateur *trova* singer and biologist, was beset by technical problems from the beginning; his microphone was transmitting a level of static noise, and short bursts of feedback punctuated his singing. El Chava soldiered on, adding humour to proceedings; when he was asked to help the organizers to check microphone levels between songs, he replaced the typical mic-check

*bueno* (“well” or “good”) with *malo* (“bad”). In an interview, a member of Cienpies, a ska band from north-east Mexico City that often played at Other Campaign events, told me that they would not usually tolerate these performing conditions were they to be found at commercial, for-profit concerts. However, for this band, events under the “Other Campaign” umbrella entailed a greater spirit of co-operation in which musicians’ efforts were framed as contributions to a larger cause, rather than commodities exploited by capitalists.<sup>190</sup> Other activists, echoing Subcomandante Marcos (2007), understood these technical problems to be intertwined with an authentic, grassroots “culture from below” that contrasted with a false, imposed “culture from above”. One member of CVDC told me that at an early stage they had been organising events “in the street” without any sound system at all, and stated that “culture from below requires neither big stages, nor big audio”.<sup>191</sup>

A number of goals and strategies, therefore, competed in this setting. Other Campaign events in Mexico City were organized around the central goal of “dissemination” of information and narratives associated with Zapatismo, which formed an important rationale for these groups’ decisions to use public spaces such as parks and squares as sites for the performance of music, poetry and theatre. This objective could be perceived in the way these groups produced communicative space, altering the physical environment and creating a variety of modalities through which passers-by could come into contact with information and narratives that supported a pro-Zapatista perspective. To return to Lefebvre, Other Campaign collectives cultivated an ambivalent relationship to the “abstract spaces” in which they had chosen to operate. On the one hand, the introduction of colour, noise, and polemical voices into public spaces may be seen as an attempt to break down the supposed “neutrality” which these spaces maintained (Lefebvre, 1991: 56). Nevertheless, this was far from a consensual process, and the notion of communication privileged among pro-Zapatista musicians was unidirectional and hierarchical – itself predicated, therefore, on a fundamental social distance between the actors present during Other Campaign events. In this setting, music was seen to operate as a transmitter of pro-Zapatista lyrical messages (that is, text), but a competing and far less prevalent discourse among such groups held it to function as sound, a presence which centripetally drew in audiences to then discover information through other textual

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<sup>190</sup> Interview, Cienpies, 19-11-12. Several rock bands I spoke to in Mexico City were critical of the local rock scene, and cited multiple incidents of corruption and exploitation of rock bands by unscrupulous promoters, competition organizers and venues.

<sup>191</sup> Interview, CVDC, 24-07-13.

means. Here, it was especially notable that the enterprise of dissemination through music relied on an understanding of music-as-text; that is, musicians tended to emphasise the transformative effects that contact with revolutionary messages could have upon audiences (for a more thorough discussion, see Chapter Five). Nonetheless, as I show in the following section, taking a sonic perspective may highlight the occasionally ambiguous power relations that emerged as Other Campaign groups sought to claim public space.

### **Contesting public spaces**

Although the majority of these political-cultural events ran smoothly, a number of episodes that occurred during my research appeared to demonstrate the fragility of Other Campaign groups' claims to public space. It was during moments in which these groups had to defend their claims to public space that they deployed a discourse of "rights" which, while reinforcing access to this space for "the people" in general, failed to differentiate between different "publics" with legitimate competing claims on the same public spaces. In this section, I describe several of these episodes, and discuss their ramifications.

In April 2013, I went to Parque de la China in the north of Mexico City to observe an event held by Colectivo Azcapotzalco. When I arrived, the group had already set up their soundsystem and banners on the large bandstand in the centre of the park, and their awareness-raising event had begun: a speaker was talking on the stage in front of the bandstand, telling stories to a crowd comprised of a small handful of people. By the side of the seating area stood a group of middle-aged men and women wearing shirts with the name of the local PRD borough<sup>192</sup> *diputado* ("democratic representative" or "legislator") printed onto the back. They seemed impatient, and frequently looked at their watches. Soon after I arrived, the organisers of the event became embroiled in an argument at the side of the bandstand with a PRD leader, after which a nearby police officer arrived to mediate the conflict. It became apparent that the local PRD had organised an event for Día del Niño ("Day of the Child", the actual date of which was two days later) in the same park, and on the same day, as that of Colectivo Azcapotzalco. After a short time, the PRD supporters retired to the edge of the park, where they held a makeshift event.

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<sup>192</sup> Or '*delegación*'.

In interviews, members of Colectivo Azcapotzalco alleged to me that on many occasions, members of the local PRD had attempted to impede their political-cultural events by arranging an event at the same time and taking the space first. They described instances in which they had arrived to a park to find PRD-affiliated groups holding an event on the bandstand, forcing them to relocate. These groups, Colectivo Azcapotzalco charged, organized such events solely to deny them access to this public space. For those intending to contribute or attend but unaware of the last-minute change, the collective put up signs around the park indicating the new venue, only to have them taken down by the group occupying this space. In response to this perceived campaign against them, the collective had started to distribute flyers containing event details in the *delegación* in which it was to take place only one day prior to the event, advertising it in the surrounding *delegaciones* about a week in advance. Nonetheless, even when they did arrive early enough to claim the space, members of the group told me that such groups would sometimes threaten to summon the police in order to dislodge them by force.<sup>193</sup>

One crucial issue lay beneath the surface of this encounter. Generally, Other Campaign groups refused to participate in the regime of permits through which the government apportioned public space. The government of Distrito Federal requires those seeking to put on events of an “artistic, musical, sporting, cinematographic, theatrical or cultural” nature in “public roads, parks or public spaces” to seek a permit from the local borough government (or “*delegación*”).<sup>194</sup> The process of applying for a permit involves six steps: visiting the *delegación* office to enquire about the necessary documentation; leaving and returning with such documentation; registering a request; a five-day period to return with any further documentation missing or required; another period for the *delegación* to make a decision; finally, the applicant attends an appointment to hear the result of this decision. While this long, bureaucratic process could prove frustrating for any group putting on regular events in public spaces, Other Campaign groups’ ideological opposition to the Mexican state further complicated matters. A well-known quote attributed to Zapatista spokesperson Subcomandante Marcos is “we do not need permission to be free”. The word here translated “permission” is *permiso*, which can also mean “permit”. Members of Colectivo Azcapotzalco sometimes made reference to this

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<sup>193</sup> Interview, Horacio, 02-05-13; Interview, José, 14-01-13.

<sup>194</sup> See

[http://www.tramitesyservicios.df.gob.mx/wb/TyS/autorizacion\\_para\\_la\\_presentacion\\_de\\_espectaculos\\_](http://www.tramitesyservicios.df.gob.mx/wb/TyS/autorizacion_para_la_presentacion_de_espectaculos_) (accessed 21-10-14).

phrase as they introduced their events to a wider public, openly declaring that these events were occurring without *permiso*. One member of this group elaborated:

We never request the spaces, be it to the *delegación* or anyone else. We don't have to ask them permission<sup>195</sup> [*permiso*]. Permission to occupy spaces, spaces which belong to the people, the people have a right to use them. (Interview, 02-05-13)

Another member of this collective appealed to the rights provided by the Mexican Constitution concerning public events:

We do not have to ask for a permit from anybody. The permit was signed with the blood of the people in the Constitution [...] if you read articles six to nine, they express the freedoms of assembly, of expression, of demonstration and of the press. So you can't come [...] to try and superimpose a regulation on top of the Constitution, a secondary law, we won't allow it. (Interview, 14-01-13)<sup>196</sup>

Beyond access to public space in practice, then, this group was concerned with such access in *principle*.

Similar issues regarding the distribution of space also arose at a political-cultural event organized by RCRS in December 2012 to mark the fifteenth anniversary of the Acteal massacre on the plaza outside Palacio de Bellas Artes. Early in the day, the organizers of the event were approached by a member of the Bellas Artes staff (described by a *grafitero* organiser of the event as “a low-level worker with dictatorial aspirations”) who requested that the event be stopped, citing orders from his boss. In response, the organizers protested that this was a cultural event and that they were not obstructing the high volume of passing tourists or blocking the street. On the contrary, they stated that “we are giving information to the people of Mexico, those [...] passing by, and we are trying to culturally express our demands in a peaceful and civil manner”. The worker left, but returned soon after, stating that the collective had been using electricity paid for by Palacio de Bellas Artes and demanding that they stop doing so. The event's organizers acquiesced and cut off the electricity, interrupting the performance of Carlos Xeneke, a performer whose routine mixed songs of various genres with humour. Xeneke finished the song he was singing without amplification, and an organizer then told the crowd what had happened. They decided to rent an electricity generator, which arrived about thirty minutes later.

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<sup>195</sup> Or ‘we don't have to ask them for a permit’.

<sup>196</sup> See a translation of the Mexican Constitution at <http://www.juridicas.unam.mx/infjur/leg/constmex/pdf/consting.pdf> (accessed 18-07-15).

The organizers of this event, like *Colectivo Azcapotzalco*, were disinclined to approach the local government for a permit to put on political-cultural events in public spaces, as the following quote shows:

When people put on a street event they ask you for a permit. Although it may be a cultural event, artistic, even for children [...] they ask for a permit to present a piece of street theatre. It's ridiculous. Obviously we always turn around and say "ah, well we haven't got one", but what do they want us to do? I'll leave if they want, and won't do the theatre, but what can I do? [...] tell me where there's a theatre here in the municipality to put on a play, there isn't one! (Interview, 24-07-14)

In their use of public spaces, Other Campaign groups tended to follow a broad strategy of occupying space first and explaining the occupation later. Once events were established as "cultural" (and therefore, so the implication went, "non-violent"), they were difficult to remove, especially in a public space like the square outside *Palacio de Bellas Artes*, a venue synonymous for many with "Mexican culture". While the latter venue was partly chosen because of its acoustics (which were good in comparison to the nearby *Zócalo*, a plaza so large that sound produced within it tended to dissipate very quickly), there were also important strategic factors to consider. RCRS had a contact linked to *Bellas Artes*' workers' union, who helped them to establish their events outside the venue:

In *Bellas Artes*, it's a public space, we know the union for INBA [Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes], which belongs to the zone, so there's [...] an announcement from their union that the plaza will be occupied by an artistic event, and as it is a union that has to do with art and culture in our country, here they can't tell you "no", because it's an artistic event. (Interview, 24-07-13)

Such an appeal to "art", then, allowed Other Campaign groups to claim a public space in which the promulgation of "culture" and "art" was highly valued. (In this regard, it is significant that appeals to "culture" were neutralized in the case of *Colectivo Azcapotzalco* above, who were competing with a local government group also wishing to host a cultural event.)

In addition to culture, these Other Campaign activists responded to the security worker's request that their event be stopped by appealing to a "non-violence" rooted in a physicality from which sound seemed to be excluded; not only was this a peaceful event, but it was not even obstructing visitors' passage through the space. Importantly, this appeal worked; the guard backed down, and returned with an objection that these activists were stealing a physical resource [electricity] from *Palacio de Bellas Artes*. Despite its conflictive nature, then, this exchange nonetheless served to reinforce ground rules among both parties in disagreement establishing a bifurcation between relatively

unimportant (and peaceful) “music”, “sound” or “culture”, and physical objects or resources that could obstruct, be owned and stolen, and be used in acts of violence or uncivility.

CVDC’s encounter with the security guard, then, was grounded in a discourse distancing “art”, “culture” and “music” from “non-peaceful” or “non-civil” activity. In turn, such an understanding corresponded to a broader discourse among Other Campaign groups that privileged music as a vehicle for the dissemination of text and tended to distance “music” from “sound” as material force. The refusal, in the above instance, to discuss “sound” belied the practical ways that Other Campaign groups used music and sound within space. For instance, as I have pointed out, some Other Campaign activists and musicians openly expressed a hope that music could draw people into a space where they would discover more information about specific causes. It was also clear from my field research that sound was an important means of creating an affective claim to space. The following is an excerpt from an interview with an organiser who worked with CVDC and RCRS:

We arrive covered, protected by various organisations and collectives. Many of us arrive, not just three or four people to put up a thirty-metre marquee: we set up the audio; the audio available is always very low-quality, but that’s how it’s done. (Interview, 24-07-13)

Other Campaign groups had a sonically rooted strategy for establishing themselves within public space; after an aural presence was established, these collectives were able to pit public access to culture against the local government’s regime of permits, manoeuvring the “path of least resistance” in their favour. Some musical activities at Other Campaign events appeared particularly directed towards claiming space. Chalco-based rap group Re Crew would perform a special ritual at Other Campaign events intended to sanctify the performance space; enjoining the crowd to salute with them the “seven paths of Mother Earth” (“put your fists up in the air, if you don’t it’s because you haven’t washed”), the band would turn to the east, west, north, south, the sky, the earth, and the heart, hailing each path by blowing into a conch shell. Once they had used this act to consecrate the event before Mother Earth, their set – and the event in general – could continue. (A similar rite was used by RCRS organizers in conjunction with a performance of “Himno Zapatista” to close an event commemorating the Acteal massacre.) While this act served to index indigeneity, ventriloquating Zapatismo as an essentially indigenous entity, it also had spatial effects. Consecrating an event occurring without the permission of the authorities before a powerful metaphysical entity was an act of palpable significance. This



sonically rooted ritual seemed to reinforce the often fragile sense of ownership over space felt by attendees of Other Campaign events.

There was good reason, then, to think about the effects of “sound” as an affective and material presence at these events, as well as “music” and “culture” as means for the dissemination of messages of support for the Zapatistas. However, partly because the rationale for political-cultural events highly privileged the textual, to consider the sonic dynamics present at these events may be to understand their effects in more ambiguous terms. As noted above, Goodman describes two categories of “audiosocial force”, centripetal and attractive, or centrifugal and repulsive, both of which act to manipulate and control human behaviour in space (2010: 10-11). As already seen, corresponding to Goodman’s notion of “centripetal” audiosocial forces, many activists characterized music as a “pull” factor that would attract the public into an environment in which they could find out about the Zapatista struggle through a variety of media. This strategy often worked to an extent; small, curious audiences frequently approached the performing area after musicians began to play. Equally, I also witnessed a “centrifugal” push factor at these events, and the interplay between these two sonic forces was often intricately balanced. After the electricity was cut off during the event at Bellas Artes in December 2012, singer Carlos Xeneke’s performance actually attracted a larger audience, even though his music, now without amplification, filled a far smaller space. There were many potential reasons for this occurrence, such as sympathy for the singer’s misfortune, or the greater attention drawn to his performance as the sound was cut mid-song. Nonetheless, moments like these formed part of a broader trend: pared-down acoustic numbers at these events (typically, but not always, street theatre) usually attracted the largest audiences.

The comparative popularity of purely acoustic events suggested that activist groups were often unintentionally cultivating “centrifugal” dynamics of sonic repulsion during Other Campaign activities. One weekday at the beginning of November 2012, a small group of Other Campaign activists from various collectives arrived at lunchtime to UAM-Azcapotzalco (a public university in the north of the city), quickly set up a sound system consisting of one speaker and one microphone, and began to broadcast pro-Zapatista discourse towards the square in the centre of the university campus. Soon realising that few students were occupying this space, they turned their amplification equipment around and began to direct sound towards the long queue that had formed outside the university cafeteria, attempting to inform those present about recent paramilitary attacks on Zapatista communities in Chiapas which, they said, did not appear

in the mainstream media. This was followed by an abortive attempt to perform music and a bid to foster dialogue with those in the queue by asking whether anyone had any “questions”, to which they received no response. It was often difficult to understand what this group was saying and singing due to the poor quality of the sound equipment they used; further, they were beset by technical failures, having to play recorded rather than live music due to microphone problems, and at several points broadcasting uncomfortable feedback across the square. Meanwhile, most of the students in the slow-moving queue continued to talk to one another despite the distorted sound that was being directed towards them. After this episode, it felt inappropriate to characterize the group’s intervention in this space in terms of dissemination of discourse. Equally, taking a sonic perspective would appear to reveal very different power dynamics to those generally considered by Other Campaign actors. Although many of the students present may have been sympathetic to this group’s cause, this sound was still unidirectionally imposed upon them by a group armed with powerful, if faulty, amplification equipment.

In addition, Other Campaign groups’ sonic appropriation of space sometimes caused conflict with other civil society groups. At the first Colectivo Azcapotzalco event that I attended, at Parque Revolución on a Sunday in October 2012, a group of about twenty people were playing *son jarocho* on the edge of the park. In a conversation, one participant complained to me that they usually played *son jarocho* on the bandstand on Sundays, but when they had arrived that morning this space was already occupied by the activist collective, forcing them to the margins of the park. Each Sunday at Parque de la China, a guitar instructor gave classes to small groups of students on the bandstand located just behind the stage where Colectivo Azcapotzalco put on their events. (This instructor was sympathetic to the EZLN and on good terms with the members of this activist group, having been using the bandstand for ten years.) Finally, every two weeks throughout the time of my research a few women from the local area would book the stage at Parque de la China to tell stories to groups of children. When I spoke to them in June 2015, they informed me that they had long been used to the fact that Colectivo Azcapotzalco would occupy the stage before their arrival and did not seek to dispute their claim to this space.<sup>197</sup> On these occasions, competing claims on public space were expressed acoustically and the parks were filled with cacophonous sound. However, if these conflictive encounters can be characterized as low-level “sonic warfare” (Goodman

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<sup>197</sup> Interview, 28-06-15. The same thing also happened on this occasion: as these women had brought amplification equipment and conducted their event at a location about twenty-five yards from the stage, at one point the members of Colectivo Azcapotzalco requested that they lower the volume of their event.

2010), there was only one winner: the activists' amplification equipment allowed them to disseminate sound with far greater force than the acoustic equipment generally available to their competitors.

Although the conflictive episodes described here cannot be seen as representative of the kinds of dynamics and power relations witnessed at Other Campaign events in general, these occurrences revealed, in different ways, the limits of the language of "constitutional rights" that these activist groups deployed in order to gain access to space (cf. Waldron 1993; Speed 2006: 67; Hale 2006). Conceptualizing music as a means of expressing discourse, rather than a acoustic entity, force or presence, allowed Other Campaign groups to simultaneously claim public spaces through sonic practice and insist on constitutional protections for such activity under the category of "freedom of expression". However, to exploit such a slippage between commonly-accepted discourse and strategic praxis was also to fail to recognize ways in which different groups' respective sonic "freedoms of expression" could come into conflict with one another as a result of the material and spatial nature of sound itself. Further, the ways that Other Campaign groups used sound to proactively claim public spaces, rejecting government authority over the same, revealed upon occasion the potential for sound to produce social distance, and sometimes precluded the possibility for equitable distribution of access to these spaces.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have provided an ethnography of "political-cultural events" put on by Other Campaign groups in public spaces in Mexico City for the dissemination of information about the Zapatista movement and a number of causes related to it. I have foregrounded the way that Other Campaign activities in these spaces were consciously structured around a linear communicative goal, with regard to space, text and sound. In this setting, the performance of music was understood to fulfil two strategic roles which occasionally conflicted with one another: as a vehicle for the direct dissemination of (textual) discourse, or an attractive force, drawing passers-by into a space full of other textual media. This chapter explores the tension between these two understandings of music's role at these political-cultural events and, more broadly, between two different ontologies of music relevant in this context – music-as-text and music-as-sound – in relation to issues of governance, law and spatial conflict. In discussing a number of occasions during which, in different ways, limits to these groups' claims on public space were revealed, this chapter argues that conflicts over public space were rooted in this

tension. Discourses about sonic media such as music often fail to account for the physicality of sound and the concomitant incongruity in applying, to such media, discourses of “rights” and “freedoms” which tend to presuppose the possibility for universal enfranchisement. I suggest that, upon occasion, Other Campaign groups strategically exploited this gap.<sup>198</sup>

Although these events were held for the purposes of dissemination, they were involved with a complex chain of social and power relations whose effects reached far beyond a one-way linear communicative dynamic. In this setting, pro-Zapatista actors manoeuvred within a multifaceted array of cultural, political and legal concepts in order to achieve their aims. The research presented here simultaneously reveals the contradictions and the importance of the “abstract space” which Lefebvre critiques. On the one hand, the threat of police violence often accompanied conflicts over space in this setting, suggesting a less peaceful underbelly to the tranquil veneer of the public parks and squares in which Other Campaign political-cultural events were held. On the other, the production of these spaces as “abstract” also had positive effects. Conflicts helped nobody and were theoretically avoidable; further, such spaces *did* need to be shared, since multiple civil society and political groups could legitimately claim to use them. Indeed, even if Other Campaign groups’ not implausible allegations regarding the local government’s manoeuvre to deny them access to public spaces were true, it seemed clear that by isolating themselves from existing frameworks for the management of public spaces, these groups often made sharing them more difficult. The most challenging question posed by such conflictive encounters, then, concerned the equitable distribution of public space, and the (sonic) limitations of discourses emphasising the “right to the city”.

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<sup>198</sup> From a certain perspective, this situation reflects Butler’s observation regarding freedom of speech in the United States that “if ‘speech’ [...] can be fully subsumed under conduct, then the first Amendment is circumvented” (1996: 23).

## CHAPTER FIVE

### “LISTEN, LISTEN”: CONTROL, COMMUNICATIVE WASTE AND PARTICIPATION IN OTHER CAMPAIGN PROTEST MUSICIANSHIP

During Other Campaign events in public spaces in Mexico City, Crismo, a rapper from Chilean band Voces Clandestinas, would often demand that the audience engage with his political messages, repeatedly shouting out *escucha, escucha* (“listen, listen”). He rarely engaged the audience directly, and preferred to skulk towards the side of the stage, downplaying any interaction that might occur outside of the goal of communicating his message. A black hooded sweater, which the rapper wore at most performances, provided a significant stage prop; Crismo would lower the hood over his face and bow his head, cutting off eye contact with the audience. At other moments, he would simply close his eyes. Crismo’s calls for the audience to “listen” and his refusal to communicate with the audience outside the realm of sound were, then, accompanied by an enactment of physical stasis, sending an implicit message that true listening involved a passive body.<sup>199</sup> When I questioned the rapper about the purpose of these calls, Crismo stated that:

[The audience] just jumping up and down doesn’t interest me, neither does [them] waving their arms. I don’t care if the audience applaud. I care that they listen [...] I always ask them to listen, that a message might get through, that instead of arriving home and saying “oh, it was good, I was jumping up and down, I got with a woman”, I don’t know, they might say “I heard this, that I should check this thing out”. (Interview, 01-02-13)

From one perspective, Crismo’s attempt to hail a physically passive audience that “listened” (in part reminiscent of Caetano Veloso’s conflictive exchange with an unsympathetic audience at the 1968 International Song Festival in São Paulo [Treece, 2000: 37]) could be perceived as an interactional power play, an attempt to control or regulate the bodies of those present, or a sign of the power of performer vis-à-vis

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<sup>199</sup> In characterizing this message as such, I am taking into account the approach to the body established by Foucault in *Discipline and Punish* (1979).

spectator. However, the more I got to know the musicians playing at Other Campaign informative concerts, the more interpellative gestures such as this seemed to me to expose their lack of control (cf. Althusser, 1971; Avenburg, 2012). Crismo and his contemporaries were performing from a highly marginal position, at events which occurred without permission and featured mostly little-known musicians, where they were ignored or dismissed by the majority of passers-by. Their calls for people to listen, more often than not, fell on deaf ears.

John Durham Peters characterizes dissemination as an act of altruism, a means of suspending norms of communicative reciprocity that emerge in direct interaction with other human beings (1999: 51-9). In support of this portrayal, Peters discusses Jesus' Parable of the Sower from the synoptic Gospels, in which "the practice of the sower is wasteful. He lets the seeds fall where they may, not knowing in advance who will be receptive ground" (55). Such an act of communicative "waste" in a practice of "broadcasting" seed allows all potential recipients to be treated as equals, but has its drawbacks, since dissemination "is not an efficient means of securing a good harvest" (55).<sup>200</sup> Equally, Peters also highlights ways in which practising dialogue – dissemination's other, an interaction of reciprocal, efficient, discriminating intimacy in which souls become "intertwined" (43) – can serve to establish relationships of control (40). Thus, despite the fact that the latter category has been romanticised in much literature on communication (33-4), Peters concludes that the relationship between the two practices is more ambivalent than has typically been recognized (57-9). In the field of ethnomusicology, these concepts are mirrored in Turino's discussion of "presentational" and "participatory" performance, where the former refers to distanced, non-interactive and hierarchical musical communication directed from authoritative musician to receptive audience, and the latter describes an egalitarian environment in which all present are invited or even obliged to participate together in the same musical practice (2009: 98-104). The key to the success of the latter category, Turino emphasises, is affective; the scholar states that it is especially important to "concentrate on how the performance *feels* in [the] act of doing" (113, italics in original). While presentational performances tend to foreground an inherent value or sense of seriousness pertaining to what is performed, participatory performances work to foster immanent feeling or emotion at the moment

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<sup>200</sup> There are reasons to question the relationship of this depiction to real-life interaction; for instance, much work in anthropology has highlighted ways that gift-giving – an act of purported non-reciprocal altruism – can serve to establish control or maintain certain forms of social order (cf. Strathern, 1988, 1992; Graeber, 2004).

that contributors play together. Although Turino maintains a relatively fixed categorical distinction between these fields of performance, he does highlight ways that musical groups can switch over time from one to the other (2008: 27). Finally, Turino differs from Peters in emphasising the political potential for a participatory musical practice resembling sonic “dialogue” as a “powerful experiential model of alternative values and ways of being for people in capitalist societies” (112). In the work of both of these scholars, then, the political stakes of such communicative categories are high.

The connected debates about dissemination and dialogue, presentational and participatory performance, and affect are highly relevant to the practices of the pro-Zapatista musicians I worked with in Mexico City, many of whom perceived their performances as non-reciprocal and highly serious acts of broadcasting. These musicians’ stated objective of using music to “spread the word” had as its end point a transformation in the mind of the hearer that pointed towards a one-way relationship of power exerted from sender to receiver. Yet it was clear that, for a number of reasons, some of these musicians were unsatisfied with musical performance as a non-reciprocal act in practice, and hoped to play for larger and more financially rewarding audiences than those typically present at Other Campaign events. In the pro-Zapatista musicianship I studied in Mexico City, then, there was a tense interaction between music as a non-reciprocal “gift” or act of communicative “waste”, as a means of control, and as a source of personal gain (or not). These differing discursive means through which to ascribe value to musical activity reflected modes of performance that were, to varying degrees, “participatory” and “presentational”.

Furthermore, the consequences of performing wastefully were economic, as well as emotional. Pro-Zapatista activist musicians often received little reciprocal reward for their activities, in terms of both audience response, recognition and financial remuneration. For many of these musicians, performing at poorly-attended events tested their dedication to activist musical practice – why sing messages with so few people to hear them? Such a situation was easier for some actors to handle than others, but the musicians with whom I felt most sympathy were those with the greatest economic dependency on music-making. While some contributing musicians, such as Botellita de Jerez drummer Francisco “El Mastuerzo” Barrios, had received ample remuneration and recognition for their music across careers that spanned decades, others had a far more precarious, humble on- and off-stage existence. Indeed, I was constantly aware of my own economic privilege in relation to many of these musicians, and this self-

consciousness was heightened by the fact that the first interaction I had with several of them was an economic one (the purchase of CDs).

During my research in Mexico City, then, I became interested in these individuals' practices of protest musicianship, and the structuring role that the dominant and interlinked objectives of "dissemination", "spreading the word" or "transmitting a message" played in their performances, discourses, and (for some) strategies of economic survival. Although I did not set out to conduct a study of this activity from an economic perspective, the topic often arose, in one guise or another, during my interviews, and it seemed to be of real significance. After all, although the financial viability of protest music has frequently been ignored in the literature on the topic, recent scholarship has emphasised the influence that economic factors have on political expression in music (Dave 2014: 17-18; Baker, 2005). For Bourdieu, cultural economies are sites for a peculiar social reversal through which artists often "have an interest in disinterestedness" (1993: 40). That is, Bourdieu states that

[t]here are economic conditions for the indifference to economy which induces a pursuit of the riskiest positions in the intellectual and artistic avant-garde, and also for the capacity to remain there over a long period without any economic compensation. (1993: 40)

Something similar appeared to hold for pro-Zapatista musicians. As a result of outside employment, some were economically empowered to downplay emotion, pleasure and excitement in favour of pure transmission of political messages. In these social circles, this style tended to be associated with high prestige. Musicians without outside income, however, had to encounter a middle ground between such high-prestige musical practices – which, tended to sideline those features of musical performance that most audiences valued – and the necessity of making a living through music. In the most extreme cases, this necessity forced some pro-Zapatista musicians out of Other Campaign circles altogether.

Furthermore, protest music usually emerges in the context of social movements linked to particular historical moments, and although the Zapatista movement is clearly, at the time of writing, still a significant force at a national level, its power and reach has diminished greatly since the 1990s. The effects of this change could be perceived in the small audiences attending Other Campaign events, and the presumption among participants that most people would be uninformed about Zapatismo. Pro-Zapatista protest musicianship during my research could not be understood outside this context of present and past-in-present; many pro-Zapatista musicians had been inspired to start performing by musicians who had supported Zapatismo in a moment that was now long



gone, and structured their practice around a discourse of dissemination suggesting a mass audience that was no longer present. From this perspective, musical performances at Other Campaign events were paradoxical affairs, yet those who participated in them still needed to fit them into coherent narratives, to make them make sense (Bruner, 1991). Moreover, such acts of sense-making occurred at a collective level, as members of the pro-Zapatista activist community strove to provide discourses accompanying and justifying their common marginality.

In an analysis of the media consumption of activists of varying backgrounds in the United States, Rauch suggests that these actors constructed the categories “mainstream” and “alternative” media in order to maintain their identities as “activist” (2007: 1007). This binary distinction helped these groups to “reinforce symbolic boundaries between themselves and others”, thus helping to maintain “diffused” activist communities (1007-8). In a similar vein, pro-Zapatista activist musicians constructed their own activities as marginal and opposed to the “mainstream”. Indeed, many of the musicians with whom I conducted research treated other musicians performing at Other Campaign events whose music contained insufficient “message” with suspicion. “Wasteful” performances – that is, the act of broadcasting songs in public spaces, to small or non-existent audiences, whose composition sidelined pleasure and highly privileged textual content targeted to a non-specific hearer – could thus be understood not only as a means of awareness-raising among an uninformed public, but also as a ritual establishing a strong marginal identity within the pro-Zapatista activist community itself. In this sense, what Bourdieu refers to as “the collective disavowal of commercial interests and profits” created a form of value, even if this was difficult to envisage being converted into financial capital (1993: 75).

In this chapter I examine closely the objective of “dissemination” of messages and information in support of the Zapatista movement as it was reflected in protest musicianship in Mexico City. In particular, I am interested in analysing the paradoxical activity of disseminating purportedly universal messages to small or non-existent audiences, and the tense relationships between dynamics of non-reciprocity and control that emerged in the course of such musical practices. In order to do so, I will look in detail at the experiences of Carlos Xeneke and Luis Ángel Santiago, two singer-songwriters who often performed at Other Campaign events in Mexico City. This chapter is structured as follows: first, I will provide a short introduction to the political-economic context in which pro-Zapatista musicians operated. Second, I will discuss the work of (1)

Xeneke and (2) Santiago in detail, bringing out ways in which they, in seeking to “disseminate” through music, variously used presentational and participatory performance techniques to exert control or create communicative “waste”. As I hope to demonstrate, the comparison between these two musicians can reveal much about the challenges and paradoxes of performing in this context. Critical analysis of their respective situations may highlight the difficulties associated with the narratives of marginality prevalent within this activist community.

### **Producing marginality in Mexico City**

At the beginning of the previous chapter, I pointed out that the accession of the PRD to the government of the Federal District in 1997 changed much for pro-Zapatista musicians in the city. Many key figures in the rock movement, which intersected with Zapatismo in making claims for access to public space, started to collaborate with the new administration. During my research in 2012 and 2013, the still-governing PRD was a powerful actor in the Mexico City cultural scene, and funded a large number of concerts in public spaces (García Canclini, 2005: 22). Nonetheless, adherence to the principles of the EZLN’s Sixth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle (2005) led many pro-Zapatista musicians to refuse to participate in events put on by political parties, including the PRD. Moreover, one Other Campaign musician who had performed at PRD-sponsored events alleged that they suffered censorship while onstage, sarcastically invoking the fact that the PRD was supposedly “founded upon freedom of expression”.<sup>201</sup> Mexican political parties often held promotional events across Mexico featuring music, providing a significant source of income for many musicians. Organizers of Other Campaign events, by contrast, did not pay their performers. It was perhaps no surprise that, during my research, a ska band called *Ideología Vigente* that had participated in the compilation album *Rola la lucha zapatista* stopped performing at Other Campaign events as they started to receive media attention and their career began to snowball. These small-scale, unpaid events attended by few tended to occupy a low position on most musicians’ lists of

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<sup>201</sup> Interview, Juan Pablo Cancino Altamirano, 29-04-13; Interview, Luis Ángel Santiago, 29-10-12. As an example, the former musician cited an occasion upon which organizers at a PRD event had shut off the power part of the way through his performance, as he began to criticise “the racism [in Mexico] and how they don’t accept you for the way you look?”. Whether or not such occurrences were in actual fact frequent, there was a widely-held notion that events outside the Other Campaign were more prone to censorship, and the vast majority of my consultants felt that “self-censorship” was a widespread problem. For discussions of music and censorship see Cloonan (2004) and Chirambo (2006); for an examination of this theme in a Mexican context see Wald (2004).

priorities.

Some pro-Zapatista musicians were able to attract their own audiences, and thus make money from their music. Elijah Wald writes about Andrés Contreras, a singer well-known to scholars of Mexican music<sup>202</sup> who travelled to Chiapas in 1994 to find out about the Zapatista uprising and who began to make a living by selling albums by Mexico City's Zócalo, where he would attract an audience of mainly working-class Mexicans by playing his provocative corridos through loudspeakers (2001: 213-30). Talking to Wald, Contreras distanced himself from the "bourgeois" *nueva canción* style of singers like Oscar Chávez, who wrote studied, poetic songs distant from his own bawdy creative idiom:

Those are people who studied philosophy, letters, who went to conservatories. They become completely wrapped up in the bourgeois scene, the elite, and they write their songs in the elitist style [...] if I try to play their songs in the Zócalo, I won't sell a single tape. I've tried it. (Cited in Wald, 2001: 228)

When I spoke to him in 2012, Contreras was still making a living from his music, although he was by no means wealthy.<sup>203</sup> Other Campaign informative concerts, by contrast, featured many musicians playing songs in the *nueva canción* style which eschewed Contreras' confrontational and humorous approach, instead performing in such a way as to reflect the seriousness of their chosen subject matter. Further, since these events tended to attract small audiences, opportunities for musicians to sell CDs at them were comparatively rare. Correspondingly, few pro-Zapatista musicians regularly performing at Other Campaign events were professional, and most earned a living by working outside of music.

Most of the musicians I spoke to who were participating in the Other Campaign told me that the main objective of their activities was "dissemination" (*difusión*). Words deriving from the verb *difundir* featured heavily in my Mexico City interviews, both with regard to music and with regard to Zapatista messages (or "the Zapatista word" [*palabra*]). Indeed, the word *mensaje* ("message") was also commonly used in my interviews; Crismo sought to use his music to "carry the message" (*llevar el mensaje*), while singer-songwriter Fernando Medina considered his music to be a "vehicle" through which radical messages could be communicated. These attitudes were sometimes manifested in lyrical styles that privileged clarity over poetry. Medina told me:

Sometimes I think I'm too [...] clear in my songs. Someone asked me when I was at university [...] "Why don't you write your songs with metaphors?" And I was like, "What?" "Like Silvio Rodríguez, who uses metaphors?". (Interview, 24-04-13)

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<sup>202</sup> See Kirschlager (2012) and McDowell (2007).

<sup>203</sup> Interview, Andrés Contreras, 15-11-12, 30-11-12.

As with the music of many Other Campaign musicians, Medina's songs typically employed direct language, and tended to eschew complex allegorical or descriptive phrasing. In this regard, then, they were distinct from the music of *nueva canción* and *nueva trova* artists (Moore, 2003; Tumas-Serna, 1992).

The overriding focus on "message" maintained by most of the pro-Zapatista musicians I spoke to was accompanied by ambivalence among many concerning the body, pleasure, and affective responses to music.<sup>204</sup> For example, Medina used an allegory based on medicine to describe pro-Zapatista artistic endeavours:

To be able to inject penicillin into your body, we need a liquid that we can mix it into, and that liquid isn't very nice [*no te agrada*]. So Zapatista philosophy is the penicillin, and whichever artistic practice is the liquid, it's the vehicle that we're going to use to make an idea of what is happening, [and] what the Zapatistas propose, get through to the people. (Interview, 27-12-12)

This allegorical account of communication sidelined enjoyment in favour of the transmission of a textual, abstract message ("Zapatista philosophy"). If the allusion to medicine signalled recognition of the affective properties of music, Medina ascribed this factor little importance, privileging text over feeling (thus recalling debates dating back to ancient Greece concerning Apollonian rationality and Dionysian sensuality [Van Keer, 2004: 29; Higgins, 1992]). Instead, because the medicine will ultimately be good for the recipient, it matters little that it might not be "nice" to begin with. Such lack of attention to affect, and the seriousness with which "what the Zapatistas propose" was sung to "the people", appeared to make it difficult to attract audiences to musical performances. By contrast, it was notable that the largest crowd I witnessed at an Other Campaign event was for rapper MC Lokoter, who was a well-known name in the Mexico City rap scene, and frequently interacted with the audience, provoking those present to dance enthusiastically in response.

Many musicians felt the need to explain this lack of an audience. Several of my consultants perceived the low attendance at Other Campaign events as a consequence of the very predicament they were protesting: according to one pro-Zapatista musician, most Mexicans had to focus on day-to-day survival, and had no spare time to devote to activism.<sup>205</sup> While this may be partially true,<sup>206</sup> others welcomed the small-scale nature of

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<sup>204</sup> See Baker (2011a: 108-77) for an argument in favour of the subversive potential of the "body-centred" genre of reggaetón.

<sup>205</sup> Interview, Carlos Xeneke, 26-12-12.

<sup>206</sup> See the data on Mexico's poverty rate in a 2008 study by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, which revealed that one in four families in the country were unable to escape poverty with just one member of the family working (<http://www.oecd.org/els/soc/41527666.pdf> [accessed 11-05-

Other Campaign informative concerts. Indeed, some pro-Zapatista musicians in Mexico City were suspicious of massivity, in which they felt that the critical voice of Zapatismo could become quickly replaced by slogans without substance, and bodily, affective responses to music might take the place of attentive listening. A teenage member of Chalco rap group XCHM told me that he preferred pared-down, direct communication that allowed greater control over the results of communicative activities:

What do I prefer, to sing in front of a hundred or two hundred people, or to sing in front of two? Well, I've always responded "two", because at least two people will listen to you, and listen well [...] on the other hand, if you are in a multitude, all they'll do is hear. (Interview, 02-11-12)

While Kassabian problematizes the dichotomy between (conscious) listening and (affective) hearing (2013: xi-xxi; cf. Bodie and Crick, 2014), XCHM made such a distinction here in order to ascribe value to poorly-attended awareness-raising events, suggesting a preference for communicative efficacy over waste (Peters, 1999: 55-7). This dichotomy was repeated elsewhere by several of my consultants.<sup>207</sup>

Other musicians made sense of this activity in different ways. Commenting on the typically small audiences found at Other Campaign events, Medina stated: "if we worked in marketing, we'd say it didn't make sense". Yet organizing and participating in informative concerts, the singer felt, simply "had to be done", as something that "the struggle has taught us to do" – echoing Stoic notions of "duty" (Nussbaum, 1997: 6-9). Medina compared the dissemination that took place at these events with the act of giving flowers to a loved one for the first time:

It's like when you have a relationship, but you never buy flowers [for your partner]. But one day you turn up with flowers, and then your partner turns round, sees them, and says "what are the flowers for, why did you bring them?" "Well, because we haven't had flowers for a long time, because we're really ascetic". That's when it all starts to change. Plant the first flower. (Interview, 24-04-13)

This analogy – in which Medina, uncharacteristically, does appear to ascribe value to the sensual – depicts *difusión* as an act of gift-giving that transforms the life of the recipient over time, even though it might not initially be appreciated. In a similar vein, Arturo, a flautist who performed at an Other Campaign event in December 2012, reflected afterwards about the event's transitory audience: "perhaps they didn't stay for very long, but from what they read on the flyer [distributed during the event] and what they see in

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15]). The OECD has published elsewhere that Mexicans work the longest hours of any country among the 36 they study (<http://www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org/countries/mexico/> [accessed 11-05-15]).

<sup>207</sup> Interview, Crismo, 01-02-13; Interview, Luis Ángel Santiago, 29-10-12.

the plaza [...] we sowed a few seeds”.<sup>208</sup> In displacing the communicative act from its effects in both time and space, these horticultural analogies suggest that big changes can result from small beginnings, and provide a rationale for the act of singing to little or no apparent audience. Whereas XCHM sought to assume a degree of control by directing their music to small audiences who they knew would truly “listen”, Arturo and Medina performed precisely on the basis that they did not know what the effects of their performances could be.

Pro-Zapatista musicians performing at Other Campaign events, then, frequently deployed discourses that rationalized marginal, small-scale concerts, and sometimes even apportioned disdain to mass-scale ones. As “message” was given primacy, so pleasure and affect were ascribed little significance. In addition, some lent greater importance to the quality of the message communicated, and the efficacy of this interaction, than to the attraction of a large enough audience for this message to have a significant impact. In a similar vein to Bourdieu (1993), it could be said that these musicians were partaking in a self-perpetuating marginality, continuing an activity whose value derived from purity of principle rather than any practical hope for effecting social change. It is within this context that one may understand the tense coexistence of preferences for relationships of non-reciprocity and control in these settings; both formed part of a discourse of marginality that made congruent (and thus sustainable) musicians’ participation in events with generally low attendance. In turn, this discourse tended to strengthen the internal dynamics of the Other Campaign activist community in Mexico City, creating a purist activist subjectivity defined by concern for message over affect. The majority of Other Campaign musicians in this setting were amateur and had little economic dependency on their music; thus, the attendance at the events at which they performed was of little personal import. For a few others, however, such marginality posed a greater problem.

### **“¡Otra!” The music of Carlos Xeneke**

I met Carlos Xeneke at an Other Campaign informative concert outside Palacio de Bellas Artes in November 2012 during which, as described in Chapter Four, the power was cut during his set. Xeneke was a middle-aged singer-songwriter who wrote music combining political messages and humour within an eclectic variety of genres. A graduate of UNAM, he had been active as a professional performer since the 1980s, both in street

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<sup>208</sup> Interview, Arturo, 19-12-12.

theatre and in music, and had a close relationship with anarchist theatre collective CLETA (Centro Libre de Experimentación Teatral y Artística), which had a long history of supporting the EZLN. During this period, Xeneke had supported insurgent groups in El Salvador and Nicaragua, and began to sing protest songs at strikes and assemblies in 1987. Later, participating in CLETA in the 1990s, he had travelled extensively to Zapatista autonomous communities in Chiapas, developing a deep commitment to the Zapatista movement evinced by twenty years of activism. Throughout this time, he had mostly performed as a solo artist, although he had recently started to collaborate with Gabriel, a former member of CLETA and guitarist who tended to play his instrument with a rock sensibility. For most of this time, he had relied on musical performance as a source of regular income, supplementing it with temporary work when opportunities arose. In recent years, however, his income from music had decreased markedly.<sup>209</sup>

Correspondingly, Xeneke's life at this time appeared to be marked by a degree of economic hardship. He was, he told me, financially dependent on his wife, who worked for an NGO in the centre of Mexico City. Furthermore, the pair had recently had a baby, after which the singer (who earned the lesser income of the pair) took the role of house-husband. In turn, Xeneke's childcare responsibilities dramatically reduced the time available to the singer to perform. The singer was happy to talk to me about his economic situation, which often became apparent in other ways during both our interactions and his performances. Xeneke was a frequent performer at Other Campaign events, as well as at protests or events held by political movements not linked to Zapatismo. He hoped to gain an income through his music, by passing round a hat during or after performances, or by selling CDs of his albums, which he priced at fifteen pesos each [\$1.50USD] or thirty pesos for three [\$3USD] (a price which prompted a middle-aged woman sitting close to me at a concert to mark the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of CLETA to remark "very cheap, no?").<sup>210</sup> As he advertised his CDs and passed around the hat, he would foreground his economic lack of privilege, saying that he and his family had to pay rent for accommodation, and that it was a myth that musicians "lived from applause" (ironically, most of the amateur musicians performing at Other Campaign events *could* afford to do so). In addition, the singer complained to me that his income from CDs had declined after media piracy had become more common, precipitating a sharp decline in his musical income.<sup>211</sup> Xeneke's

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<sup>209</sup> Interview, Carlos Xeneke, 26-12-12; Interview, Carlos Xeneke, 24-06-15.

<sup>210</sup> It is worth noting that the former strategy was usually frowned upon at Other Campaign events, since pro-Zapatista activist groups tended to aim to direct donations to Zapatista communities or their own projects.

<sup>211</sup> See Cross (2011) for a discussion of the extensive market for pirated media materials in Mexico.

surroundings were not austere – for instance, there was a personal computer in his household, upon which he had worked out how to record his own songs; he was particularly proud that he had learned to use the Linux operating system from a former work colleague. Further, with his family he lived in a middle-income neighbourhood<sup>212</sup> in a house a ten-minute bus ride from a Mexico City metro station. Nevertheless, at this moment the effort that Xeneke was putting into his musical practice was clearly failing to bear the economic fruit the singer desired.

Faced with a mass media which would only “broadcast what the owner wants”, meaning that “people [would not] get informed”, Xeneke saw *difusión* as “the fundamental goal” of the Other Campaign’s political-cultural events.<sup>213</sup> Like many activists, he alluded to a “media siege” surrounding the Zapatista movement which made it necessary to occupy public spaces in order to inform the public “of what [was] happening in Zapatista territory”, and considered that if, as a result of Other Campaign activities, “two or three people become aware of the fact that [...] there is a lot of repression against the Zapatista movement [in Chiapas], that’s a success”.<sup>214</sup> By contrast, he was sceptical about the communicative potential of large-scale rock concerts. Although popular rock bands sometimes shouted Zapatista slogans during their performances, Xeneke felt that these bands would “do little activism [...] they go up on stage, and support Zapatismo, support Wirikuta,<sup>215</sup> support other movements in defence of the earth. But in those groups, one or two do the activism, the rest don’t”.<sup>216</sup> He also suggested that one of the limitations of large-scale concerts was the tendency for the crowd to get drunk, use drugs, and dance, rendering attentive listening impossible. By contrast, Xeneke felt that pro-Zapatista informative concerts had a concealed aim, “whether or not we’re aware of it”: to continue “generating the organization” around which these events revolved.<sup>217</sup> Here, then, true *difusión* could only occur when undertaken by smaller-scale, grassroots organisations, while masses of people were to be treated with suspicion.

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<sup>212</sup> Gilbert points out that in Mexico “the middle class is not big – about one in five Mexican households” (2007: 15). Indeed, so-called “middle-class neighbourhoods” are also sites of economic precarity for many.

<sup>213</sup> Interview, Carlos Xeneke, 26-12-12.

<sup>214</sup> Interview, Carlos Xeneke, 26-12-12.

<sup>215</sup> In May 2012, a rock concert was organized in Mexico City's Foro Sol in protest at the government's decision to grant mining concessions to Canadian mining companies on the sacred land of the Wixáritari or Huichol people, called 'Wirikuta', located in San Luis Potosí. Its lineup included Caifanes, Café Tacvba, Julieta Venegas (formerly of Tijuana No!), Ely Guerra, and Calle 13. (See <http://music.remezcla.com/2012/latin/wirikuta-fest-cafe-tacvba-caifanes-calle-13-bunbury-julieta-venegas-ely-guerra> and <http://mexico.cnn.com/entretenimiento/2012/05/27/el-wirikuta-fest-se-transforma-en-un-llamado-de-justicia-para-mexico> [accessed 29-08-14].)

<sup>216</sup> Interview, Carlos Xeneke, 26-12-12.

<sup>217</sup> Interview, Carlos Xeneke, 26-12-12.



The apparent paradox inherent in this formula – indiscriminate dissemination in a small-scale, even intimate setting – was a source of productive tension within Xeneke’s musical practice. The singer-songwriter had taken to imitating the presence of a large, enthusiastic and vocal audience during performances, upon occasion loudly applauding himself after songs, and shouting *otra* (“encore!”). Although this act of demonstrative ventriloquism was partly for humorous effect, and suited the self-deprecation that characterised the singer’s public persona, it also filled a communicative gap between performer and expected audience that often emerged from the reality that Other Campaign audiences were only unreliably present. Xeneke explained that he had begun to applaud himself after participating in “events that the friends [*compañeros*, or pro-Zapatista activists] have organised where the only audience are those that are organising, and those that are going to perform, nobody else”.<sup>218</sup> Thus, in the lack of realization of the conventional interaction between performer and audience, such a gap was performatively bridged by the former party.<sup>219</sup>

This act also pointed to something that marked Xeneke out from many other pro-Zapatista musicians – in his performances, the singer sought to cultivate a close, interactive relationship with the audience, often starting with a joke-strewn invitation for the audience to dance which was addressed:

To the entire sister Republic of Mexico, via satellite from Chilangotitlán,<sup>220</sup> the most populated and polluted city in the world, I send greetings to all of the Spanish speakers with these songs unknown worldwide [*canciones mundialmente desconocidas*], and if anyone wants to dance, it’s just a case of choosing your partner and going hell for leather [*¡a darle duro!*].<sup>221</sup>

There was a deliberate comical incongruity between the mass audience addressed in this introduction (which was meticulously planned and usually repeated word-for-word) and the small-scale reality of Other Campaign events. Before live audiences, Xeneke always presented his music as marginal, suggesting in this introduction that his songs would “never be heard on the radio, nor the television”, and hence describing his performances as “exclusive”. Equally, in constructing this figurative, absurd communicative distance, Xeneke also created an opportunity to eschew control over the audience and allow them to respond to his music with a degree of freedom. He also contributed to the creation of a relaxed performer-audience relationship with persistent self-deprecation, sometimes

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<sup>218</sup> Interview, Carlos Xeneke, 01-05-13.

<sup>219</sup> See Cooren (2010, 2012) and Cooren and Sandler (2014) for arguments in support of the importance of ventriloquism to human communication.

<sup>220</sup> A pun built upon *chilango* (slang for an inhabitant of Mexico City) and Tenochtitlán, a famous tourist zone and former Aztec city that is the site of several pyramids.

<sup>221</sup> A sexual double meaning is almost certainly intended here.

mocking his own baldness (which he dramatically revealed by lifting up his baseball cap), or pretending to receive a phone call from his psychologist and asking the audience to call for an encore. Xeneke also foregrounded his own poverty in his music; one of his songs, “Aquí Estoy” (Here I Am), consists of verses listing various trappings of middle-class life that the singer lacked (“I don’t have a cable for the television/I don’t have an American Express card/Nor a bank account, or a DVD”) that give way to a stoic chorus (“nonetheless, here I am, with myself, here I am”). Further, he would give audiences (those large enough) the opportunity to participate in performing some of his songs, most markedly with “Partidos y Candidatos” (Parties and Candidates), a rap song for which he sometimes asked the audience to collectively clap the beat and chant the chorus.

As the lyrics to “Aquí Estoy” suggest, Xeneke followed a prevailing model of pro-Zapatista protest musicianship in his clear, direct songwriting style. He was an extremely prolific lyricist, and tended to write words first; the singer told me that he would “fill many sheets of paper, and then I write and write, and then transfer what I wrote onto the computer, and from there I start to put the song together”.<sup>222</sup> Gabriel, his performing partner, described Xeneke’s creative process in a similar fashion:

He writes what we could call poetry, or the verses [...] and then starts to form it into a song. [...] in musical composition he also looks for the chords, and I sometimes say “you know what, let’s improve this here”, or I suggest a[nother] chord. (Interview, Gabriel, 01-05-13)

Xeneke’s music tended to reflect the privileging of lyrical messages or narratives in his creative process. His song “Consigna Rebelde” (Rebel Slogan), for instance, placed lyrics about Subcomandante Marcos and the Zapatistas into an interactive call-and-response structure: “The people are not *priista*<sup>223</sup> [*response, etc*]/The people are Zapatista/And if the people are Zapatista/Put my name down on the list”. A track accompanying this song on Xeneke’s album *Mundialmente Desconocido* (“Unknown Worldwide”) discussed the Mexican government’s attempt to unmask Subcomandante Marcos in 1995 over a jazz background, concluding that “thousands of people have taken to the streets to demonstrate our support for the uprising and the righteous demands of the indigenous Zapatistas”. Similarly, “Ellos” (Them), a song in the cumbia style, used a repetitive formula to depict the control of powerful interests over Mexican society (“they control business/they control the oil/they control the banks/they control the police/they control the soldiers”, “they control the mass media/they control fashion and education”). Meanwhile, in “¿Cual Independencia, Cual Revolución?” (What Independence, What Revolution?), a song

<sup>222</sup> Interview, Carlos Xeneke, 01-05-13.

<sup>223</sup> That is, supporters of the ruling Revolutionary Institutional Party (PRI).

underscored by a *son jarocho* rhythm, Xeneke denounces failures to live up to the promise of the revolutionary past: “The Crown no longer rules, and they ended slavery/But with so much poverty it’s pretty much the same/Oligarchs govern the Nation/Just as it has been, ever since the Revolution”. In each of these cases, the notion of music as medium for the transmission or dissemination of text or “message” could be clearly heard within Xeneke’s music.

Xeneke’s lyrical style was highly confrontational (Mattern, 1998: 30): he was more concerned with praising certain actors and condemning others than with presenting a reasoned, informed argument, or fomenting debate. During performances, he sometimes provoked objections among some of those present by taking the side of causes seen to be controversial. For instance, at a RCRS event in December 2012 to mark the Acteal massacre (see Chapter Four), Xeneke criticized the wave of public mourning that had followed the recent death of singer, songwriter and actress Jenni Rivera in a plane crash, suggesting that this response ought to be focused on other tragic events, and asking sarcastically: “the dead of Calderón[’s war on drugs]: does anyone mourn them?<sup>224</sup> Does anyone mourn the victims of Acteal?” Some objected strongly to his opinions; for instance, I noted that, when he played at the Casa del Lago in Chapultepec, one passer-by standing by the performing area started to shake his head vigorously and left, apparently offended by something Xeneke had sung. Equally, there was no denying that he knew how to entertain obliging audiences, and that many appreciated his participatory approach as well as his humorous and self-deprecatory onstage demeanour (which, it may be noted, contrasted markedly with the serious tone he tended to take during interviews). In particular, he characterized the style of humour in his songs as being very *chilango* – that is, it appealed to Mexico City residents, and typically did not “get the same response” elsewhere.<sup>225</sup>

Thus, within Xeneke’s musicianship, tensions emerged between indiscriminate, mass communication and sometimes divisive entertainment targeted at a specific audience. Although the singer’s compositional process privileged text over music, in his live concerts Xeneke deliberately set out to create an interactive experience, involving the audience in the act of performance. While his performance style may be understood as principally presentational, then, Xeneke also sought to incorporate some participatory features at certain moments during his concerts. Further, he tailored his act to particular audiences, thus circumscribing, at times, the potential reach of the messages he sought to

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<sup>224</sup> See Morton (2012).

<sup>225</sup> Interview, Carlos Xeneke, 01-05-13.

impart with his music. This facilitated the creation of a rapport with those present, helping the singer to gain financial contributions at the end of each performance. Therefore, Xeneke's practice of *difusión* intersected with a series of more immediate aims that were reflected in his live performance style. However, a small number of other musicians I got to know during my research in Mexico City were just as economically dependent as Carlos Xeneke on performing at Other Campaign events, but took a less participative approach. In the following section, I look at one such musician, a singer-songwriter called Luis Ángel Santiago.

### **Luis Ángel Santiago**

I first approached Luis Ángel Santiago after his performance at an event put on by RCRS outside Palacio de Bellas Artes to raise awareness of political prisoners in Mexico. On this occasion, we began to chat and I purchased four of the singer's CDs for one hundred pesos (roughly \$10USD at the time). During this conversation, Santiago invited me to attend his performance at an informative concert put on in Parque Revolución by Colectivo Azcapotzalco on the following day, before meeting with me for our first interview in the following week. The singer was in his early twenties and a regular performer at Other Campaign events; he frequently presented sets at events organized by both RCRS and Colectivo Azcapotzalco, although since he lived on the northern fringe of the city he had cultivated a closer relationship with the latter group. Santiago's background was an important part of his identity; the son of two indigenous Mixtec-speaking migrants from Oaxaca, he often wore shell earrings from the same state. He had been through a difficult period after his father, a policeman, was murdered by a criminal robbing a bus a few years earlier; but this moment had also given Santiago an opportunity to reflect on the "societal breakdown" that had taken place in Mexico.<sup>226</sup>

Like Xeneke, Santiago tended to perform solo, accompanying himself on the guitar, and refused categorization as a *trovador* since his music incorporated a number of styles including *son cubano*, reggae, rock and blues.<sup>227</sup> Since his teenage years, he had been a fan of ska and punk and had, two years prior to my research, joined a ska band which he soon left due to ideological disagreements, feeling that "we should make music for something [...] something that contributes to society".<sup>228</sup> Two weeks after leaving this

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<sup>226</sup> Interview, Luis Ángel Santiago, 29-10-12.

<sup>227</sup> Interview, Luis Ángel Santiago, 29-10-12.

<sup>228</sup> Interview, Luis Ángel Santiago, 29-10-12.

band, he decided to depart Mexico City and head to Cherán, a town in Michoacán where a group of indigenous Purepechá had created their own self-defence organizations, fighting against the police, organized crime and a logging company, which were allegedly working together (Gledhill, 2014: 515).<sup>229</sup> Santiago claimed that this visit was a catalyst for change in both his worldview and musical practice, leading him to begin presenting solo concerts with politically themed music.

Although I never visited his home, Santiago told me that he lived in a deprived, marginal area in which there was nothing to do (“there’s no culture, there’s no sports”).<sup>230</sup> As with Xeneke, Santiago sought to derive a means of subsistence from his musical activities, principally through the sale of CDs, but he was struggling financially during my research. At times, this made it difficult to arrange interviews (of which we conducted three), since the singer could not afford the cost of travel even in Mexico City, where any single metro journey cost just three pesos (about \$0.30USD). At a Colectivo Azcapotzalco event in January 2013, Santiago displayed his CDs on the table where the collective placed the merchandise it wished to sell, but told me that he had sold nothing throughout the day. Indeed, although Santiago had recorded six albums at the time of research, some packaged in a far more professional fashion than those of Xeneke (thus representing a significant investment of time and capital), at no point did I witness any purchase of the singer’s CDs.

In the first interview I conducted with him, Santiago articulated a well-defined approach to musicianship, ascribing value to his songs according to the messages and stories they contained, and sidelining the role of affect. Citing instances upon which spectators had approached him after performances to congratulate him before casually revealing that they had failed to comprehend the serious themes addressed in his music, he suggested that in Mexico there was “a real problem [that] most people just hear and don’t listen”.<sup>231</sup> Santiago told me that he aimed for his music to “raise awareness” in his listener, ultimately stimulating audiences to reflect on their surroundings and find things out on their own account later.<sup>232</sup> Further, the singer made a sharp distinction between music played in order to “entertain” or “pass the time” and his own, which was intended for those willing to listen attentively; he even criticised Other Campaign organizers for

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<sup>229</sup> See <http://www.elenemigocomun.net/2013/01/self-determination-defense-cheran/> (accessed 22-06-15).

<sup>230</sup> Interview, Luis Ángel Santiago, 29-10-12.

<sup>231</sup> Interview, Luis Ángel Santiago, 29-10-12.

<sup>232</sup> Interview, Luis Ángel Santiago, 29-10-12. This resembles Freire’s notion of “conscientization” (1970), a term to which pro-Zapatista activists often made reference.

allowing too many musicians fitting into the former category to perform.<sup>233</sup> Like Crismo at the start of this chapter, Santiago connected “listening” to physical passivity, and linked “hearing” to music’s affective appeal:

I hear a song, it’s energetic, I already like it. And I buy a CD because I like it, it’s energetic. But then I don’t listen to it, I don’t pay attention to the lyrics, and there are others that contain just one verse and repeat it over and over, but because it’s got a catchy rhythm, they sell a ton of CDs.  
(Interview, Luis Ángel Santiago, 29-10-12)

Santiago felt that his own music deserved to be listened to, something that suggested less physical interaction with audiences. Nonetheless, his recognition of the commercial appeal of “catchy” music implied that Santiago understood, at this point, that his purist practice was likely to draw the singer into an increasingly marginal economic situation.

The singer’s performances, then, tended to reflect the seriousness he understood to pertain to the act of “spreading the word”. While onstage, Santiago tended to engage with his audiences far less than Xeneke. Instead, between songs he often advertised his CDs, asking those present to support the “independent music” that he represented. He also gave many short talks attempting to draw the attention of those present to what he considered new political realities, such as the following farewell address outside Palacio de Bellas Artes in October 2012:

All the peoples that struggle for a better world are being persecuted [...] this song is for them, for the political prisoners, because we’re incomplete without them. And to all the people passing by, we’re inviting you to come and inform yourself [...] draw up to these alternative spaces where we try and raise awareness.

Further, Santiago made only minimal attempts to involve the audience in his performances, and emphasised the seriousness of his chosen subject matter by closing his eyes and frowning, suggesting a sense of gravitas and importance. The singer often opened his sets with a song entitled “La Buena Canción” (Good Song) containing a strong critique of the fantastical love songs heard on the radio (“My girlfriend left me/My boyfriend hurt me”; “many fantasy stories/ways to sweep away the reality”), which staked a converse claim for his own music as journalistic, faithful representation of the gritty reality of contemporary Mexican life:

No digo que esté mal	I’m not saying it’s wrong
Pero hay más de que hablar	But there are better things to talk about
Gente en la calle	People on the street
Haciendo malabares	Juggling <sup>234</sup>

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<sup>233</sup> Interview, Luis Ángel Santiago, 29-10-12.

<sup>234</sup> Or, in other words, doing street entertainment as a form of begging.

Niños muriendo por inanición                      Children dying of starvation  
 Y no hay muchos que lo canten                      And not many sing about it  
 (Luis Ángel Santiago, “La Buena Canción”)

Here, Santiago depicts the music experienced through mass media as a distraction from a harsh reality that he then takes on the responsibility of communicating. Equally, in foregrounding the banality of love songs and the importance of using music to recount authentic experience, Santiago implicitly appealed to the audience to take his music seriously and listen carefully to its lyrics.

As with Carlos Xeneke, this privileging of the textual and rhetorical was evident in Santiago’s composition process. Santiago’s lyrics were mostly extremely direct, eschewing the poetic language used by *nueva trova* singers such as Silvio Rodríguez and Amaury Pérez:

I try to be more simple and clear in what I say, so that what I say may be understood. I do use metaphors and all that, but [my aim is] that it might be understood from a little girl up to the most intellectual of people – that a labourer, a miner, a fisherman, an indigenous person, whoever it might be, would be able to listen. (Interview, Luis Ángel Santiago, 29-10-12)

Not only did Santiago take great care to produce an intelligible message, but many of his songs were based on poetry with pro-Zapatista or revolutionary themes, with the music composed around already-written lyrics. For instance, one was an up-tempo “musicalization” of Mario Benedetti’s poem “Te Quiero” (containing the line: “I love you because your mouth/knows how to shout ‘rebellion’”). Two of his songs, “Tshinarini Despertar” (Tshinarini Wake Up) and “Clamor de los Niños Purepechá” (Cry of the Purepechá Children) narrated Santiago’s experiences in Cherán, a town in the state of Michoacán in which a group of Other Campaign-affiliated indigenous Purepechá inhabitants had taken up arms to defend their sacred territory.<sup>235</sup> Whereas the mainstream media portrayed the indigenous community in Cherán as “troublemakers” and “violent types”, with these songs Santiago aimed to convey the ignored reality that “they are fighting for their forests”.<sup>236</sup> He wrote “Clamor de los Niños Purepechá” about the psychological effects of the conflict on these children (“they say that here children died [...] because they heard fireworks and it gave them panic attacks<sup>237</sup> [...] the children were no longer going out onto the streets”<sup>238</sup>). In “Tshinarini Despertar”, meanwhile, Santiago described the conflict over this land from the perspective of its indigenous protagonists,

<sup>235</sup> See <http://michoacancheran.blogspot.co.uk/> (accessed 30-08-14).

<sup>236</sup> Interview, Luis Ángel Santiago, 29-10-12.

<sup>237</sup> Supposedly, fireworks were used as a warning signal in this context.

<sup>238</sup> Interview, Luis Ángel Santiago, 29-10-12.

revealing that “twenty thousand hectares have been felled” of sacred land, and alleging that people were “tortured, kidnapped [and] assassinated” by the “heartless dogs” of the state:

Arrugas en el rostro	The wrinkles on their faces
Hablan de rabia y dignidad	Speak of rage and dignity
Los niños con letreros	The children holding signs
“Quiero vivir en paz”	“I want to live in peace”

(Luis Ángel Santiago, “Tshinarini Despertar”)

The intimacy of this description resulted from Santiago’s visit to Cherán, where he had a series of vivid experiences and spoke to many people, writing his songs on this basis. In a sense, there was something ethnographic about the singer’s musical practice, with songs replacing prose as his chosen medium of communication.

Santiago’s performances at this time, then, contrasted sharply with those of Xeneke. While both sought to use their music to disseminate pro-Zapatista messages, the former utilized few of the participatory techniques employed by the latter, instead performing in such a way as to foreground the importance of the messages included in his songs. This singer, then, cultivated a presentational onstage dynamic that created an implicit hierarchy – audiences were to sit and listen, acting as physically passive “receivers” of text, suspended in sound, that aimed to affect their worldview. Nonetheless, if this portrayal of Santiago’s performances may appear somewhat critical, this is partially a result of a dramatic crisis of confidence that the singer had during the time of research that revealed the vulnerability of the position of onstage authority that he tended to assume. In an interview in April 2013, Santiago told me that he had recently gone out drinking with a close friend who had seen him perform and felt that the singer’s concerts were too “serious”, reflecting his offstage character very little (“Luis, you’re full of joy [...] why do you perform like that?”).<sup>239</sup> This comment led the singer to reflect on his approach to performance and the culture at Other Campaign events, saying that “those of us who play this type of music for awareness and struggle soon become very serious onstage”.<sup>240</sup> Santiago told me that “before [my performances] almost seemed like Mass”, and that he had since committed himself to playing in a more joyful manner, “to make it seem more agreeable in the moment [...] that’s one way to reach people too, right?”<sup>241</sup>

<sup>239</sup> Interview, Luis Ángel Santiago, 24-04-13.

<sup>240</sup> Interview, Luis Ángel Santiago, 24-04-13.

<sup>241</sup> Interview, Luis Ángel Santiago, 24-04-13.



The singer also became dissatisfied with the audiences that Other Campaign events tended to reach. In a later interview, in July 2013, Santiago complained to me that:

We talk about the fact that we should create awareness and all that, but we don't move beyond those spaces in which there's already awareness. Why not move to other places where, plain and simple, they aren't expecting this type of music, and suddenly they [hear] these ideas, and you start to go, really, create the seed [*semillita*]? (Interview, 22-07-13)

Similar kinds of discontent have often been evinced among activist musicians in many different contexts; for instance, among Cuban rappers afflicted by conflicting anxieties concerning the moral status of commercialism and the limitations of “preaching to the choir” (Baker, 2011: 338-45). In response to these tensions, the singer had decided to diversify his musical activity. First, he began to perform alone in a greater variety of public spaces – by taco stands, in “the street” and on public transport – in order to reach a wider audience.<sup>242</sup> Second – and most significant – he had started to perform less frequently at Other Campaign events, having recently found work as a (non-singing) *bajista* in a *norteño* ensemble which made much of its money performing at (weekend) parties. Santiago told me that although this ensemble played music whose lyrical content was entirely apolitical, as a member of the band he had started to talk about political issues with two of its musicians who “have really progressive ideas”. He claimed that in conversing with one of these musicians, he had “opened their worldview a bit”, thus discovering a more intimate, personal means of using musical practice to effect political change.<sup>243</sup>

During this time, then, Santiago had conducted a revealing volte-face, looking to develop a mode of performance that was less “serious” and more “joyful”. In doing so, although he mostly maintained the presentational dynamics that he had previously cultivated, the singer sought to deal with the tensions he had encountered in this mode of performance by embracing the idea of audience pleasure as a positive contribution to a process of awareness-raising. Although I did not see Santiago perform in the wake of his epiphany, in this section I have highlighted ways that the concept of hierarchical transmission of text was embedded in the singer's creative process. It seemed possible that his change of heart would prove productive, leading to a new practice of creativity oriented around a more affective communicative strategy (cf. Turino, 2009: 102).

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<sup>242</sup> For ethnographic research concerning the phenomenon of musicians that perform on buses in Mexico, see Kirschlager (2012).

<sup>243</sup> Interview, Luis Ángel Santiago, 22-07-13.

## Conclusion

Santiago's epiphany took place at the end of my time in Mexico City in 2013, making it difficult to research any further. However, his experience was indicative of a number of important tensions within Other Campaign performance culture. The first was between presentational and participatory modes of performance (cf. Turino, 2009); between an imperative to transmit information in a unidirectional, hierarchical flow and a desire to entertain and include those present. The second involved the extent to which musicians could exert control over their audiences – hailing them as passive “listening” subjects – or whether they instead broke down the performer-spectator hierarchy, perhaps gaining a more subtle, implicit form of influence. The third, with Bourdieu, was between musicians who could afford to perform music in non-reciprocal fashion and those who could not. Many of the amateur musicians I spoke to understood their musical performances as the expression of deeply-held political beliefs for which they received little reward (that is, a form of altruism), and they had helped to establish a dominant discourse which excluded affect while emphasising the unidirectional, non-participatory transmission of a message. This situation exposes a significant limitation of Other Campaign events: they were not organized to support a protest musicianship that was sustainable (in the broadest sense of the term). That is, purism was a privilege; pro-Zapatista protest musicians seeking to make a living could hardly expect to do so by ignoring affect and failing to create audience rapport.

The marginality which afflicted pro-Zapatista musical activism, then, was both a problem and a solution: within the discourse and praxis of these actors, it produced some paradoxes and solved others. On the one hand, the “serious”, unidirectional mode of musical performance that came to be associated with “spreading the word”, in fact, appeared to create significant obstacles for the achievement of this goal. On the other, in the activist “field”, it created something akin to Bourdieu's “symbolic capital” (1993: 54, 67): a form of prestige specific to a particular social context. In turn, this symbolic capital can be seen to have contributed to the maintenance and intensification of a pro-Zapatista activist identity. In other words, Other Campaign events had high in-group value because they allowed pro-Zapatista actors to perform activist identity to one another, thus helping to reproduce it and maintain it in time.

In the 1500s, when the Catholic Church convened the Council of Trent, many sought to circumscribe musical composition, arguing that music ought to be used as a

means of indoctrinating the hearer with the faith through comprehensible messages; yet others, however, lent value to music's attractive properties (Monson, 2002). Similar tensions appeared within Other Campaign protest musicianship. Although it formed part of a broad-based pro-Zapatista strategy being implemented through a variety of media in numerous places, the objective of Other Campaign musicians and activists in Mexico City to "spread the word" or "raise awareness" by disseminating messages created very practical problems for protest musicians. Of course, protest musicianship always defines itself as a marginal endeavour in one way or another, be it in pro-Zapatista singer-songwriters' searing and fundamental critiques of the Mexican state or Cuban rappers' "constructive criticism" of Cuba's government (Baker, 2005). Pro-Zapatista musicians' consciously marginal performances, which were predicated on the shared notion that their message was too radical to be included in the news coverage of the dominant "mass media", may also be understood as rituals that circumscribed and strengthened the Other Campaign activist community. Nonetheless, the seriousness with which many pro-Zapatista musicians approached their music appeared to compound this marginality in a way that also disempowered these actors in an economic sense. In this chapter, Carlos Xeneke's incorporation of participation within his performance, and Santiago's apparent rejection of his former presentational style, highlighted in different ways the boundaries and limitations of the activist community in which the pair operated.

## CHAPTER SIX

### PRODUCING AN “OTHER NATION”: *AUTOGESTIÓN*, ZAPATISMO, AND INTIMATE NATIONALISM IN HOME STUDIO MUSIC-MAKING IN MEXICO CITY

In April 2013 I went to Chalco, to the south-east of the Mexico City metropolis, to spend a weekend with members of Re Crew, a rap group I had seen perform at a number of Other Campaign events. Prior to this visit, I had been intrigued by the band’s use of a conch shell as part of a ritual during these live concerts. In an interview during this weekend, band member Danybox explained this ritual as follows:

We want to transmit [...] to the young people [*chavos*] [a message] that they should maintain our culture, and that these traditions shouldn’t be lost. In fact, in some songs we put in phrases in Nahuatl [...] So we want to transmit [a message] that our roots should not be lost. (Interview, 11-12-12)

This weekend trip to visit Re Crew in Chalco was a disorienting mixture of old and new, diverse cultural tropes variously associated with the “traditional”, “modern” and “postmodern”.<sup>244</sup> On the evening of the day I arrived, we visited a *pulquería* (a bar serving *pulque*, a viscous alcoholic drink made of the maguey plant and consumed locally for millennia) where other clients were singing popular songs played on a jukebox; at this venue, we discussed a rap that Kiper, a member of the band, was writing about illegal graffiti; on the drive home, we sang along to the band’s music, which they played on the sound system of their car; after this journey, another member of Re Crew, Higer, showed me a series of pictures on his phone of a woman upon whose naked body he had spray-painted a piece of body art; then, one member of the band told me of his intention to attend a trip to excavate pre-Hispanic archaeological relics on a nearby volcano. These incidents placed into relief Danybox’s intriguing statement above, which resembles a hybrid mixture of references to ancient “roots” (*raíces*) and instruments on the one hand,

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<sup>244</sup> See Manuel (1995) and Walcott (1999) for arguments connecting hip-hop musical practice with postmodernism.

and on the other, a logic of communicative “transmission” which some scholars strongly identify with the modern era in Europe and the United States (Carey, 2009). Indeed, to compound the perplexity, Danybox had made this comment during an interview conducted in the band’s digital home studio in Chalco, in which another band member, Higer, subsequently blamed “technology” for the loss of Mexico’s cultural “roots”.<sup>245</sup>

Such ambivalent discourses concerning the relationship between technology and tradition were frequently invoked among pro-Zapatista activist musicians in Mexico City. Among many of these musicians, the objective of “spreading the Zapatista word” came to coexist with goals of “preserving”, “transmitting”, or “keeping alive” cultural traditions or “roots” through recording practices centred on the digital home studio. These groups understood the Zapatista rebels as “inheritors” of the Mexican nation, and constructed Zapatismo as a movement seeking to preserve, or keep alive, pre-Hispanic indigenous traditions (EZLN, 1994; 2013: 39). Further, digital home studio practice brought together occasionally conflicting discourses of authenticity and individuality that intersected with a notion of *autogestión* which my consultants linked to the Zapatista ideal of autonomy.

In this chapter, I explore the connections and tensions between these discourses that emerged during the course of my research in Mexico City, organizing my argument as follows. First, I will ground this chapter in the existing literature on the digital home studio, particularly that which focuses on confluences and conflicts between notions of tradition, authenticity, individuality and community that arise in the use of this technology of communication. Second, I will relate these ideas to the creation of Mexican musical “tradition” in the twentieth century, sketching a brief history that begins in the post-revolutionary period and ends with the contemporary Zapatista movement in the 1990s. Finally, I will locate the musical practice of a number of pro-Zapatista bands in Mexico City digital home studios in this context, highlighting ways that the perceived “authenticity” facilitated by technological and social change supported these groups’ intersecting goals of dissemination of pro-Zapatista messages through music, as well as the “preservation” of music understood to represent “national tradition”.

### **Nation, tradition and technology in Mexico**

It has been recognized in recent ethnographic studies by Stobart (2011), Baker (2011b), Neuenfeldt (2007) and Crowdy (2007) that the digital home studio has become

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<sup>245</sup> Interview, Re Crew, 11-12-12.

increasingly important for contemporary music-making practices across the world. One of the earliest attempts to understand the significance of the digital home studio was made by Pierre Théberge, who viewed it as part of a broader set of emergent socio-cultural arrangements and values (or “social technology”) where “the privacy of domestic space becomes the ideal site of musical expression and inspiration” (1997: 217-8). Other scholars have highlighted ways that such “privacy” may interact with and interrupt “non-private” social values, ideas, and activities. Stobart (2011) examines the home production of music videos by Gregorio Mamani, an indigenous migrant to Sucre, Bolivia. In this setting, digital home studio practice was used as a means of celebrating indigenous cultural heritage, but the use of this technology also started to accompany an increased emphasis of the “individual” over the “communal” source of creativity (2011: 214-16). Indeed, it is appropriate to ask how shared social concepts may change in contexts marked by the increasing dominance of such apparently private, intimate social technologies. In what ways are “imagined communities” perpetuated and created not by “print capitalism” (Anderson, 1991), but through the digital home studio?

In *Modernity at Large*, Arjun Appadurai suggests that “electronic capitalism” might be seen as the contemporary subjectivity-creating version of Anderson’s “print capitalism”, creating an environment in which a “postnational political order” might develop (1996: 8, 22). Appadurai’s position has gained implicit support from commentators taking the position that nationalism and technology-driven globalization are antithetical, and that the rise of the latter will inevitably cause the demise of the former (Barber, 1992; Rothkopf, 1997; also cf. Hilbert, 1997: 120; Pieterse, 1994; Taylor, 2012: 180). Recent scholarship on nationalism, meanwhile, emphasises the ways that (imagined) nations have become transnational brands in a fragmented, post-Westphalian world (Dinnie 2010). There is merit, then, in approaches that seek to locate the nation, as imagined community, in spaces beyond the “public sphere” as typically defined (cf. Fraser, 1990; Milioni, 2009). Indeed, many scholars have concluded that “nations can be constructed and strengthened through transnational flows and the technologies of globalization” (Bernal, 2004: 3; cf. Saunders, 2011). Correspondingly, in recent years ethnomusicologists have paid increasing attention to the ways in which musical practice, often facilitated by new media technologies, can perpetuate imagined national communities in the context of diaspora (Zheng, 2010; Jung, 2014).

These debates are highly relevant to the history of Mexican nationalism in the twentieth century. As Alonso Bolaños (2008), Madrid (2010), Velázquez and Vaughan

(2006) and Hellier-Tinoco (2011) demonstrate, many of what are now understood as Mexican musical “national traditions” are actually the result of conscious projects of state construction (or “invention” [Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983]), especially during the decades after the Mexican Revolution (1910-20). In the wake of the Revolution, the state began to (re)construct an essentialist socio-cultural Mexican identity from practices of art, music and dance (Velázquez and Vaughan, 2006: 100-1). In this milieu, conflicting opinions emerged about how to “forge the nation” (Gamio, 1982): while some such as José Vasconcelos, Secretary of Education between 1921 and 1924, advocated the assimilation of indigenous musical practices into a homogenous national *mestizo* culture, others ascribed “indigenous” and “popular” culture inherent value within a more plural Mexican nation. In the field of music, these attitudes aligned with distinct courses of action: for instance, while some elite musicians in the postrevolutionary period believed that Mexican vernacular musical traditions ought to be “dignified” through orchestral arrangement according to the Western classical tradition, others advocated systematic fieldwork and recording, preserving “‘pure’ indigenous music” whose “essence”, it was hoped, could form a base from which a new national style could be gradually elaborated (Madrid, 2006: 694).

Such divergent perspectives influenced official state policy in different ways during the post-revolutionary period (Vaughan and Lewis, 2006). On the evening programmes of state-funded radio stations such as XFX,<sup>246</sup> popular musics that had been “reorganized”, “cleaned up”, and assimilated into a “bourgeois musical format” were mixed together with European art music, placing Mexican nationalist culture on the same pedestal as the high-status European nationalist cultural model that many Mexican nation-builders sought to emulate (Hayes, 2000: 50, 56). These radio projects

drew on the country’s regional musical genres – from huapangos to jarabes to danzas – to create a “panorama” of regional musical traditions. This musical panorama positioned regional songs as inspiring examples of a larger body of Mexican national music. (Hayes, 2000: 52-3)

This regionalist cultural nationalism, incorporating traditions associated with both indigenous and *mestizo* culture, was given further support in 1952 when the government-funded National Institute for the Fine Arts (INBA) created the Ballet Folklórico, an institutional performance group devoted to staging the “essence” of the Mexican nation, whose repertoire “ranged from indigenous dance rituals to revolutionary corridos and *bailes típicos* from the nation’s diverse regions” (Zolov, 2001: 241-2).

Other government institutions promoted “heritage” in different ways. In 1948, the

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<sup>246</sup> This is not an acronym.

government created the National Indigenist Institute (INI), an institution whose goal was to “preserve” indigenous musical practices, and which would go on to sponsor recording projects in rural communities across Mexico (Alonso Bolaños, 2008: 63-7). These practices were defined according to restrictive, essentialized notions of indigeneity that failed to take indigenous people’s musical tastes into account. In 1986, a Taller de Programación Musical (Music Programming Workshop), which brought together a number of INI-sponsored radio stations involved in recording and disseminating “indigenous music”, produced a statement defining this music as “the living expression of the indigenous person through instruments of pre-Hispanic origin”, “part of the culture of the ethnic group” and “a sonic expression developed through spiritual, cultural, and social processes”. It declared that indigenous music was “of a social, ritual, and ceremonial character”, identifiable by “the rhythm they use to play their music” and “well-defined genres, depending on the place” (Alonso Bolaños, 2008: 66). At the end of the twentieth century, the INI funded the creation of a number of phonographic series, such as a series of cassette tapes of “indigenous music” released under the name *Sondeos del México profundo* (“sounds from deep Mexico”) (63, 67). As indicated by this name, these projects continued to present a romanticized, pre-modern version of indigeneity.

Towards the end of the twentieth century, however, the government-led cultural nationalist project was dramatically altered. In the wake of Mexico’s default on its foreign debt repayment in 1981, the ruling PRI (Revolutionary Institutional Party) pursued neoliberal policies of so-called “structural adjustment” and the government “divested itself of social and cultural spending” (Vaughan, 2001: 484). As it cut down on state-funded cultural nationalist programmes, the PRI of the 1980s and 1990s also sought to structure nationalism differently. President Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988-94), in particular, aimed to weaken the historic ties between state and nation, placing the nation in the private realm (O’Toole, 2003: 277-8). Instead of a conscious project of state construction, Salinas de Gortari narrated the nation as a “set of core, immemorial principles that were ahistorical and permanent”, and state-sponsored nationalism became oriented around the goal of “selling” Mexico to prospective foreign investors and tourists (276-7). This orientation towards tourism reinforced the regionalist impulse of Mexican cultural nationalism; Hellier-Tinoco points out that “[f]or agendas of Mexican nationalism and tourism, essentialization involved [...] the reduction and neat classification of the country into regions each with its own typical food, dance, music, clothes, and other cultural practices that were regarded as representative” (2011: 45).



Thus, at the time of writing, *ballet folclórico* is performed at educational institutions and tourist destinations across Mexico. Most states in the country are officially represented by at least one piece of music: Chiapas by the marimba piece “Las Chiapanecas”, Veracruz by the *son* “La Bruja”, Jalisco by the mariachi piece *jarabe tapatío* and Sinaloa by the banda song “El Toro Mambo”.

The divorce between nation and state that Salinas attempted to effect during his six-year presidency (1988-94) was reinforced by the Zapatista uprising of January 1994. The EZLN entered the fray as a staunchly nationalist organization which, at least at the very beginning, sought to bring down the state (Berghe and Maddens, 2004; Long, 1999). The EZLN’s First Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle was addressed “[t]o the people in Mexico”, and asserted that “[w]e are the inheritors of the true builders of our nation” (Subcomandante Marcos, 2001: 13-16). It declared that the country was in the grip of “a clique of traitors” that formed part of a “seventy-year dictatorship” which the EZLN equated to opponents of independence in the nineteenth century and the Europhile dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz (13). Zapatista nationalist rhetoric, which often referred to the Mexican “nation” by the word *Patria* (fatherland), can also be found in the music produced by Zapatista bands. Thus, “Himno Zapatista” contains the line “our *Patria* shouts out and needs the efforts of the Zapatistas”; another Zapatista song, “Nuestra Patria No Se Vende” (Our Fatherland Is Not For Sale), states that:

Nuestra Patria no se vende	Our <i>Patria</i> is not for sale
Nos vale el mundo entero	It is worth the world to us
Pero los malos gobiernos	But the bad governments
Lo venden al extranjero	Sell it to foreigners
Vendepatrias que son	Traitors that they are
Nos dejan en el olvido	They leave us to be forgotten

(“Nuestra Patria No Se Vende”, author unknown)

Mirroring the reconfiguration of nationalism that took place during the Salinas administration, then, the rhetoric of the EZLN painted “nation” as adhering to “the people” rather than the state (Berghe and Maddens, 2004: 132-7; cf. Gilbreth and Otero, 2001: 19-20; Gallaher and Froehling, 2002). Furthermore, the EZLN’s later non-violent search for “autonomy” became linked to a multiple notion of Mexican nationhood, as Zapatista organizations sought to maintain the vitality of indigenous languages and perceived “cultural traditions”. In education, this implied “rescuing” oral traditions remembered by Zapatista elders (Baronnet and Breña, 2008: 117), but it also meant the

reconstruction of lost cultural practices. In a recent interview, a Zapatista educator from eastern Chiapas expresses anxiety about the disappearance of their “regional music” performed on instruments such as the violin, marimba, drum (*tambor*) and reed flute (*carrizo*), which was being superseded at dances by keyboard music (EZLN, 2013: 15).

The “traditions” to which Re Crew and a number of pro-Zapatista musicians with whom I conducted field research made continuous reference both in interviews and music, therefore, had a more recent history than they tended to recognize. These groups were operating at a specific historical moment during which the pillars of postrevolutionary cultural nationalism had been economically and ideologically undermined as neoliberal policies came into effect. At this juncture, the public status of the “nation” was called into question not only by Salinas de Gortari, but by the EZLN. The conscious uncoupling of “nation” and “state” that both actors promoted in the late twentieth century privileged a private, small-scale, and highly personal version of the Mexican nation which it was not the role of government to protect. Furthermore, during the 1990s and 2000s the Mexican government’s accession to neoliberal international trade agreements such as NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) and GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade) brought down the prices of the equipment used in digital home studios such as personal computers (Cross, 2011: 308). This was precisely the media technology associated in some scholarly literature with processes of “individualization” and the privileging of the private realm (Théberge, 1997: 216-20; Bennett and Segerberg, 2013: 1). During this period, then, conflicting tendencies emerged concerning the relationships between “nation”, “state”, “technology” and “tradition”.

The activities of the musicians with whom I conducted research in Mexico City must be understood within this broader context. As I will show in the remainder of this chapter, their efforts to use music to transmit, broadcast or disseminate information about the Zapatista movement and other causes relating to it was often connected to another practice of transmission concerning nation, heritage and tradition. In turn, these practices were reliant upon the creation and use of digital home studios – something which represented, for many of these musicians, an example of the “autonomy” practised by the Zapatistas. In the following section, I will give a broad introduction to four pro-Zapatista bands whose discourses and musical practices exemplify these dynamics, before looking in detail at two, paying attention to the ways that notions of technology, tradition and autonomy intersected in musical practices of “spreading the word”.

### **Tradition and *autogestión* in the city**

Between October 2012 and July 2013, I conducted research with four Mexico City-based pro-Zapatista bands active in recording new music, some working in digital home studios (*estudios caseros*) and others utilizing more professional channels. I became acquainted with these musicians as they participated in the Other Campaign, performing at live events and contributing to the compilation album *Rola la lucha zapatista* (see Chapter Seven). Most lived in run-down *barrios* on the outskirts of the Mexico City metropolitan area in which crime and poverty were rife, such as Iztapalapa, Ecatepec and Chalco. I conducted in-depth ethnographic research with each of these bands, although since none was fully professional, this research was often fragmented, taking place at weekends and on public holidays. None had enjoyed significant economic success, and most could not afford to record in professional studios.

Of these four bands, Ecatepec-based ska band Cienpies was the only one to record in a professional studio during my research, a goal for which the band's members had saved up for years. This band, made up of six musicians in their late twenties and early thirties who had started to perform during the 2000s, harboured nostalgia for the pro-Zapatista rock scene that they followed as adolescents during the 1990s. Although they were better-established than many other musicians with whom I conducted research (having their own manager and frequent performing opportunities outside the Other Campaign), Cienpies defined themselves as outsiders within the contemporary ska scene which, they said, was dominated by bands singing apolitical songs about love and heartbreak to “apathetic” audiences that were “only interested in Facebook and video games”.<sup>247</sup> Cienpies claimed to be an “independent band” unwilling to enter into deals with commercial labels, suggesting that since protest songs were too “inconvenient for the system” to be promoted by a major label, such a move would inevitably compromise their political edge.<sup>248</sup> Correspondingly, some of the band's members were fiercely critical of bands whose music avoided political themes. For instance, during a conversation at one concert I attended in November 2012, one Cienpies singer, Akter, labelled the popular headline ska act that performed after them “clowns”, and suggested to me that their music had less value because it lacked a political message.

Like the majority of pro-Zapatista musicians I spoke to, Cienpies held a vision of social change that emphasised the importance of the communication of a political

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<sup>247</sup> Interview, Cienpies, 19-11-12.

<sup>248</sup> Interview, Cienpies, 02-05-13.

“message” as a means of individual transformation. In interviews, the band also linked their practice to the Zapatista project of autonomy which, in turn, they equated with the notion of *autogestión*, telling me that they were “[i]ndependent. We pay for everything. All *autogestivo*, like the Zapatistas”.<sup>249</sup> Although no direct translation for the term *autogestión* exists in English, it may be rendered as “self-management” or “grassroots control” (see Lefebvre, 2009: 14). Lefebvre defines *autogestión*<sup>250</sup> as a “practice that may be opposed to the omnipotence of the State”, which implies ongoing social struggle (2009: 134). He states that:

Each time a social group [...] refuses to accept passively its conditions of existence, of life, or of survival, each time such a group forces itself not only to understand but to master its own conditions of existence, *autogestión* is occurring [...] This definition also includes all aspects of social life; it implies the strengthening of all associative ties, that is to say, of civil society. (Lefebvre, 2009: 135)

In broader perspective, however, this version of *autogestión* is more ambivalent than Lefebvre recognizes, since it bears notable affinities with pro-neoliberal discourses proclaiming the value of private enterprise. Not only can Mexico’s elites be seen to have encouraged private organization beyond the state since the late 1980s, but *autogestión* may also be viewed as a response to the youth disenfranchisement engendered by neoliberal economic policies. For instance, García Canclini (2011: 14) and Woods et al. (2011: 110) argue that *autogestión* has become a means for Mexican youth to participate in a creative economy in a context of instability and high unemployment in which regular, stable work patterns have become far less frequent. Nonetheless, García Canclini and Urteaga conclude, the failure of this approach may be evinced by the corresponding “extensive exclusion of the majority and the condemnation of creatives to intermittency and precarity” (2011: 139).

In Mexico City, pro-Zapatista musicians often made reference to *autogestión*, although this term could refer to a wide variety of musical practices and recording arrangements; Cienpies’ “independent” arrangements involved renting a professional studio, while other groups, like Re Crew and Iztapalapa-based band The Páramos, had created digital home studios which they, too, considered to be examples of *autogestión*. What seemed to connect these apparently disparate practices was the idea of independent music-making as a means of protecting freedom of expression, regarding both dangerous or controversial political messages and past musical practices. This freedom was

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<sup>249</sup> Interview, Cienpies, 19-11-12.

<sup>250</sup> Lefebvre was, of course, originally writing in French, which is the reason that the *o* carries no accent here.

considered to be under threat not only by the state but by commercial censorship, something to which my consultants frequently alluded.<sup>251</sup>

Furthermore, many of these musicians exhibited deep ambivalence towards the category “technology”, often suggesting that new technologies were to blame for the disappearance of cultural “traditions” while simultaneously utilizing these technologies to preserve what they perceived as their musical heritage. Ajishar, from Instituto del Habla, for instance, felt that the proliferation of information had detached music from context and identity:

today it’s very easy, thanks to globalization, thanks to this crisis of information that we have on the Internet [...] it’s easier that an adolescent falls into things that don’t belong to them [...] that sense of belonging is being completely lost. (Interview, 27-11-12)

Nevertheless, these groups also highly valued dissemination – of “tradition” and “message” – and saw home studios and the Internet as important means through which to achieve this objective. Laiko, a rapper from Instituto del Habla, told me that musical identity across Latin America was in danger of disappearing, and that musicians had a duty “to disseminate the identity that we are losing” as pan-continental “brothers and sisters”.<sup>252</sup> This sense of lost or disappearing identity motivated his studio practice and use of the Internet. The members of The Páramos, meanwhile, agreed that the Internet allowed their music to reach unexpected places, even outside Mexico.<sup>253</sup>

The cultural “loss” to which these bands objected, however, was also blamed on local consumers of culture, with these musicians frequently complaining that musical “traditions” were not appreciated by Mexicans themselves:

It’s almost impossible to make a living out of Mexican traditional music here, almost impossible. Whilst people from outside come and appreciate the musical value, local people don’t value their own music. (Interview, The Páramos, 21-07-13)

With statements such as this, these musicians constructed themselves as marginal subjects, distancing themselves from “local people” while simultaneously creating a position for themselves as ambivalent representatives of “local people’s music”. Nonetheless, many were socially and economically distanced from the typical consumers of “popular music” in Mexico. All of these bands were funded by outside jobs: the members of Cienpies, for instance, earned money by variously performing in restaurants and bars for other ensembles and working in illustration, video editing and graphic design, while Laiko from

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<sup>251</sup> For instance, Laiko from Instituto del Habla told me that “the artist who goes out to sell” ends up changing their message (20-07-13).

<sup>252</sup> Interview, Instituto del Habla, 27-11-12.

<sup>253</sup> Interview, 16-02-13.

Instituto del Habla taught in a primary school in Mexico City. Although these musicians lived in geographically marginal places, then, many were comparatively well-educated and worked in middle-class professions. In this context, the practice of *autogestión* may be better understood as a mode of spatial separation than one of creating autonomy from the state; these musicians could only create spaces of *autogestión* by channelling resources to them that had been earned through everyday employment.

In what remains of this chapter, I will build on this discussion by focusing in greater detail at the ways that two bands with which I conducted extensive research, The Páramos and Instituto del Habla, responded to these intersecting and conflicting discourses in their musical and studio practice. I will demonstrate that, in these settings, as *autogestión* in the digital home studio facilitated a mode of musical expression perceived to be “authentic”, the dissemination of messages in support of Zapatismo came to intersect with the dissemination of Mexican musical national traditions. Equally, this was a highly ambivalent context marked by a Mexican neoliberalism that these bands strongly opposed. As such, in their attempts to “tell stories” and “carry messages” through music, these bands’ deployment of perceived musical “traditions” or “roots” invoked ambiguous sentiments such as nostalgia and anger which in turn, highlighted contradictions and failures of the twentieth-century Mexican national project.

### ***The Páramos***

When conducting research on the *Rola la lucha zapatista* compilation album (see Chapter Seven), I contacted The Páramos, a band who had contributed several songs to this album, and they invited me to visit them at their house in Iztapalapa, a poor, densely-populated borough located in east Mexico City just beyond the reach of the city’s metro system. The Páramos were made up of two core members, Eve and Toto, musicians who could play a variety of instruments but tended to sing and play guitars and bass. They also had a drummer whose commitment to the project seemed questionable, and who I never met. Eve and Toto were in a relationship and lived together, while the pair – both psychologists in their thirties – earned a living by giving classes and workshops at the nearby Iztapalapa campus of Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana (UAM) and the more centrally located Universidad Insurgentes. The Páramos allied themselves with the Other Campaign, and had also participated more directly with the Zapatistas; for instance, Eve and Toto had conducted a small-scale media project in a Zapatista community in Chiapas.

In interviews, The Páramos emphasised the material modesty and resourcefulness that had marked their emergence as a band. The pair told me that they had begun in 2008 rehearsing in a basement, borrowing equipment from friends or other bands, often in exchange for favours. When Toto got work in a studio editing video and photography, he started to teach himself to record while the sound engineer was away, and became inspired to create a home recording studio. Toto and Eve bought a computer and basic multitrack recorder from friends, and began to record themselves while slowly accumulating studio equipment and instruments of various kinds.<sup>254</sup> By the time of my research, The Páramos had created a home studio equipped with a basic drum kit, bass guitar, electric guitar, acoustic guitar, and microphones. It had a separate booth for the sound desk and computer, and a window through which performer and producer could see each other. Although the pair had gone some way to soundproofing the walls with egg-boxes, cables had to pass through the door during recording, meaning that the door could not fully close. During my research I spent a number of afternoons at the band's studio, observing them record and occasionally participating in this process. In collaboration with Eve and Toto, I helped to produce, and performed in, two tracks, thus gaining close insight into the pair's creative process.

Although they were open to new ideas, even those coming from an outsider (like me), Eve and Toto also had clear concepts about the music they wanted to produce, especially with regard to its themes and accompanying sounds. First, the pair told me that in their music they aimed not to sing about “love; revolution; struggle” – thus perpetuating romantic delusions about “saving the world” through music – but instead “to tell a story”, especially “about topics that aren't easy to discuss”, like the 1997 Acteal massacre or the problem of femicide in Ciudad Juarez.<sup>255</sup> Many of these themes were important issues within Other Campaign circles, and two of the albums that The Páramos had already recorded at the time of my research, *Acteal: la otra historia vol. 1* and *Éxodo: la otra historia vol. 2*, as well as the album they were working on at the same time (provisionally entitled *Historias de maíz*), contained many allusions to indigenous culture, the Zapatista movement, and its numerous political allies.<sup>256</sup> The band's own rhetoric

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<sup>254</sup> Interview, The Páramos, 16-02-13.

<sup>255</sup> Interview, 16-02-13.

<sup>256</sup> For example, their song “¿Quién rezará a los muertos?” from the album *Acteal: la otra historia vol. 1* begins “Let history speak for itself/You can't stop time/Nor can paramilitary forces/silence your voice”, linking The Páramos' journalistic style to the ongoing counter-Zapatista violence in Chiapas. The use of the phrase “otra historia” (“other history”) in the album's title reflects the Zapatistas' frequent use of the word “otro” to describe their own activity (for instance in “La Otra Campaña” [“The Other Campaign”]), and Acteal is the site of an Other Campaign-affiliated group called Las Abejas. The track “Atenco ardió” refers

highly privileged the textual over the bodily, and they told me that their insistence on the audience listening to their lyrics rather than dancing had caused several venues to refuse to allow them to perform.<sup>257</sup> Further, the band's members often conceived the stories told in their music in personal terms. For instance, Eve felt a connection to the theme of femicide through her personal experience as a woman in Mexico City (“it’s striking to see it become something normal [...] as I came here, I saw a sign that said ‘here it is prohibited to throw away rubbish, dogs or women’. It’s becoming so everyday that it’s frustrating, humiliating”).<sup>258</sup>

Second, although the pair were resistant to any attempt to categorise their musical style, it became clear that they shared similar ideas about how the band ought to sound. On their website, The Páramos describe themselves as a “rock/punk/ska/garage/regional” band,<sup>259</sup> a mixture that led, as Toto described it, to a “clash of cultures”.<sup>260</sup> On one hand, in an interview, Eve stated that the band “always takes as a base the melodies or rhythms of the people”, which formed the band’s “roots” (*nuestro raíz*). That is, since both of the band’s core members were “from families of musicians who played in village bands”, these roots were the result of a particular rural upbringing that the pair shared.<sup>261</sup> On the other, Toto told me that he had also grown up listening to Jimi Hendrix, The Beatles, and Santana, and only began to listen to “traditional” music much later; this music, he claimed, also reflected “immediate roots” that he wished to “recreate” in sound.<sup>262</sup> He stated that:

We weren’t familiar with the sounds of the conch shell, nor of the flute, nor of other prehispanic instruments, until a few years ago. We had already had some experiences with electric guitars, with electric bass [...] there’s a clash of cultures and obviously, there’s a need for self-expression. (Interview, 21-07-13)

Such musical “self-expression” – a personal means of both self-discovery and self-enactment which this pair of psychologists appeared to ascribe therapeutic value – was mentioned frequently during our interviews, and appeared to be a key structuring concept for The Páramos’ musical practice. Toto, for example, valued music as “our only means of expression”, even if “for the rest of the world it might not matter if we make songs,

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to a campaign of protest organized by a Zapatista-sympathetic group against the construction of an airport in Mexico State.

<sup>257</sup> Interview, 16-02-13.

<sup>258</sup> Interview, 16-02-13.

<sup>259</sup> As already highlighted in this chapter, in this context the Spanish word *regional* is often linked to Mexican cultural nationalism.

<sup>260</sup> Interview, 21-07-13.

<sup>261</sup> Interview, 21-07-13.

<sup>262</sup> Interview, 21-07-13.



or if we make music that's out-of-tune and badly-harmonized". Correspondingly, both repeatedly emphasised the fact that they had no musical training.<sup>263</sup>

The pair felt that the commercialization of music in Mexico had led to depoliticization and a lack of genuine "self-expression". They told me that "if you want to set up a rock or cumbia band, or whatever, it has to be one with commercial tendencies [...] and not with reflexive social content", satisfying an ignorant public who only wanted to "dance, have a good time, [listen to] love stories, forget about their everyday lives".<sup>264</sup> Indeed, in interviews they perpetuated a paradoxical discourse which characterized Mexican "popular music" as a marginal pursuit. For instance, Toto told me that: "it's a great contrast between the music of the people [*música popular*] and all this commercialization appearing; while these genres of pop, for example, in English, are overvalued, traditional music is undervalued"<sup>265</sup>. Nevertheless, although the pair felt that communication technologies such as the Internet had been driving this lamentable process, The Páramos were also directly engaging with the same technologies.<sup>266</sup> They ran a website containing an introduction to the band, its history, and its members on which much of their music could be streamed online.<sup>267</sup> In addition, they had created a number of Youtube videos in which the stories told in their songs were narrated visually.<sup>268</sup> The pair felt that the Internet had allowed them the possibility of finding an audience at a national and international level. Indeed, Eve told me that, especially given that it was often difficult to find venues to perform, "without the Internet, everything we'd done would be void".<sup>269</sup>

Since Eve and Toto perceived mainstream music to be dominated by commercial interests with no stake in the perpetuation of tradition, *autogestión* – a concept the pair linked to the notion of Zapatista "autonomy" and understood to be physically manifested in their digital home studio – assumed special importance.<sup>270</sup> Many bands, Eve felt, tended

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<sup>263</sup> Interview, 16-02-13.

<sup>264</sup> Interview, 21-07-13.

<sup>265</sup> Interview, 21-07-13.

<sup>266</sup> Interview, 21-07-13.

<sup>267</sup> <http://theparamos.wix.com/oficial#!> (accessed 30-09-14).

<sup>268</sup> See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6pmfsR3iDDc>, about the Tlatelolco massacre in Mexico City in 1968 ("¿Quién reزارá a los muertos?"); <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FoqnIgUH1wY> ("Los emboscaron") about the Aguas Blancas massacre in Guerrero in 1995 in which 17 peasants were killed by police, who subsequently attempted to frame them as armed assailants (accessed 16-10-14). The latter video provoked many passionate responses in the comments section. It concludes with a caption: "This video is not for sale. Share it".

<sup>269</sup> Interview, 16-02-13.

<sup>270</sup> On the band's website, for instance, it was stated that "The Páramos is a totally autogestive project (un proyecto totalmente autogestivo), with one objective: to express ourselves through music!". <http://theparamos.wix.com/oficial#!historia> (accessed 30-09-14).

to wait “for a great producer to produce [their] music, to record and promote it [*difundirlo*]”.<sup>271</sup> By contrast, both members emphasised that their development of the capacity for domestic production of music was built upon a decision to reject such dependency and begin a process of self-education: “I like the fantasy where your own producer comes and he makes you famous and rich, but breaking out of that fantasy, that’s *autogestión*”.<sup>272</sup> For Eve and Toto the *autogestión* represented by the home recording studio allowed for the expression of not only political content, but also musical traditions. Indeed, the band’s creativity was rooted in the diverse ways that they placed political content and regional musics into tension with one another, producing an unsettling mixture of nostalgia, loss, and irony.

I gained a valuable insight into the band’s creative process during my participation in the recording of a song The Páramos had written called “Dulce Aroma” (Sweet Aroma), which was inspired by the Juan Rulfo short story “El llano en llamas” (The Burning Plain). Eve and Toto arranged “Dulce Aroma” for acoustic guitar, bajo sexto, snare drum, (female) voice, and the synthesised trombone sound of a keyboard; during our recording session, I also added a series of rolls on the snare drum and a whistled melody that I felt complemented the character of the song. The 3/4 rhythm of “Dulce aroma”, with the first note of the bar played with a low trombone note and the second and third with strummed chords on the acoustic guitar, was intended to evoke the *vals* rhythm of the mariachi music of the state of Jalisco. At the same time, this rhythm was complemented with a doubled vocal line which echoed punk vocalization in wavering between a spoken and sung voice. The song’s lyrics describe a relationship of intimacy interrupted by time and distance (“I even lost track of the days, years I’ve spent sitting waiting for you here”; “My eyes now dry, same as my bones”; “Everything tastes of absence, your absence”), and the theme of waiting connects it to Rulfo’s “El llano en llamas” (1953), a short story set in the Jalisco countryside which describes the experience of a group of rebels hiding through the Mexican Revolution. Rulfo’s story opens by citing the lyrics of a corrido (“They killed the bitch/But the pups remain”), a grounding in Revolution-era popular music that The Páramos index in “Dulce Aroma”, constructing in sound a revolutionary nostalgia that becomes ghostly in the space of forlorn absence narrated by the lyrics.

Elsewhere in their music, the band deployed references to “popular” or “traditional” music in support of more direct critiques of the Mexican state. The band’s

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<sup>271</sup> Interview, 21-07-13.

<sup>272</sup> Interview, 21-07-13.

song “Fue una masacre” (It Was A Massacre) refers to the paramilitary massacre of 45 people in Acteal, Chenalhó, Chiapas on December 22, 1997, who belonged to a Zapatista-supporting pacifist Catholic organization called Las Abejas (also see Chapter 4). This song is arranged for two voices and two guitars (rhythm and solo), and structured into three parts distinguished by rhythm. The first part is organized around a descending harmonic and melodic line in a simple 4/4 rhythm, and the lyrics – sung in downbeat fashion in the lower registers of the singers’ voices – describe in graphic detail the horrors of the Acteal massacre (“the spilt blood of the peoples condemned to genocide and hopelessness”). The second (introduced by a “one, two, three four”) remains in 4/4 time, but its rhythm is syncopated and at a higher tempo, and the vocals repeatedly shout: “It was a massacre in Acteal, Chenalhó!” The final section, however, eschews vocals, instead containing an instrumental *vals* in 3/4 time performed on the two guitars in the key of E minor. This, the band explained, was an allusion to the regional music of Chiapas, which included many *valse*s, some in minor keys, typically performed on the marimba. However, it would be naïve to interpret The Páramos’ use of this *vals* as a straightforward exercise in maintenance or preservation of tradition. Instead, a musical style associated with Chiapanecan indigeneity is juxtaposed in jarring fashion with the conflictive realities of rural Chiapas, as illustrated by the band’s reference to the Acteal massacre, an atrocity the intellectual authorship of which they (along with most supporters of the Zapatista movement) attributed to the Mexican government.

Finally, “¿De que país me hablas?” (Which Country Are You Talking About?) opens with a fragment of a triumphalist speech given by former President Carlos Salinas de Gortari (“Today the *Patria* is stronger [...] Today we make the new Mexican greatness a reality”) on the occasion of the approval of NAFTA by the United States House of Representatives in November 1993. This sample is accompanied by a recording of the *organillo*, a box-shaped instrument producing typically “nostalgic melodies”, often from the post-revolutionary period, using a score-reading mechanism similar to that found on a pianola (Reuter, 1984: 99). Those playing the *organillo* (called *organilleros*) in public spaces in Mexico City often do so as a substitute for begging; thus, for many, the sound of the *organillo* evokes present-day poverty, as well as nostalgia for the past.<sup>273</sup> The juxtaposition of *organillo* music with Salinas’ speech created a disjunction exploited in the song’s angrily-delivered lyrics: “Which country are you talking about? The Mexico of above? Its millionaires’ bank accounts? The Yes Men of America? [...] Which country are you

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<sup>273</sup> See an interesting article on the *organilleros* written by Kate Newman at <http://matadornetwork.com/abroad/the-slow-demise-of-mexico-citys-organilleros/> (accessed 28-09-14).

talking about? The Mexico of below? Hunger and desperation, collapse and desolation?”

These three examples illustrate how, for The Páramos, the use of the digital home studio in tandem with the Internet facilitated a mode of musical “self-expression” that they considered impossible through other channels. In different ways, each of these songs uses music constructed as (regionally) national in the post-revolutionary period to comment on Mexico’s revolutionary past and neoliberal present, and accompany stories which are both narrative and declamatory. It was this “self-expression” through which The Páramos developed a creative alliance between regional musical “roots” and the radical political messages of the Zapatistas’ Other Campaign. It was especially notable that this band created such “personal” expression as they used a home studio to which Eve and Toto felt an intimate connection: it was located in the pair’s house, and they themselves had created it. Nevertheless, among the musicians I studied the discourse of *autogestión* also used to refer to diverse recording arrangements with different relationships to domestic space. In the following section, I explore the recording practice of rap outfit Instituto del Habla, a rap band whose music reflected, in a more explicit and in-depth fashion, on the Mexican national project.

### ***Instituto del Habla***

I was first introduced to the members of Instituto del Habla by activists from Coordinadora Valle de Chalco during a short visit to Mexico City in July 2012. When I moved to the city for a longer period, beginning in October of the same year, they invited me to a series of recording sessions, live performances and radio interviews. While the band’s personnel had varied throughout its history, at this time it had two members, Laiko el Nigromante and Ajishar, who worked with an amateur producer, DJ Iceman, in whose house this studio was situated. Laiko had studied at the Escuela Nacional de Danza Folklórica (National School of Folkloric Dance), and worked at a school in Ecatepec as a teacher of “artistic education specializing in Mexican folkloric dance”.<sup>274</sup> By contrast, Ajishar had received less formal education than Laiko, and worked as a manual labourer in the Chalco area; he had joined Instituto del Habla when, after starting to record as a solo artist with producer Iceman, Laiko came across his music on Myspace and contacted him. The pair subsequently began to perform shows incorporating material from Ajishar’s album *Black and Brown Pride* and Instituto del Habla’s *Rap con sabor a México* (“Rap With A

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<sup>274</sup> Interview, 20-07-13. This was a position for which the rapper gave workshops on Saturday mornings, making it difficult for him to perform at the many Other Campaign events held during weekends.

Mexican Flavour’), and they had recorded a new album together called *Tierra y libertad por cualquier medio necesario* (“Land And Liberty By Whatever Means Necessary”). As suggested by the title of this album (a combination of Emiliano Zapata’s slogan “Land and Liberty” and Malcolm X’s motto “by whatever means necessary”), the pair harboured significant differences. Laiko’s political outlook was informed by Mexican cultural nationalism and reverence for what he saw as the country’s indigenous musical “roots”, while Ajishar took the racial struggles of black and Latino populations in the United States as a principal point of reference.

Both rappers perceived their musical practice to be intimately intertwined with questions of self and identity. Ajishar told me that as a teenager he was enthused by rock and punk, but came to feel he “lacked ability” with musical instruments; nevertheless, keen to be “a participant in some manner in the musical scene”, he began to perform rap.<sup>275</sup> His early lyrics, the rapper told me, were borne out of the “desire to express myself”, releasing anger built up from the experience of economic marginalization in the *barrio* of Chalco:

Someone from here can’t study for example fine arts because of how expensive those courses are, photography, or whatever else. A kid from here, if they are fortunate enough to get to study, will study some technical course, to maybe become [...] the operator of some machine. (Interview, 27-11-12)

Meanwhile, the discourse of Laiko (who *did* have the kind of fine arts background which Ajishar envied) was focused on a goal of preserving and expressing cultural “identity”; he told me that he felt a “commitment to seek first an identity for myself”, and thought that “as Mexicans we do have an identity that we don’t want to see, or which may seem to have disappeared or be unfamiliar”.<sup>276</sup> This sense of lost identity drove Laiko’s interest “in Mexican folkloric dance and [...] national cultural traditions“, both outside and inside the recording studio:<sup>277</sup>

Mexicans are products of a great mixture, in other words [...] nobody has pure blood here really, in Mexico – rather, we’re a mixture of many things, and our culture is also a mixture of many things. But it has an identity nonetheless [...] there’s a point of convergence in which identity appears, an identity which is being lost right now. (Interview, 27-11-12)

Despite their differences, then, Laiko and Ajishar both viewed musical practice as a means of expressing intimate experience, be it concerning economic marginalization or national cultural identity. Not only did this perspective inform the pair’s studio practice, but it also

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<sup>275</sup> Interview, 27-11-12.

<sup>276</sup> Interview, 20-07-13.

<sup>277</sup> Interview, 20-07-13.

underpinned the band's incorporation of pro-Zapatista lyrics into their songs. Instituto del Habla, like The Páramos, valued *autogestión* and perceived the arrangement they had with their studio to be *autogestivo*, belonging to and sponsored by those that carried out the creative work. This concept was also reflected in Instituto del Habla's use of the word *underground* (loaned from English), which alluded to places in which the authentic self-expression of the people of Mexico could be made and heard. For example, Laiko told me that rap artists that left the underground and entered the mainstream had to alter their content in order to do so, creating "decaffeinated" rap ("You'll find a different message in the underground than with a band that's got a big platform").<sup>278</sup> As with The Páramos, then, digital home studios in this "underground" setting provided a platform for "expression" both of self and identity and of pro-Zapatista messages. Furthermore, Instituto del Habla also had an ambivalent relationship with the Internet, seeing it as a potential threat to locally rooted tradition, but also using it to disseminate their work.<sup>279</sup>

In October 2012, Laiko invited me to a recording session in Iceman's home studio in Chicoloapan, in the east of Estado de México. We met at a metro station to take a bus to the studio, and on the way Laiko showed me what he dubbed his *peña-pack* – a small red backpack that the PRI had handed out in schools as part of Enrique Peña Nieto's successful presidential campaign (Laiko spent considerable time lamenting Peña Nieto's recent election to office during our journey). Inside, he was carrying a number of pre-Hispanic instruments: three ocarinas in the shape of a tiger, an eagle, and a frog fashioned to make sounds corresponding to their respective animals, a conch shell, and *tenabaris* (ankle percussion used by Aztec dancers in Mexico [see Rostas, 1998]). After a journey of about one hour, we arrived at the studio, which was located in the house of Iceman, the band's amateur producer, and consisted of one microphone and a computer in the middle of a sea of clothes.

From my past experience living and working in neighbouring Valle de Chalco I knew that this was an area that had enjoyed rapid growth ever since, as part of the turn to neoliberal economic policy in the 1980s, the Mexican government sharply reduced agricultural subsidies, negatively impacting Mexico's agrarian economies and forcing rural families to migrate to urban areas (Barry, 1995; Relinger, 2010; Nadal, 2002; Aguilar,

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<sup>278</sup> Interview, 20-07-13.

<sup>279</sup> As well as uploading the majority of their recorded work on YouTube, Instituto del Habla has a page on music-streaming website SoundCloud: <https://soundcloud.com/laiko-el-nigromante> (accessed 14-10-14). Their album *Rap con sabor a México* (2011) is available to download for free at <http://4puntozcrew.over-blog.com/article-instituto-del-habla-rap-con-sabor-a-mexico-2011-104204941.html> (accessed 14-10-14).

1999).<sup>280</sup> The studio bore the traces of urban expansion alongside symbols of the area's rural past; chickens wandered about in the yard outside, which was full of dust and littered with planks of wood, as well as corrugated metal rods of the kind used for construction. Iceman's house was part of a floor-level complex surrounding this yard which was, in turn, protected by a small pack of aggressive dogs. Several rooms faced onto the yard, some with windows not yet fitted with glass, which was used by the inhabitants of the complex to clean and dry clothes. The intimacy of this space – both interior and exterior – was underscored by the fact that it was occasionally visited by the producer's partner and child. Although the relationship between artists and producer was an economic one – Instituto del Habla paid Iceman a small sum as remuneration for his work – Iceman was clearly good friends with Laiko and Ajishar, and much studio time was spent drinking beer and making jokes, especially at my expense.<sup>281</sup>



*Figure 9: Digital home studio of Iceman, producer for Instituto del Habla*

On this occasion, Laiko was recording a track as a solo artist, and was joined by a number of collaborating musicians: rapper Bankai and guitarist Jair Aguilar, brothers

<sup>280</sup> Also see [www.inegi.gob.mx/est/contenidos/espanol/proyectos/conteos/conteo2005/sintesis.pps](http://www.inegi.gob.mx/est/contenidos/espanol/proyectos/conteos/conteo2005/sintesis.pps) (accessed 04-07-15).

<sup>281</sup> *Albures* are a common form of pun in Mexico usually involving putting different words together to create a sentence with a sexual hidden meaning; a particularly common form of *albur* involves constructing a question that, if answered honestly, implicates the respondent in transgressive behaviour. Since I was not a native speaker of Spanish, I was an easy target for *albures*.

from northeast Mexico City; and guitarist Mario Caudillo, who was studying at UNAM's National School of Music (singer and music student Georgina Tritón also performed on the track during a later session which I did not attend).<sup>282</sup> These participants had vastly different cultural horizons, something which was made clear at particular moments during the session. For instance, while Laiko and Bankai recorded their rap tracks inside the studio, several of us waited in the yard and shared a conversation initiated by Caudillo about the music of J.S. Bach, whom he labelled a “genius”;<sup>283</sup> later, Laiko and Bankai discussed various musical uses for the instruments he had brought in his *peña-pack* which, Laiko hoped, could help to create a “pre-Hispanic atmosphere”. Then, on the way home, while we were taking a transport to a nearby metro station, Laiko, Bankai and Jair started to rap a song called “Tregua” whose political message they hoped to transmit to their fellow passengers. In fact, the coexistence of discourses about Mexican indigenous musical culture, “regional traditions” and the “genius of Bach” was less unusual than it might seem, since classical and indigenist traditions were both sponsored by the same state-funded cultural institutions, such as the INBA. I was particularly keen, however, to discover how this group combined perceived Mexican “musical traditions” with a hip-hop practice that was, in turn, self-valorized by references to political “message” and “lyrics”.<sup>284</sup>

During this session, and a later editing session Laiko invited me to attend, this group recorded and produced an acoustic version of the well-known Mexican folk song “La Llorona” arranged for two acoustic guitars and voice, with rap inbetween each chorus performed by Laiko and Bankai. (They later debuted this song at an Other Campaign event in November 2012 to mark Día de los Muertos, along with a live solo performance by Caudillo on classical guitar.) “La Llorona” (a tune arranged for piano by Carlos Chávez in 1943) is based on a folk tale with an indexical link to Mexico’s pre-Hispanic history. It tells the story of a woman who, having drowned her own offspring and then herself, mournfully seeks her children as a ghost so that she may enter the spirit world (Kirtley, 1960). Importantly, in Ramón Peón’s 1933 film *La llorona*, the title character was equated with La Malinche, Hernan Cortés’ Nahua mistress who betrayed her native people for the Spanish invaders. While there are many versions of this song, Laiko’s *La Llorona* opens:

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<sup>282</sup> Interview, Mario Caudillo, 23-06-15.

<sup>283</sup> In fact, Caudillo was no classical purist, but performed music in a wide variety of styles, including classical, rock, hip-hop, and Mexican popular genres such as the bolero.

<sup>284</sup> Debates about the place of political messages within music have been particularly prominent within hip-hop culture, marked in particular by Public Enemy rapper Chuck D’s description of rap as the “black CNN” (Neal, 2012: 435; also see Alim, 2012).



“They say I don’t have sorrow, Llorona, because they don’t see me weeping/The dead make no noise, Llorona, but their pain is greater”.<sup>285</sup> Laiko’s rap during the track’s verse places this myth into a broader political and relational context: the figure of La Llorona suffers under the “colonial yoke”, which persists in the collective memory: “so much time and we still carry the chains; our blood is spilt by the acts of strangers’ hands”.<sup>286</sup> Here, the band laments the “malign time, which has marked that distance” between present and past, accompanying a recognition of a common experience joining these times together: “Your sentence, perpetuated by centuries upon centuries, in your sorrow; open veins are a vestige of the wound that left barren love and lost dreams”.<sup>287</sup>

The haunting memory that the track’s lyrics (both rapped and sung) evoke was also suggested by the samples Laiko and Iceman used in their arrangement. Thus, the song opens and closes with the sound of a conch shell, while the eagle-shaped ocarina that Laiko had carried in his *peña-pack* accompanies the female voice each time the chorus appears and later marks the end of the song. It had taken time and effort to record and edit these samples, and the resulting samples were only sporadically deployed in the final version. Discussions between Laiko and Bankai suggested that they were intended to function as an aural signifier of pre-Hispanic Mexico, which was brought into a politico-emotional context of sorrow at colonial domination. Such a link to the pre-Hispanic was affirmed in the credits at the end of the song, when Laiko raps: “*Yeah*, Instituto del Habla, preserving the roots of Mexican culture”.

In turn, this line seemed to encapsulate some of the productive tension that underpinned the band’s creativity: *yeah*, an English loan word imported from American rap (and pronounced in an American accent), followed by the assertion (in Spanish) of an essentialized Mexican identity that rap practice could “preserve”. Indeed, the same line is repeated throughout Instituto del Habla’s 2011 album *Rap con sabor a México*, which contains a number of songs that are undergirded by samples drawn from Mexican regional music constructed as national during the postrevolutionary period. In this album, music is simultaneously valued as a textual medium for the transmission of anti-state, pro-Zapatista messages and a means for the preservation of musical “tradition”. “La Batalla”, the album’s second track, calls on the audience to “prepare yourselves, soldiers, for this

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<sup>285</sup> “Dicen que no tengo duelos, Llorona, porque no me ven llorar/Hay muertos que no hacen ruido, Llorona, es más grande su pena”.

<sup>286</sup> “A tanto tiempo y aun llevamos la cadena/nuestra sangre es derramada por acción de mano ajena”.

<sup>287</sup> “[...] tu condena; perpetuada, por los siglos de los siglos, en tus penas; venas abiertas, son vestigio de la herida que dejó el amor ingrato y las ilusiones perdidas.” The phrase “venas abiertas” recalls Eduardo Galeano’s dependency-theory classic *Las venas abiertas de América Latina* (1971).

war without quarter”, a righteous, Quixotic quest (the track makes many allusions to Cervantes’ *Don Quijote de la mancha*, from riding on horseback to tilting at windmills) for which “in my rifle, lyrics burn with inspiration”, directed “against the corrupt government”. Elsewhere, “Somos” (We Are) figures hip-hop as a battle waged with “uncensurable song”, in which “the voice of the people” may be kept alive while “society covers itself in banal fashions”. Meanwhile, the eleventh track on the album, “Nostalgia”, contains the most direct criticism of the Mexican government of any track on the album: here, “the neoliberal dictates, and it’s a crime to be poor”; “they are selling my country, piece by piece”; neoliberals (and the “tyrant president”) have “their hatred kept in a briefcase that spoke of the war in Chiapas and the question of oil”. But this song also attempts to reflect the emotional life of the inhabitants of this Mexico, who are giving up “hope of living better times” and turning to a sorrowful “nostalgia”. At the end of the song, the band themselves enter into this nostalgic longing for the past, wishing for “eternity” in which “with our ideas we forge, in rap, immortality”. In each of these songs, critiques of Mexican society and institutions of governance leads into introspection concerning the role of rap itself in processes of change.

As the lyrics of *Rap con sabor a México* position a nostalgia for the past alongside a fierce critique of contemporary society, so this past is evoked with music, in a similar fashion to the way that the musical traditions of South American indigenous groups were appropriated in *nueva canción* (Fairley, 1984; Morris [Nancy], 2014: 20-24). Most of the songs on the album use samples of Mexican regional music played at the beginning and/or end of the track, then manipulated into a new form in order to underpin the beat. Notably, during research Laiko told me that every sample the band used for the album had been downloaded online. While it might often be difficult to discern the regional musical sources upon which these songs are based from the beat alone, the samples at the beginning and end of these songs foreground these sources. For instance, the album’s fourth track, “La Bruja” (The Witch), is based on a *son jarocho* folk song from Veracruz which tells the story of a witch whose seductive charms lure the singer into her home, where she transforms him into “a pumpkin and flowerpot”. In their version, Instituto del Habla play a sample from an old recording of this song at the end of the track, after having reshaped this recording into the acoustic building blocks of the track’s beat. The same structure reoccurs on “Somos”, “Seguimos en la Lucha”, “Intro”, “Malhaya”<sup>288</sup> and “Outro”. These songs, all assert aural continuity between hip-hop and “regional

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<sup>288</sup> This song uses a sample of *son jarocho* band Mono Blanco’s song “Malhaya”.

traditions” rooted in the postrevolutionary nationalist project.

These patterns and themes come to the fore in “Seguimos en la Lucha” (We Continue in the Struggle), a song expressing solidarity with the Zapatista uprising which is worth discussing in detail.<sup>289</sup> The track opens by directly referencing Zapatismo with a sample of Subcomandante Marcos reading a statement representing the Tzotzil people who participated in the Zapatista rebellion: “we are the people of the night, the bat people. We can tear apart and bleed an entire group, person by person, one per day for a long time, and nobody will know where the blows are coming from.”<sup>290</sup> It is then followed by a sample of a piece of marimba music in 3/4 time, which initially appears unredacted but is subsequently edited to fit into a syncopated beat in 4/4 time. Although Laiko told me that this sample was from Las Chiapanecas, a piece often played at institutional performances of Chiapanecan folkloric dance, it appears, in fact, to have been taken from “Luna de Xelaju”, a marimba melody from Guatemala, where it is – ironically – deeply associated with the Guatemalan nation.<sup>291</sup> Nonetheless, here this tune is unconsciously resignified as Mexican, implying a deeply affective underlying understanding of aural “Mexicanness” closely linked to the timbre of the marimba itself, rather than any particular piece. Indeed, the lyrics of “Seguimos en la Lucha” transport us to Chiapas, in which the marimba is commonly performed as a traditional instrument during *fiestas* (“continue then, Subcomandante, though they might think you crazy [...] the fight for Chiapas will make their lands tangible; the *indígenas* will harvest a free people”).<sup>292</sup>

In Laiko’s rap in “Seguimos en la Lucha”, the government’s idea of “nation” is contested and contrasted with Mexico’s revolutionary past: “Say what independence, say what Revolution, if we continue to comply with a project of nation that, the further it advances, the more it takes away our freedoms?” Here, the rapper launches a fierce critique of the Mexican political classes. President Felipe Calderón (2006-2012) is painted as an “imbecile” under whose rule “there are people that work and don’t eat”; instead of dealing with this situation, the political classes (whose number also includes the leftist

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<sup>289</sup> This song appeared on the album *Rola la lucha zapatista* (see Chapter Seven).

<sup>290</sup> Footage of Subcomandante Marcos reading out this quote appears at the beginning of the documentary film *Zapatistas: Crónica de una rebelión* (see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AVsozwJjRKs> [accessed 04-10-14]).

<sup>291</sup> Navarrete (2005: 130) states that some Guatemalan nationalist scholars argue that “the origin of the marimba is pre-Hispanic” so that they “can glorify the instrument as an ancient national treasure and as a symbol of Guatemalans’ national cultural identity”.

<sup>292</sup> The Zapatista record label Producciones La Voz De Los Sin Voz have produced a compact disc of marimba music from Santiago El Pinar in the Los Altos region of Chiapas, which includes covers of Las Chiapanecas and Cielito Lindo.

political opposition) broadcast “commercials on the TV, so that tourism grows”.<sup>293</sup> Bereft of a real solution to Mexico’s problems, politicians fall back on empty patriotism: “they don’t approach the topic [of poverty] but they announce ‘*viva México!*’”. The alternative is made crystal clear: “long live Zapata and the San Andrés Accords”; “long live [Subcomandante] Marcos”. Instituto del Habla’s use of samples of Mexican musical “traditions”, then, is far from celebratory; instead, it is bitter, critical and even ironic. On *Rap con sabor a México*, allusions to Zapatismo are brought to bear within this productive tension between the past romanticized in sound and the dystopic present constructed and criticized in rap. In “Seguimos en la Lucha”, the Zapatistas bridge this divide, representing peoples that “for centuries were ignored” but who “now cover their faces as revolutionaries [...] to defend their freedoms”.

Instituto del Habla, then, sought to use the digital home studio to preserve nationalist musical traditions, motivated by a goal of maintaining and expressing an essentialist, intimate “identity”. In turn, this enterprise privileged the home as private source of authentic creativity. But although they used this “social technology” (Théberge, 1997: 217) to undergird “genuine” critique of the Mexican neoliberal state, support for Zapatismo and nostalgia for the postrevolutionary past, it was also evident that the economic and ideological circumstances in which this band operated were emphatically tied to the neoliberal present. Not only were the costs of creating digital home studios reduced by neoliberal economic policy, but the nationalism that Instituto del Habla expressed through this medium reflected the reconfiguration of the “nation” into the private sphere that accompanied Mexico’s neoliberal turn. Further, this technology facilitated a dynamic resignification of Mexican musical traditions that Instituto del Habla worked to control (by playing original samples at the beginning and end of songs) and which, in the case of “Seguimos en la Lucha”, effectively appropriated a Guatemalan nationalist tune for Mexico. In their recording practice, then, Instituto del Habla were producing a very contemporary form of nostalgia.

## Conclusion

In this chapter I have demonstrated how, among pro-Zapatista bands of various genres in Mexico City, the use of the digital home studio coincided with an ideal of *autogestión* that was linked to the Zapatista project of “autonomy”. In turn, this undergirded a perceived

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<sup>293</sup> This seems to be a reference to the government’s response to the Chiapas conflict (see Chapter Three).

mode of intimate, authentic self-expression defined against an inauthentic cultural mainstream in which commercial censorship was understood to be prevalent. For these artists *autogestión* emerged as a means of defending cultural “traditions” from neoliberal policy allowing large multinational companies to control cultural production in Mexico. The “self-expression” associated with the digital home studio facilitated messages of support for the Zapatista movement and a plethora of other causes related to it, as well as the expression of perceived cultural “roots”: regional musical “traditions” created as national by the cultural policies of the Mexican postrevolutionary state. In turn, reinforcing perceived freedom of expression through the creation of *autogestión* – a project inspired by the Zapatista ideal of “autonomy” – led to the expression of support for Zapatismo, creating a self-reinforcing cycle. Thus, both the act of spreading pro-Zapatista messages, as well as that of representing Zapatismo sonically (for instance, by using samples of marimba music or sampling a speech by Subcomandante Marcos), became related to the creation of private means of musical production, involving the cultivation of complex economic relationships with actors from a variety of backgrounds as well as the channelling of economic resources from musicians’ regular incomes towards musical practice.

Nonetheless, while this *autogestión* may be located in relation to Zapatismo, it may also be situated within neoliberal economic policies and their accompanying ideologies. These groups were working at a specific historical juncture, shaped by the cultural legacy of the Mexican postrevolutionary state’s national project, as well as the divorce between “state” and “nation” that conflicting forces (the EZLN and President Carlos Salinas de Gortari [1988-94]) attempted to effect in the late twentieth century. Their studio practices must be understood within this context, in which nationalism was constructed and experienced at an intimate, private level. This chapter, then, has examined the ways that the “imagined” nation can endure in spaces beyond the Westphalian public sphere. Further, it has highlighted the ambivalent relationships that emerged in these settings between technology and tradition, and the ways that these bands used recording technologies to critique the present and express nostalgia for a past simultaneously free from and reified by such technology. Svetlana Boym, in *The Future of Nostalgia*, argues that “[n]ostalgia inevitably appears as a defense mechanism in a time of accelerated rhythms of life and historical upheavals”, suggesting that “fundamentally, both technology and nostalgia are about mediation” (2001: xiv, 346). In the settings examined in this chapter, vestiges of the past and marks of the rapidly changing present were a source of creative

tension in the music-making process. Here, as well as being a political creed that could be propagated through musical practice, Zapatismo became for many musicians a means of mediation between past and present.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### MUSIC, TRAVEL AND THE NEGOTIATION OF ZAPATISMO IN OTHER CAMPAIGN COMPILATION ALBUMS

In August 2013, the EZLN ran a summer school called the “Escuelita” (Little School), as part of which almost 2,000 activists from across Mexico and around the world travelled to Chiapas to stay for a week in different Zapatista autonomous communities. For many of my musician and activist consultants from Mexico City, this was their first opportunity to experience Zapatista daily life, as male pro-Zapatista activists learned how to work the land, use machetes, and harvest corn, while female activists were introduced to an arduous domestic schedule of grinding corn, making tortillas, and cooking meals. While these activities reflected a strict gender division of labour, activists I spoke to tended to emphasise the positive aspects of their experiences. In interviews afterwards, some figured the Escuelita as a revelatory moment, in which their eyes were opened to the intimate reality of Zapatismo. For instance, El Chava, a biologist and amateur singer-songwriter who often performed at Other Campaign concerts in Mexico City, told me the following:

For me the Escuelita was a total watershed, a beginning of something very personal. Why? Because I believed I had an idea of what Zapatismo really was. And, well, I did have one, but it was a basic understanding [*una base*], nothing more. (El Chava, 18-08-13)

Previously, El Chava had thought the Zapatistas in need of help – saying that “they are fighting [*en lucha*] and they are suffering” – but after the Escuelita he concluded, comparing the Zapatistas’ project with the society described in Thomas More’s 1516 book *Utopia*, that “we are the ones that need the Zapatistas right now”. He specifically emphasised what he perceived as the good state of health of Zapatista children, the ready availability of sustenance and all manner of medicinal plants in the Zapatistas’ *milpas* [agricultural smallholdings], the ostensible harmony of intra-community relations, and the democracy of their organization (“the people give the orders”). El Chava told me:

My previous understanding [was] that the Zapatistas needed civil society to survive. But

it's not true! We need the Zapatistas, to learn from their experiences [...] from what they've done. We need what they've taught us in these few days in order to be truly free. (El Chava, 18-08-13)

El Chava experienced travelling to Zapatista communities as a moment of transformation in which deeper understanding of both “true” Zapatismo and “true” freedom could be attained (cf. Noy, 2004). As such, he positioned Zapatismo as an entity that was simultaneously pure and in need of continuous discovery. This experience, however, also caused El Chava to re-think the relationship between Zapatista autonomous communities in Chiapas and their supporters elsewhere. In this interview, then, El Chava pointed towards a Zapatismo that was both unstable in practice and subject to at least implicit contestation. In addition, his statements reflected the ways that the idea of Zapatismo was ascribed power in activist circles. Even if they were mostly careful to distinguish themselves from the category “the Zapatistas” *per se*, pro-Zapatista actors frequently found themselves invoking and representing Zapatismo, implicitly identifying themselves with this movement in an indirect sense.

So far in this dissertation, I have mostly focused on music-making limited to particular sites – a recording studio in rural Chiapas, a San Cristóbal restaurant, public spaces and digital home studios in Mexico City – and travel has hardly been discussed. Yet it was clear from my research that moments of travel and encounter such as that experienced by El Chava were highly significant. Visiting Chiapas allowed pro-Zapatista musicians to experience what they had been representing in music elsewhere, and travel between different sites of pro-Zapatista activism more generally allowed these individuals to be confronted with different realities and experiences, as well as new ideas about “what Zapatismo really was”. Many pro-Zapatista activists came from outside Mexico, and most were accustomed to social contexts very different to that of rural Chiapas. Some were from European anarchist groups, especially those located in post-fascist countries Spain, Germany and Italy; many others were from Chicano activist circles based in cities in the United States organized around spatial divisions rooted in the idea of “race” (or skin colour). These backgrounds inevitably affected how these actors characterized the Zapatista movement. However, neither was “encounter” in these circles confined to the physical movement of human beings. Many of these activists had discovered, and become active supporters of, Zapatismo through online media. Musical transit – either online or through the communication of physical compact discs – allowed for different perspectives on Zapatismo that had arisen in distinct contexts to be brought together, and helped to create ties of mediated communication that were often later transformed into



face-to-face relationships. Thus, just as some chapters in this dissertation highlight different understandings of Zapatismo that became activated in different contexts, so in this chapter I seek to move beyond these isolated and detached representations, addressing the following questions: how, in offline encounter and online mediation during which Zapatismo (or Zapatista-ness) was enacted and represented in music, was this movement (or “imagined community” [Leyva Solano, 1998: 46]) established as a coherent, meaningful entity in the minds of its participants? Alternatively, were there musical moments of encounter during which emic notions of Zapatismo came up against other discourses and ideologies that, in varying ways, demonstrated divergent understandings of this constructed worldview?

In this chapter, I will address these questions by examining the case of two compilation albums created in support of the Zapatista movement, *Las voces rebeldes del otro lado* (2008-2013) and *Rola la lucha zapatista* (2012). While these albums, like a great deal of musical activity in pro-Zapatista circles, were structured around the objective of “disseminating” the Zapatista “word”, I also highlight ways that they embodied, represented and led to encounter in different sites across the Zapatista movement. As such, they provided means not only through which community, conviviality and friendship could emerge among pro-Zapatista activists, but through which people could collectively enact a sense of “being Zapatista”. In turn, these experiences suggested questions about the intersection between musical practice, travel and identity. In the following section of this chapter, I explore these questions as they are reflected in the literature on both music and the Zapatista movement. I then move on to a discussion of the two pro-Zapatista compilation albums just mentioned, paying attention to the ways that musical migration, travel and encounter within pro-Zapatista circles provided opportunities for the performance of sameness and difference; similar and divergent understandings of Zapatismo.

### **Travel, encounter and Zapatismo**

Transit and encounter across different cultural backgrounds and borders has become an important concern for contemporary ethnomusicologists (Amico, 2014; Kruger and Trandafoiu, 2014; Toynbee and Dueck, 2013). Examining the Festival au Désert in Mali, Amico argues that musical encounters between Tuareg nomadic locals and foreign tourists formed a site for “preserving the self and of discovering the other” (2014: 96).

Other scholars emphasise the role of musical encounter in the negotiation of identities, such as Kruger and Trandafoui, who take the position that “migrating music [...] helps construct spaces for the articulation of identity politics” (2014: 16). Finally, examining intercultural musical encounter, Toyne and Dueck point out that “copying always involves some kind of translation [...] in ‘doing’ another’s music you have to bring it across into your own system of conceptual and aesthetic categories, in which it makes sense and has value” (2013: 8). The act of musical dissemination, then, may also be considered a powerful means of performing identity. In processes of travel, encounter, and other types of flows, musical practice may allow for sameness and difference to be revealed and concealed.

As I have already discussed in this dissertation, Zapatismo is a social movement with a vast geographical reach that often motivates activists to travel great distances, and which became a *cause célèbre* for those championing the transformative effects of new media technologies (NMTs) as means for breaking down distance (Ronfeldt and Arquila, 2001; Burbach, 1994, 2001; Froehling, 1997). Some scholars understand the movement’s reach as a source of potential strength. In Castells’ (disposable [cf. 2000]) theory of the network society, “project identity” refers to a novel identity, consciously and reflexively constructed in order to achieve social change, creating new meanings in the process (2010: 8-11). Project identities, or identity projects, are designed to be inclusive, starting from a “blueprint of social values and institutional goals that appeal to a majority of citizens without excluding anybody, in principle” (Castells, 1998: 353-4). Notably, Castells identifies Zapatismo as the source of a particularly powerful “project identity”, implying that pro-Zapatista actors are willing to reflexively and consciously work to produce a worldview to which a broad base of people are able to subscribe (2010: 165).

Some scholars, however, hint at a more ambivalent view of Zapatista identity. Kowal examines how pro-Zapatista actors use online technologies to magnify “the struggle that is occurring in Chiapas” (2002: 120). In an online context of highly mediated communication which fosters disjunction, misunderstanding and difference, Kowal suggests, Zapatista identity becomes “fragmented to allow for a plurality of supporters who can call themselves ‘Zapatista’”, in turn creating a sense of disjunction between different nominally pro-Zapatista factions (2002: 115). Nonetheless, while this online “fragmentation”, in Kowal’s reading, suggests an obstacle for the formation of shared identity, there is good reason to be sceptical about the validity of the online-offline divide that this scholar presupposes. Recent media scholars have increasingly emphasised the

“growing permeability of all media” (Bennett, 2003: 26) and the power of “convergence culture” (Jenkins, 2006). Chadwick advocates paying attention to the ways that “newer media practices in the interpenetrated fields of media and politics adapt and integrate the logics of older media practices”, forming what he calls a “hybrid media system” functioning on the basis of flows across different media technologies (2013: 4). Elsewhere, analyzing membership of three formal organizations pushing for social change in the United States, Bimber et al. point out that although comparatively few members of these organizations were avid social media users, online platforms contributed to a context in which action could be taken and contention could occur (2012: 2-3, 72-4).<sup>294</sup>

Travel and face-to-face encounter, then, are vital contextual factors for online activity, and vice versa. Harry Cleaver recognizes that Zapatista communities in the 1990s used intermediaries to disseminate communiqués via the Internet, and highlights the ways that such activities intersected with other media such as newspapers and television (1998: 628). With the benefit of being able to consider more recent pro-Zapatista mobilizations, Belausteguigoitia (2006: 99) echoes Cleaver’s analysis, calling attention to

the strategic intervention of different communities, agents, and mediators working “in the flesh” as well as virtually [...] It was in such a context that the [Zapatista] movement came literally to the streets, universities and urban settings of Mexico and virtually connected them with the streets, university, and urban settings of other nations, especially in the Euro-Anglo world.

The depictions of the movement presented by both Cleaver and Belausteguigoitia, then, would appear to implicitly challenge Kowal’s “fragmented” online Zapatismos by emphasising the importance of physical travel within Zapatista circles. In particular, the presumption of hybridity and flows across media complicates any simple superimposition of certain modes of identity onto particular technologies of communication (cf. Born, 2013: 7-8; Feld, 1994).<sup>295</sup> Further, it makes attention to context invaluable for any scholar wishing to discuss questions of identity.

Dahlgren argues that in late modernity “all of us are to varying degrees composite people, activating different sides of our selves in different contexts” (2009: 64). He goes on to suggest that “[f]or democracy to happen, citizens must be able to encounter and

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<sup>294</sup> This rejection of a strict online-offline divide is echoed by Bennett and Segerberg (2013), Lim (2013) and Castells (2012).

<sup>295</sup> The linear transition from orality to literacy mapped onto a transition from the “primitive” to the “modern” made by early media scholars like McLuhan (1962, 1964), sits uneasily with the history of Mayan peoples in Chiapas, who were forcibly dispossessed of their native writing system by Spanish colonialists, written into history as an “oral” culture, and “missionized” in order to teach these newly “primitive” oral peoples the gift of writing (Rockwell, 2005).

talk to each other”, moving into the “innumerable physical spaces, sites, and settings in which people may meet and interact as citizens” (2009: 114-5). In other words, movement and encounter are highly important for the enactment of shared identities (such as “citizen” subjects of a “democracy”) at particular times. With this in mind, one might also note Subcomandante Marcos’ response, in May 1994, to allegations that he was gay:

Marcos is gay in San Francisco, black in South Africa, Asian in Europe, Chicano in San Isidro, Anarchist in Spain, Palestinian in Israel, Indigenous in the streets of San Cristóbal [...] and, to be sure, Zapatista in the Mexican Southeast. In sum, Marcos is a human being. (Subcomandante Marcos, 1995: 214-5)

Marcos’ intriguing statement asks us to consider contextually specific experiences of discrimination and marginalization, but also suggests a sense of unity collectively pertaining to them. It echoes the tense relationship between sameness and difference I encountered during my field research in Mexico City, in which pro-Zapatista actors often invoked Zapatismo as an exemplar for correct action, but were also careful to position Zapatismo as “other”, a distant entity whose reality was difficult to comprehend in an urban context and whose “real-ness”, therefore, could only be discovered in direct encounter within Zapatista communities in rural Chiapas. (Indeed, I also felt this sense of distance, and much of my research in Chiapas took place at the margins of a presupposed, but only briefly experienced, “Zapatista social life”.) In the remainder of this chapter, then, I will take up the theme of music in “transit” or “flow”, highlighting ways that two pro-Zapatista compilation albums created in order to “spread the Zapatista word” became loci for online and offline encounter in which the notions of “Zapatismo” and “Zapatista-ness” were represented, enacted and translated.

### **From *El fuego y la palabra* (2004) to *Las voces rebeldes del otro lado* (2008-2013)**

In 2004, to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of the creation of the EZLN, the magazine *Rebeldía* organized a series of events and published various EZLN-endorsed works, including a book by journalist Gloria Muñoz Ramírez entitled *20 y 10: El fuego y la palabra* (20 and 10: The Fire and the Word) (2004a) and two multimedia discs containing EZLN communiqués, photographs, interviews with Zapatistas, and audio recordings of Zapatista statements. The magazine also put together a four-compact disc box set of music about or by the Zapatistas, also entitled *20 y 10: El fuego y la palabra* (with each compact disc given an individual title: “Fuego”, “Palabra”, “Resistencia”, and “Dignidad”), and organized a concert to promote its release on January 11 (Muñoz Ramirez, 2004b: 5, 11-

12). Each disc of this box set had its own character: “Fuego” contained mostly rock, ska, and punk by artists from outside Mexico, like Ozomatli (United States) and Manu Chao (France); “Palabra” contained music by *trova* artists such as León Gieco (Argentina) and Arturo Meza (Spain); “Resistencia”, meanwhile, is made up of rock and ska by Mexican artists such as Maldita Vecindad, Tijuana No! and Antidoping. Finally, “Dignidad”, the fourth compact disc of the set, contains corridos and songs recorded by Zapatista artists and bands like Comandante David and Trío Montaña. With this box set, then, *Rebeldía* aimed to bring together music-making in support of the Zapatista cause from around the world which had become linked to a global vision of resistance. In an article about the topic, they conclude that “Music and rebellion become united [*se hermanan*, literally “become brothers”] in an artistic-cultural movement around the Zapatista struggle [...] it is a movement that continues [...] to grow, since it is part of the creation of a new political culture of struggle against neoliberalism and for humanity”.<sup>296</sup>

This 4-CD box set was to motivate, and provided a model for, the creation of more pro-Zapatista compilation album projects. In 2008, Muñoz Ramírez’s 2004 book was translated into English and a series of events were held to promote its release in the United States, at which the 2004 CD box set was also promoted. Radio Zapatista was a California-based radio collective with a monthly half-hour programme on Pacifica Radio which helped to organize these events, during which (as Alejandro, a longstanding member of the collective who I introduce in more detail below, told me in San Cristóbal de Las Casas) they “saw the positive reaction” that people had to the *20 y 10: El Fuego y La Palabra* box set and felt inspired to develop their own project.<sup>297</sup> Realising that there was much music written about the Zapatistas by US-based artists (both by so-called “Latinos” or “Chicanos” and musicians of Anglo-Saxon descent), members of Radio Zapatista decided to collect Zapatista-themed songs by domestic artists and make a compilation album. Partly, their intention was to reflect the ways in which the Zapatista movement intersected with and had inspired local socio-political struggles in the United States. This was especially linked to the recently-launched Other Campaign, which

created a lot of noise. So we thought it would be really interesting to make a compilation and [with it reflect] precisely that reality of local struggles, and there are lots of them [struggles] in the United States which are inspired by Zapatismo. Such as the immigrant struggle, the Chicano struggle, the struggle against discrimination. (Interview, Alejandro, 22-10-13)

After Radio Zapatista decided to develop this project, which would be called *Las voces*

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<sup>296</sup> *Rebeldía* 15:2, p. 12.

<sup>297</sup> Interview, Alejandro, 22-10-13.

*rebeldes del otro lado* (Rebel Voices From The Other Side) – a name which emphasised commonalities beyond the spatial segregation of the US-Mexico border – the compilation was put together by only one member in 2008. It contained nineteen tracks from across the United States – from East L.A. (Olmecca), to Chicago (Los Vicios de Papá), to Puerto Rico (Los Nadie) – containing an eclectic variety of musical styles, with rap, punk, ska, rock, salsa, and *trova* songs sung in mostly English and Spanish.

Although *Las voces rebeldes del otro lado* (or *Las voces*) was compiled in 2008, the project was subsequently put to one side for several years. During this time, Radio Zapatista relocated to San Cristóbal de Las Casas, Chiapas, where its members began to conduct first-hand journalism in Zapatista and Other Campaign-affiliated communities. It was as late as 2012, just before my field research in Mexico began, that the compilation was uploaded for free download on the Radio Zapatista website.<sup>298</sup> In 2013, however, during my stay in San Cristóbal, the collective decided to release a physical version of the album to coincide with the celebrations marking the tenth anniversary of the creation of the Zapatista *caracoles*. By the time I arrived to the city in April 2013, Radio Zapatista comprised only two people: Rita, a Mexican activist of just over thirty years old who had lived in Europe and Asia as well as Chiapas, and Alejandro, a Mexican author who had participated in Radio Zapatista in San Francisco for many years before moving to San Cristóbal. Instead of the secondary journalism and commentary mostly provided by Radio Zapatista in San Francisco, Rita and Alejandro focused on original reporting, and spent much time travelling to rural Chiapas to interview members of Zapatista autonomous communities or communities affiliated to the Other Campaign. After getting to know Rita and Alejandro through mutual friends in pro-Zapatista activist circles, my role as a researcher became important to the development of a physical CD of this album. Having been awarded a small research grant for a project recording Zapatista songs in rural Chiapas before encountering a series of obstacles to its completion, I was able to divert some of this grant into material costs for *Las voces*, thus falling into a slightly paradoxical position as financial backer of a project I was studying for my own doctoral dissertation. As well as financial support, I helped to manually assemble these CDs and also contributed to the group's strategic deliberations on a variety of issues. Participation in this project (one of the few occasions upon which I conducted what could be unequivocally described as “applied” research) allowed me to gain a perspective on the deliberations that lay in the background of this enterprise, incorporating financial and

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<sup>298</sup> [http://radiozapatista.org/?cat=8&tipo\\_audio=Programa&idioma=Espa%C3%B1ol](http://radiozapatista.org/?cat=8&tipo_audio=Programa&idioma=Espa%C3%B1ol) (accessed 03-12-14).

legal issues, as well as concerns about representation, the project's relationship with the Zapatista JBGs and strategies for dissemination.

The overarching goal of dissemination that motivated the *Las voces* physical CD was related to the particular social and technological contexts from which the project emerged. The packaging that the collective made for the album was deliberately cheap, lightweight and simple to assemble. Instead of hard plastic cases, we opted for clear plastic envelopes, into which we would place printed and manually folded cardboard cases that featured the album's front and back design and contained compact discs (which, in turn, we had burned using a copying tower belonging to Radio Zapatista). Once we had prepared the basic materials, we gathered together small groups to manually assemble batches of the CD. This was a time-consuming, but social and enjoyable, endeavour. This CD, then, was created for travel: it could be easily transported due to its small size and insignificant weight (especially useful for air travel) and quickly assembled elsewhere, so long as participants had the correct equipment and a pen drive carrying both the design for the front and back cover and the album's tracks. Our aim was to create a project with transnational reach, and while in Chiapas we sought to find people who could distribute it abroad, establishing new ties or strengthening pre-existing ones with individuals or groups in Australia, the United States, the United Kingdom, Brazil and Germany.

The Mexico-US relationship that the project embodied was represented in the CD's design. Having considered a number of photos for the front and back covers, we decided to use a picture of a mural painted by Alicia Siu (a Los Angeles-based artist) in a San Cristóbal house used by a Chicano activist collective called Estación Libre. The mural depicted two armed Zapatistas standing by a globe restrained by chains, and carried two slogans: one, "The great world powers have not yet found the weapon to destroy dreams", and another (in Spanish), "Brothers and sisters of other races [*razas*], of other colours, but of one heart". A friend of the collective studying graphic design who agreed to work for free made a photograph of this mural into a CD cover with album title, song titles and album details. The back cover also included a statement dedicating the project to the Zapatistas, and declaring that "The word [*palabra*] of the Zapatistas has been a cry of hope and motivation to continue with our struggles [*luchas*] on the other side of the border". Indeed, this message was directly carried to Zapatista territory when a member of Radio Zapatista visited a JBG to present the CD after I had left Chiapas in October 2013.

Finally, on the back of the CD a clause was printed affirming that “proceeds from this disc will go to the JBGs of the Zapatista communities”. This pointed towards the fact that, as Rita told me in an interview, the project had multiple aims:

One of the principal objectives is to raise funds for the *compas* [Zapatistas]. But the other main aim is that the word continue to walk [*que siga caminando la palabra*]. That is, that the Zapatista message continue to be disseminated [...] at the end of the day we as a collective might even cease to exist at some point. But the message will remain. (Interview, Rita, 19-10-13)

These differing aims came into tension with one another during our discussions about the price at which we would sell the CD. Together, Rita, Alejandro and I drew up a table outlining suggested prices for sale in different countries around the world; thus the CD would cost thirty pesos in Mexico [£1.50GBP], five pounds in the United Kingdom, and ten dollars in the United States. Our deliberations over price took several objectives into consideration. First, the sale of the CDs was aimed to raise money; second, it needed to be affordable, so that its “word” could be spread as far as possible; third, the CD had to be priced in such a way as to suggest that its contents were worth listening to. These differing aims suggested variously higher and lower prices. However, we had to take one further consideration into account. On another occasion, Rita told me that if a pro-Zapatista activist individual or group were to be found *lucrando* (“making money” or “cashing in”) from the Zapatistas’ image, the Zapatistas would (figuratively) “cut their head off”; indeed, I got to know people who had been marginalized from San Cristóbal activist circles following suspicions that they were doing just this. *Lucrando* was, however, a negotiated, subjective and uncertain concept (not least because few people openly declared their accounts in public) that greatly amplified the potential impact of hearsay. There was pressure on those collaborating on this project, then, to leaving those purchasing the album in no doubt that proceeds from it would be destined for the Zapatista communities. Correspondingly, Alejandro told me in an interview that he felt the phrase stating as such on the back cover of *Las voces* should have been printed in larger font, since “it’s part of the meaning [*sentido*] of the CD”.<sup>299</sup>

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<sup>299</sup> Interview, Alejandro, 22-10-13.





Figure 10: Front cover of *Las voces rebeldes del otro lado* CD



Figure 11: Back cover of *Las voces rebeldes del otro lado* CD

A series of fraught issues to do with finance, then, were partly exacerbated as a result of the global distribution intended for the CD. But this CD had always been transnational, communicated from mostly Latino communities of the United States to Zapatista communities in Chiapas, and in many of the songs found on it the contributing artists present very particular perspectives on Zapatismo that link it, implicitly or explicitly, to the Chicano struggle in the United States. During my three-week research stay in Los Angeles, I conducted a number of interviews with consultants who repeatedly emphasised the continuities between Chicanismo and Zapatismo, as well as a number of other causes such as the US civil rights movement. Nonetheless, some concepts that had power in the context of LA were used little in pro-Zapatista circles in Mexico. Racial terms such as “Raza” and “brownness” were highly important among Chicanos in LA, and fitted alongside the Chicano-nationalist concept of “Aztlán”, a mythical pre-Hispanic homeland for Mexicans that stretched across the Mexico-US border. The idea of Aztlán motivated many politically aware Chicanos to connect with their perceived ethnic roots by learning Nahuatl; meanwhile, “Raza” refers to ethnic groups from across Latin America but is commonly encountered in the context of racially segregated American cities such as Los Angeles. By contrast, in Chiapas (as Alejandro, who knew both contexts well, put it), indigeneity was perceived to be “not just an ethnic or even biological question” but “a plurality of elements that constitute you as indigenous”.<sup>300</sup> For example, Shannon Speed has demonstrated that the rural Chiapanecan community Nicolas Ruíz stopped self-identifying as “indigenous” by the mid-twentieth century as its population no longer spoke Tzeltal or wore indigenous dress, two key cultural markers of indigeneity (2002: 212-4). Only in interaction with human rights organizations and activist groups did its population agree to denominate itself an official “indigenous community” again, especially in recognition of the additional rights this status conferred (217-9).<sup>301</sup> This example forms part of a broader picture suggesting that indigeneity in Chiapas is most often understood as a cultural, rather than biological, category.

Such differences, which ultimately pertained to the logic upon which “identity” could be constructed, were reflected on *Las voces*. The driving chorus of the album’s tenth track, “Mexica Tiauhi” by the California-based Chicano band Para La Gente, goes as follows:

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<sup>300</sup> Interview, Alejandro, 22-10-13. Shannon Speed notes that “in Mexico, the primary identifier of an indigenous person is language” (2006: 68).

<sup>301</sup> Also see Jung, who perceives indigenous identity in Chiapas as “the condition of participation in a global political dialogue” (2003: 436).

Move with it, just move with it,  
 Just move with it, just move it forward  
 Ce, Ome, Yei, Nahui [One, Two, Three, Four  
 Mexica Tiauhi Forward, Mexico]  
 (Para La Gente, “Mexica Tiauhi”)

Para La Gente dedicated this song “*pa’ mi raza*” (to my race), while the song’s chorus cited above counts from one to four in Nahuatl. Although this tri-lingual song is the product of a post-colonial, ghettoized American city, the band links Chicanismo to Zapatismo as it attempts to break free from this urban setting. In its lyrics, “American” is depicted as a corrupt and unhealthy form of identity; the singer “need[s] water like Americans need dough”, and the “systems that govern don’t cure you, they make you ill” [these lyrics are in Spanish]. By contrast, in this song the “Zapatista gaze” [*la mirada zapatista*] provides a means through which resistance to this oppression can be realised; the singer was “born as a rebel”, and is “fighting [*luchando*] for my people” with “words [*palabras*] that are my weapons [*armas*]”. These linguistic links to the Zapatistas (the use of the words *luchar*, and *palabra* in relation to *arma*, are among the turns of phrase most easily identifiable with the Zapatista movement [cf. Subcomandante Marcos, 2001]) are underpinned by a discourse of unity: “we go advancing little by little, side by side, hand in hand, we’ll move forward, marching in the streets, from the mountains to the valleys” [Spanish].

Through their use of language, then, Para La Gente position themselves as “Zapatista” across urban and rural settings. The band incorporate the language of Zapatismo into their music far more than they openly mention this movement; thus, they are singing Zapatismo as a worldview that has been, to an extent, interiorized, naturalized, even appropriated. Equally, however, as they deploy a vocabulary highly reminiscent of Zapatismo this band also implicitly reinforces concepts of race-based kinship more closely related to Chicano activism, particularly in their use of the phrases “my people” (*mi pueblo*) and “*mi raza*” (my race). “Mexica Tiauhi”, then, presents a Zapatismo which appears to correspond to local ideas and values. Indeed, this tendency is reflected in several other songs on *Las voces*. In “Vamos” (Let’s Go), LA-based Chicana hip-hop artist Cihuatl-Ce declares herself a *guerrilla mataguera* [...] *declarando guerra* (“guerrilla white-killer [...] declaring war”) and the song opens with the declaration *vamos mi gente* (“let’s go, my people”), before the singer goes on to declare “before you shoot me, I’m gonna shoot you, like a Zapatista”. The album’s sixth track, “Sangre Iluminada” (Enlightened Blood) by LA-based band Mayazteca, opens: *iluminado por la luz penetrando a mi gente, me mantengo*

*consciente, luchando por mi gente* (“illuminated by the light penetrating my people, I remain aware, struggling for my people”). At the same time as they represent an imagined Zapatismo, these songs perpetuate an ethnic sameness based on difference of skin colour which reflects, above anything else, the logic of racial division found across the contemporary United States.

The cultural flow that these songs witness to and embody – as both the result of decades of transnational exchange of information about the Zapatista movement, and themselves sources of information about this movement – thus reveals much about the forms of social division prevalent in the racially stratified society in which they were created. However, face-to-face musical encounter made possible by travel could help to place into relief, in a more direct fashion, the differing forms of social division prevalent in the distinct contexts around the world in which pro-Zapatista activists operated. In turn, during my research, such encounter was facilitated by a compilation album entitled *Rola la lucha zapatista*, which ended up linking musicians from across the Americas with Zapatista communities in rural Chiapas.

### ***Rola la lucha zapatista (2012)***

In January 2012, activist group Coordinadora Valle de Chalco decided to create a compilation album in support of the Zapatistas, and put out an online call for contributions to their project, which opened as follows:

Faced with the outbreak of the war of extermination against indigenous peoples and of generalized repression against society [...] we believe that we must display all our creativity, put all our resources into the struggle and make use of all of the tools of dissemination that we have to hand to keep our peoples informed [...] we want to launch a musical project for the dissemination of the struggle of the Zapatista peoples which will consist of creating a compilation of songs of all genres: cumbia, hip-hop, *ranchera*, reggae, *trova*, rock, *son*, punk, *huaracha*, tango, *banda* [...] we call for you to join us in getting together musical material that shakes the hearts and the consciences of the people of our *ejidos*,<sup>302</sup> neighbourhoods, schools, cities and workplaces.

The group requested contributors wishing to express “with different rhythms the importance of the struggle of the Zapatista peoples, their advances in education, health, culture, production, communication, justice, democracy – in other words, their

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<sup>302</sup> *Ejid*os are units of communal land used for agriculture in Mexico. It has been argued that one of the causes of the Zapatista rebellion in 1994 was the 1992 constitutional reforms carried out by President Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988-94) which made *ejidos* available for sale and purchase.

autonomy”, using music to send a message that “the Zapatistas are NOT alone!” In a step that would define the direction of the project, the organizers stated that this was “not a call solely for dedicated musicians, but for all those that want to try it”, and that contributions could be of any “sonic and musical quality”. Pre-existing musical recordings could also be accepted, and would-be contributors were given about two months to contribute their songs, which would be attached in an email to the collective. Finally, the idea was that the songs would be “made available to everybody on one or several independent media [*medios libres*] websites to be downloaded, and you can spread them around [*rolar*] in your localities”. The call concluded: “Let sound the scratches, the lyres, the drums. LONG LIVE THE ZAPATISTA COMMUNITIES! LONG LIVE THE EZLN!”

Although the organizers had presumed that the project “was going to be something more or less local”,<sup>303</sup> within a few hours contributions started to arrive; eventually, almost one hundred songs were sent from artists around the world, almost all of which were accepted onto the album.<sup>304</sup> With *Las voces* shelved at this time, Radio Zapatista contributed the nineteen songs donated to them by US-based artists, and other submissions came from Germany, Argentina, Italy, Chile, and Ecuador, as well as from across Mexico. Participating musicians mostly found out about this project online. Well-known Tlaxcala reggae soundsystem artist Lengualerta, for instance, told me that he decided to contribute to this project after seeing on “the Enlace Zapatista website that there was a call. And I sent my songs, and that was it”.<sup>305</sup> Meanwhile, Akter, the lead singer of Mexico City-based ska band Cienpies (see Chapter Six) had seen

the call on the Internet, we joined, we sympathize [with] some societal issues, like the Atenco case, like the case of the Zapatistas, so we’ve been working on these issues since the band started, now seeing the call, we thought it was a good opportunity to join in the collective effort. (Cienpies, 12-06-12)

As Akter implies here, Cienpies was drawn to participate in Other Campaign events after contributing to this project, suggesting that it could form a locus around which previously unconnected activists and musicians could come to form relationships (a theme to which I will return later in this chapter). The final album, which was called *Rola la lucha zapatista* (or *Rola*) (“Spread the Zapatista Struggle”), contained 77 tracks and was made available for download on the websites of a number of independent media organizations of the

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<sup>303</sup> Interview, El Chava, 18-02-13.

<sup>304</sup> The Páramos (see Chapter 6) had some songs rejected, but only on the basis that they had sent too many.

<sup>305</sup> Interview, Lengualerta, 17-08-13.

Mexican alternative Left, such as Regeneración Radio and Rebel Sounds. Although it was theoretically possible to do so, the collective organizing the project had not gathered data on how many times the album had been downloaded; nonetheless, unbeknownst to CVDC, one user had uploaded many of the tracks on the album to YouTube, where at the time of writing many songs have achieved thousands of views, with one, “Cumbia Zapatista” by Sonido Psicotropical, on almost 9,000.<sup>306</sup>

As suggested in the initial call, very little quality control was imposed by the album’s organizers. Some of the tracks on the album, such as Cienpies’ “Sos Político” (You’re A Politician), are simply demo tracks recorded as live. One, “Liliana” by Salvador<sup>307</sup> y Raquel, was written and recorded by a singer and a poet expressly for *Rola*, with the encouragement of its organizers. This track was recorded at the very last minute, leaving the singer slightly unsatisfied with the final result: “It was a bit improvised [...] I didn’t like how I came across in the song because there was a problem with the mix, but it was a question of time”.<sup>308</sup> A key goal of the project, a CVDC activist explained, was to give an opportunity to unknown, “independent” artists who had been supporting Zapatismo without gaining much attention, and whose songs, they told me, were “of great quality because of what they represent[ed] in themselves”. This was a statement into which much could be read, but which seemed to privilege process of production and “authenticity” of expression over affective acoustic qualities.<sup>309</sup> Not all activists I got to know appreciated Coordinadora Valle de Chalco’s non-discriminating style, and some privately complained about the poor quality of certain tracks. Many, however, appreciated the artistic freedom afforded by the project, such as Lengualerta, who told me: “what I like about [*Rola la lucha zapatista*] is that it doesn’t have any filter, we’re all equal on it”.<sup>310</sup> Neither were songs expected to be explicitly pro-Zapatista – many of the album’s tracks do not mention the Zapatistas. Contributions were, however, expected to reflect a spirit of “struggle”:

If you have in your heart, if you say that this song is about struggle – it can be in general, about the political struggle, the struggle of the [indigenous] peoples, social struggle, cultural struggle, or something else [...] but yet further, if it’s about the EZLN [and] you have it in your heart and say “I want to send my song” [...] it will be welcome [...]. What interests us are the intention and message that you have in your song. (Interview, CVDC, 24-07-13)

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<sup>306</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jkXabnv\\_MIc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jkXabnv_MIc) (accessed 12-12-14).

<sup>307</sup> Although this singer is listed on *Rola* as “Salvador”, the performing name he used most often was “El Chava”.

<sup>308</sup> Interview, El Chava, 18-02-13.

<sup>309</sup> Interview, CVDC, 24-07-13.

<sup>310</sup> Interview, 17-08-13.

In addition to being a tool for dissemination of information, then, CVDC created this album to exemplify an affective sense of “struggle” that was linked to “Zapatista-ness” and came from “the heart”, as well as to embody perceived ideals of Zapatismo – particularly that of “culture from below” (Subcomandante Marcos, 2007). I was keen, therefore, to discover ways that pro-Zapatista musicians went about this task in the music that they contributed to the project.

“Liliana”, a song for solo voice and guitar specifically written for *Rola*, tells the story of a three-year-old girl whom Raquel had met in a Zapatista autonomous community in Chiapas who maintains a sense of playful joy despite material impoverishment. Liliana’s imagination allows her to transform her surroundings; she picks up a plastic bottle and plays with it as if it were her baby:

Envolvió en su rebozo una botella	She took into her shawl a bottle
Y sobre su espalda la colocó	And put it on her back
Y con la magia de su inocencia	And with the magic of her innocence
En un bebito lo convirtió	Turned it into a baby
Con sus sueños	With her dreams
da vida a las cosas muertas	she gives life to dead things
Y con su vuelo va a conjurar	And with her wings, <sup>311</sup> she’ll exorcise
La muerte y el odio	Death and hate
Y la injusticia	And injustice
Un mundo nuevo nos va a encontrar	She’ll find us a new world
(Salvador y Raquel, “Liliana”)	

In an interview, the singer (El Chava) told me that “imagination is a very powerful weapon [...] Liliana’s seemed an interesting form of resistance [...] she had no clothes to put on, or at times nothing to clean her mouth with, but she was happy with her doll. She had what she wanted”.<sup>312</sup> The imaginative transformation of humble objects in a situation of limited resources into expressions of value and beauty described in “Liliana” could be read as an analogy for this project in general, which emphasised resourcefulness and creativity over aesthetic polish. Just as the bottle may have been unimpressive to some, but was appropriated and transformed by Liliana, so the contents of *Rola* were attributed value as the property and immediate expression of the participating musicians.

Other musicians’ contributions also reflected the sense of personal experience of Zapatista life found in “Liliana”. The title of “Takiukum”, a song contributed by

<sup>311</sup> The term *vuelo*, which literally means “flight”, is difficult to translate here but could also be rendered as “freedom”, “ambition” or “imagination”, as well as the translation given here, “wings”.

<sup>312</sup> Interview, El Chava, 18-02-13.

Argentinian group Nicolas Falcoff y La Insurgencia del Caracol, refers to a Zapatista community in the municipality of Chenalhó, Chiapas which suffered paramilitary attacks just prior to the massacre in the neighbouring community of Acteal on December 22, 1997, and which was also the site of a camp for refugees fleeing violence at this time. This song, a pared-down, contemplative piece with male and female harmonizing vocals, acoustic guitar and cello, features poetic lyrics that make veiled references to the Zapatistas:

Cuando ya no hay nada que perder, y todo por cambiar	When there's nothing to lose, and everything to change
Cuando solo importa poder ser, y estar en un lugar	When all that matters is to be, And be in a place
Hombres de maíz en rebeldía parecen brillar	Men of the corn in rebellion seem to shine
Porque con el fuego y la palabra abren claridad	Because with the fire and the word They bring clarity

(Nicolas Falcoff y La Insurgencia del Caracol, "Takiukum")

In this passage, the phrases "the fire and the word" and "men of the corn in rebellion" act as signifiers for Zapatismo which are woven into an intricate, close representation of a geographically specific experience within the Zapatista milieu. Phrases strongly associated with Zapatismo, then, are incorporated into lyrics that are presented and sung as the expression of the singer's innermost feelings, performing an intimate, personal Zapatista subjectivity.

Some contributions to *Rola*, however, took a more distanced perspective on Zapatismo. Chilean hip-hop group Voces Clandestinas' "Chacana y Kultrun" (submitted as two separate mixes to the album) constructs a pan-Latin American struggle that incorporates the Mapuche indigenous peoples of Chile, the Zapatistas in Chiapas, and other leftist movements from across the continent. It opens with a sampled recording of a Mapuche chant, which is mixed with an atmospheric sample lending the song a trip-hop feel. The lyrics address "America", and narrate a unified Latin American experience of governmental repression: "The same, we're abused/we suffer the same, the same, the same, we're tortured". "Chacana y Kultrun" goes on to list, and rhetorically unite, indigenous struggles from across Latin America: "a *pasamontañas* from Chiapas; a dance from the Amazon; Victor Jara's guitar". From about the halfway point, a children's choir enters, embodying in sound the unity to which the song makes reference. A different mix of this song, which also appears on *Rola la lucha zapatista*, concretizes this pan-Latin-



Americanism with a sample from a speech by Che Guevara at the United Nations in 1964, quoting Fidel Castro's Second Declaration of Havana: "no people of Latin America is weak, because it forms part of a family of hundreds of millions of brothers [and sisters] that share the same miseries, experience the same feelings, have the same enemy, [and] dream of the same better world".

Although it is impossible to do justice to the diversity of representations of Zapatismo found on all 77 songs on this album, these three examples illustrate a variety of responses to the project's call for heartfelt contributions themed around "struggle". While some contributors to *Rola* cultivate a relationship of distanced solidarity with the EZLN and the Zapatistas, others take up a Zapatista voice in their music. "Chacana y Kultrun" plays with distance and generality, negotiating a space between geographically dispersed struggles, and using the opening sample to sonically ground the track in Chile, a context of which Voces Clandestinas may claim first-hand acquaintance. Meanwhile, both "Liliana" and "Takiukum" claim intimate knowledge of Chiapas, narrating intense, close experience. This difference in approach reflected the respective experiences of travel of these contributing musicians. Falcoff, a member of Argentinian solidarity group Red de Solidaridad con Chiapas de Buenos Aires, had been a regular visitor to Zapatista communities in Chiapas since 2006 and toured Mexico in late 2013, performing in Chiapas in August of the same year; Raquel, the poet who wrote the lyrics to "Liliana", had also spent time in Zapatista communities.<sup>313</sup> Comparisons between these songs exemplify how representations of Zapatismo on *Rola* tend to reflect pre-existing patterns of travel and participants' physical positions within "international Zapatismo" (Olesen, 2005).

Nevertheless, as I will explore in the next section, after it was released *Rola* itself became a locus around which travel among Zapatista networks – and my own research within these networks – became structured. This project, then, did not only assemble perspectives on Zapatismo from different areas, but brought together pro-Zapatista actors from different sites to perform Zapatismo in sound. Such moments of encounter, I want to argue, were crucial to the negotiation of Zapatismo itself.

### ***Rola la lucha zapatista, the offline, and travel***

Many artists participating in *Rola* were enthused by the global reach of this project. El

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<sup>313</sup> Interview, Nicolas Falcoff, 14-11-13; Interview, El Chava, 18-02-13.

Chava, for example, told me that “perhaps in England nobody’s ever going to see me [...] But when you play my song [...] my voice and my song will reach over there”.<sup>314</sup> The outward-oriented dissemination that El Chava envisaged, however, was accompanied by an opposite reaction, since *Rola* also served to bring together pro-Zapatista actors from different parts of Mexico and the world: musicians, activists, and researchers. When I arrived to Mexico in June 2012 in order to carry out exploratory research, I sought out Coordinadora Valle de Chalco who, as well as granting me an interview, put me in touch with a number of groups who had participated in *Rola*. This was a catalytic moment in my fieldwork which opened up possibilities for conducting research in digital home studios and public spaces in Mexico City. In addition, as the *Rola* project snowballed during my research it started to form a locus around which pro-Zapatista musical activity in a multiplicity of sites for communication were structured and moments of offline, face-to-face encounter experienced.

After CVDC created *Rola* as an online compilation album, other activists suggested to them that they should “make copies and distribute them” and subsequently “hold a live event to promote” this physical CD.<sup>315</sup> CDs of *Rola la lucha zapatista* were assembled by hand, and consisted of a plastic envelope, a paper cover with the album’s design and title, and a copy of the disc; they were given a price of ten pesos, which both covered the cost of production (about three pesos each) and was intended to suggest that the CD’s contents were worth listening to (the surplus was destined for Zapatista communities). A series of concerts, mostly held in public spaces, were organized to promote these CDs in Mexico City (in El Chopo, a market for alternative youth culture selling mostly rock music; outside La Karakola, a pro-Zapatista cafe and cultural space; in a public space in the borough of Magdalena Contreras; and outside the Palacio de Bellas Artes) as well as in Puebla, Valle de Chalco and Tlaxcala. At such events, a snowball effect often materialized; participating musicians living outside Mexico City would travel to the centre of the city to perform at these promotional events, get to know the organizers, and invite them to put on a similar event in their localities. Reflecting on the Tlaxcala event, one activist from Valle de Chalco stated that some *Rola* promotional concerts had become

like parties with friends, where perhaps you don’t know everybody [to begin with], but in the end [you know] everyone [...] we took a panoramic photo at the end with all the crew [*banda*] that had stayed, and all that, an awesome photo. Because at the end we were all

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<sup>314</sup> Interview, El Chava, 18-02-13.

<sup>315</sup> Interview, CVDC, 19-11-12.

sharing food, all of us who were there, [sharing] the dance, the party.<sup>316</sup>

By this point, then, the *Rola* project had moved far beyond a means of dissemination of pro-Zapatista messages: it was also a focus of conviviality, the creation of new friendships and the cultivation of community. Indeed, this was something which I also experienced; after a time visiting Other Campaign events in public spaces in Mexico City, those charged with distributing food to activists started to serve me as well, implicitly welcoming me into their group and providing a way for me to get to know participants on a personal, informal level.



Figure 12: Image shared online calling for contributions to the Rola la lucha zapatista project

<sup>316</sup> Interview, 24-07-13.

**ROLA LA LUCHA ZAPATISTA**

LENGUA ALERTA  
 MERCADO VERDE CREW  
 LUNA NEGRA COLECTIVO  
 RE CREW ERIS  
 VOCES CLANDESTINAS  
 TO CUIC LIBRE  
 ANAHUAC ROOTS  
 LIBERTARIO FYAH  
 CHAVA Y SUS ROLAS  
 NAHUA TECUANI

**HACER UNO**

**11 AM**

Miles de rabias, un corazón:  
 las comunidades zapatistas!

Acxolotl No. 12, Atlhuetzla  
 (a 15 minutos de Tlaxcala sobre la  
 carretera que va a Apizaco,  
 a 50 metros de la griega)

AR  
 Alod. Control de Represión y por  
 la Seguridad  
 COLECTIVO  
 CUARTA ESTELA

Figure 13: Online flyer for event to promote Rola la lucha zapatista in Tlaxcala

*Rola* also served to connect people who had been separated by distance, converting mediated “weak ties” into face-to-face “strong ties” (Granovetter, 1973).<sup>317</sup> Crismo, the Chilean rapper and writer introduced in Chapter Five whose band Voces Clandestinas contributed the song “Chacana y Kultrun” (see above) to *Rola* in 2012, held strong anarchist, anti-nationalist and atheist views. When he moved to Mexico City in the same year, he contacted CVDC. Responding, they invited Crismo to perform at a series of *Rola* promotional events, and he became a regular feature at Other Campaign events in Mexico City.<sup>318</sup> In attending these events, Crismo – who had arrived with few contacts in Mexico – formed friendships with the members of CVDC that went beyond Other Campaign activities. Thus, although these promotional concerts often unintentionally produced distance between musicians and the intended recipients of their “word” – as I have highlighted in Chapter Five – they were also loci for the development of new friendships. Notably, it appeared to have been in making a transition from an online to an offline project that *Rola* became a particularly potent site for the conversion of weak ties into strong ones (cf. Haythornthwaite, 2005).

For many participating musicians, however, the most emotionally significant part of this story came in August 2013. In an interview in July 2013, Laiko from Instituto del Habla, another frequent participant in events to promote *Rola*, told me of a letter he had recently received:

I opened my mail, and there was a letter. You’ll never guess who from, friend [*compa*]. From Subcomandante Marcos. The signature of Subcomandante Marcos on the letter of invitation, it was his signature. And I said “no way!” This is something else. Well, they’re inviting us to participate in some workshops that they’re going to put on [...] it’s not “Zapatista corner” [*rincón zapatista*]<sup>319</sup> any more, it’s “Zapatista nation”, no? (Interview, Laiko, 24-07-13)

To celebrate the tenth anniversary of the creation of the caracoles in August 2013, the EZLN had invited many of the musicians that had participated in *Rola* to Chiapas, to contribute to concerts in CIDECI, a small Zapatista-allied territory just outside San Cristóbal de Las Casas, and at the *caracol* of Oventik. Coordinadora Valle de Chalco were also invited to contribute to the organization of these concerts. Although many of those invited (like Instituto del Habla) were unable to afford the journey, Voces Clandestinas,

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<sup>317</sup> “Strong ties” refer to intimate, close connections between individuals such as marriage or kinship, whereas “weak ties” refer to relationships which are less frequently enacted but which, according to Granovetter, give individuals greater social advantage (1973).

<sup>318</sup> Interview, Crismo, 01-02-13.

<sup>319</sup> Rincón Zapatista is the name of a shop selling Zapatista wares and literature in Mexico City.

Mexican Sound System, To Cuic Libre, Rabia (a rock band from Mexico City), MC Lokoter, Lengualerta, El Chava, and Olmecca (a rapper from Los Angeles), all of whom had contributed to *Rola*, travelled to Chiapas to contribute to these events. They were joined by Hernan and Rigo (see Chapter Three), who had also been invited to perform.

As part of these festivities, from 8-10 August 2013 a fiesta was held in the Zapatista *caracol* of Oventik to mark the tenth anniversary of the creation of the Good Government Councils (JBGs), which was attended by many activists, independent media organizations and Zapatistas. During this fiesta, there was a roster of live music intermingling sets by Zapatista groups and outsiders who had participated in *Rola*, and which continued each day until the early hours of the morning. For many of these musicians, performing for an audience of Zapatistas in a Zapatista community was an emotionally important occasion, not least for Crismo, who told those present that this was the fulfilment of a “dream” that dated back to his time in Chile. Two days later, a concert was held at CIDECI featuring many of the same musicians, and attended by both pro-Zapatista activists and Zapatistas, to mark the beginning of the first Zapatista “Escuelita”.

These moments of face-to-face musical encounter could publically reveal relations of difference and sameness among pro-Zapatista activists that might otherwise go unrecognized. In CIDECI, Rekaxx, from Chalco-based anarchist rap group To Cuic Libre, began the band’s performance at the venue by describing the Zapatistas as a unidirectional inspiration, declaring: “On Friday we were in Oventik, it was an honour, it is an honour to walk in that place, tread this ground, and see all these people who have taught us so much about how to organize, to live the day-to-day in resistance”.<sup>320</sup> Just as Rekaxx suggested commonalities of resistance between Chiapas and Chalco, so Crismo united different experiences by emphasising common enemies: “I want to unleash [...] rancour against the damn bad government, the damn police, the pigs, the politicians, those that sell off the land [...] long live the Good Government Councils!” Noticeably, in doing so he momentarily assumed a Zapatista voice, deploying well-known Zapatista rhetoric and concerns about the monetization of land alongside opposition to a common enemy within hip-hop *barrio* culture, the police. Crismo and Rekaxx were both staunch anarchists who were, in some areas, critical of Zapatismo; for instance, Crismo told me

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<sup>320</sup> These performances were broadcast live on Regeneración Radio, and recordings of them are available for download online at the following address: <http://www.regeneracionradio.org/index.php/autonomia-m/item/3986-presentaciones-del-concierto-en-cideci-por-inicio-de-la-escuelita-zapatista> (accessed 12-12-14).

that he was intuitively sceptical about the Zapatistas' formation of governments (JBGs).<sup>321</sup> During these moments, nonetheless, both highlighted commonalities over differences, consciously producing Zapatismo as a Castellsian "project identity" (Castells, 2010; cf. Osumare, 2001).

Nonetheless, at other moments in his CIDECI performance, Crismo sought to openly, even provocatively, highlight difference. Alongside being an anarchist, Crismo perceived religion – and especially the authoritarian figure of God – as a hindrance to human freedom. In his performance at CIDECI he performed a song, "Ateos" (Atheists), which foregrounded a critique of the religion which, he nonetheless recognized, was a significant part of ritual life within Zapatista communities. In a later account of the event, Crismo described this moment as follows:

I sang many songs, but I remember one in particular, a song called "Ateos" [Atheists], with lyrics completely critical of the religious institution and the loss of the human will under the omnipotence of the iconography of the concept of God. Even going against the suggestions of many who recommended that I not do this because I was in a place with religious force, pointing at a picture hung up on the wall of a bishop very dear to the Zapatistas. (Appendix 4)

Crismo introduced "Ateos" by alluding to "respect": "I don't want to be stubborn and aggressive towards people who are believers, who I respect a lot, but now I'm going to give you the reasons I continue to be an atheist". The song itself lists a litany of human suffering and misery, before concluding "It's the innocents who suffer, open your eyes [...] Your God does not exist, your God has never been by your side; in his name they destroyed cultures". Crismo's performance thus touched upon a vulnerable point within the Zapatista movement: the tense coexistence between mostly Catholic Zapatistas and their supporters, many of whom held negative opinions about "religion" as a category.

Other artists performing at this event highlighted other differences in underlying social values. During his concert at the venue, LA-based Chicano rapper Olmecca, a contributor to both *Rola* and *Las voces*, performed his song "Browning of America", a bilingual song critiquing attitudes to immigration in the United States. Prior to performing it, Olmecca was drawn to provide an explanation of the song's themes, in which he talked at some length about the "politics of race" of the United States. His translation of the word "browning" was particularly worthy of note; since the closest word to the English "brown" in Spanish is *café* (literally the colour of coffee), the rapper rendered this word *encaféciendo*. While, on the one hand, Olmecca indexically linked this translation to Zapatismo (specifically the 2001 "March of the Colour of the Earth") by describing *café* as

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<sup>321</sup> Interview, Crismo, 01-02-13.

the “colour of the earth”, he ended his talk by tentatively questioning whether “you say it like that [*encafeciendo*] in Spanish”. The fact that the word *café* was almost never associated with race in Mexican Spanish had to do with the reality that, as discussed earlier in this chapter, the overt politics of ethnicity in Mexico were far less focused on supposedly “biological” categories of skin colour than in the United States.<sup>322</sup> At this moment, by attempting to translate American racial politics into this new context, Olmeca made clear the contrast between divergent schema of social division in the United States and Mexico. As such, he effectively foregrounded the possibility for miscommunication and difference within Zapatismo, as a worldview that individuals from a vast range of backgrounds used to make sense of their lives.

Similar musical moments of encounter among pro-Zapatista actors also took place in nearby San Cristóbal, which underwent something of a transformation during August 2013. The festivities in Zapatista communities attracted a critical mass of pro-Zapatista activists who, briefly, casually flooded the city’s public and commercial spaces with Zapatista messages and images. Several musicians who had contributed to *Rola* performed in commercial spaces in San Cristóbal over this time. In Café Bar Revolución and El Paliacate (see Chapter Three), musicians Lengualerta, Olmeca, Mexican Sound System and Chilean singer Moyenei contributed to concerts attended by large crowds of pro-Zapatista activists. Here, support for the Zapatistas was made explicit through musical performance in spaces where, during other times of the year, it tended to bubble beneath the surface. Thus, in Café Bar Revolución, Mexican Sound System’s singer Gabo Revuelta dedicated part of his performance “to sexual tolerance”, saying that “we have an open mind and we work for *a world in which many worlds fit*”, alluding to the well-known Zapatista slogan here italicized, before asking “yes or no” and eliciting a loud cheer from the audience.<sup>323</sup> On another occasion, at a concert in El Paliacate, Lengualerta introduced his song “Somos” (“We Are”, a song which appeared on *Rola*) as “a homage to the Zapatista communities”, drawing enthusiastic cheers from a supportive crowd. The song’s chorus is constructed around a single phrase:

Somos un ejército de soñadores	We are an army of dreamers
Y por eso somos invencibles	Because of that, we’re invincible

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<sup>322</sup> See Moreno Figueroa (2010), who argues that Mexican society sustains a *mestizo*-dominated discourse of “racelessness” which effectively allows underlying but never-discussed racist values privileging whiteness of skin to be perpetuated.

<sup>323</sup> I am unsure of the extent to which homosexuality is accepted within Zapatista communities. However, it is otherwise clear that these communities tend to follow a similar patriarchal model to that of most other indigenous societies in Chiapas.



This short phrase is taken from a letter written by Subcomandante Marcos to Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano in 1994,<sup>324</sup> and carries several implications. These words suggest strength in unity, which is reinforced by acts of imagination or “dreaming”; further, the declaration “we’re invincible” implies an unspecified antagonism, another party against whose potential attack this invincibility might be tested. Finally, when putting the two lines together, a tragic interpretation presents itself: dreamers can, and perhaps must, conquer death with the imagination (thus, for example, “Zapata lives!”) as part of their resistance, setting harsh material reality against allegorical thought. During Lengualerta’s performance of “Somos” in El Paliacate, the collectivity alluded to by this phrase was enacted and embodied, singer and activist crowd exuberantly singing the chorus together.

This moment of encounter, then, allowed for the performance of Zapatismo as a collective identity, even between individuals with otherwise radically different worldviews. In other words, this moment – and others like it – facilitated the expression and enactment of a particular aspect of pro-Zapatista activists’ “composite identities” in a significant “communicative space” (Dahlgren, 2009). The lyrics of “Somos” emphasise unity and togetherness, and present an inclusive message likely to alienate few; here, their performance enjoined the audience, however briefly, to identify as “Zapatista” in a moment of co-presence enabled through travel. They facilitated the temporary and residual transcendence of the fragmented “Zapatismos” (pertaining to anarchists, Christians, socialists, environmentalists, and any number of other groups [Rovira, 2008: 45-6]) that could arise over mediated, distanced communication (Kowal, 2002: 115). It was during moments like these that one began to sense the importance of music to the ongoing achievement of transnational Zapatismo, as a medium that brought people together into communicative spaces in which sameness and difference could be expressed, explored, and negotiated.

## Conclusion

While the organizers and participants of *Rola la lucha zapatista* and *Las voces rebeldes del otro lado* lent value to these projects as means for dissemination of messages in favour of Zapatismo, in this chapter I have suggested ways in which these compilation albums may be understood to have contributed to, and strengthened, social relations between activists and musicians participating in this social movement by providing opportunities for travel

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<sup>324</sup> See <http://palabra.ezln.org.mx/comunicados/1994/1994.htm> (accessed 12-12-14).

and encounter. *Rola* and *Las voces* facilitated the development of online ties between disconnected individuals and groups creating music in solidarity with the Zapatistas from positions of comparative isolation. Often, this music reflected distinct logics of social division that, in turn, suggested particular contexts, while assuming the guise of a “Zapatista voice” constructed on the basis of phrases and terminology strongly associated with Zapatismo. In a number of cases, these online ties became transformed, through travel and face-to-face encounter, into close friendships upon which further organization could be built. Furthermore, in providing opportunities for pro-Zapatista activists from different parts of the globe to meet one another, these projects created spaces – to different degrees ephemeral and lasting (such as fleeting, acoustically produced public space or a material compact disc) – for individuals to group together and collectively identify as “Zapatista”. This often involved locating and performing commonalities that could unite pro-Zapatista actors at particular times and in certain spaces. Thus, in some contexts there emerged the implicit negotiation of a Zapatista “project identity”, as individuals consciously sought to locate and emphasise common ground between pro-Zapatista actors. Equally, the performances of some musicians during moments of musical encounter within pro-Zapatista circles revealed or hinted at difference, especially regarding logics of social division. Although some musicians clearly aimed to perform the latter rather than the former, it would be a mistake to position “sameness” and “difference” as polar opposites in this context; indeed, the Other Campaign has been built upon a recognition of differences, as well as continuities, in social struggles among pro-Zapatista actors.

The case studies examined in this chapter support the argument made by Chadwick (2013) and Bimber et al. (2012) that media ecologies matter more than individual technologies of communication, and that groups empower themselves by using hybrids of different media technologies; the new and the old in conjunction. In this context, the trajectory of *Rola la lucha zapatista* – which began as an online project and drew its participants, step-by-step, into the immanent world of live music – may be instructive: here, music became pulled towards face-to-face social relations, resisting its initial abstraction into the online realm. This project saw participants travel across the alternative mediascape already outlined in this dissertation, performing music produced in home studios (Chapter Six) in public spaces (Chapters Four and Five) and commercial spaces (Chapter Three), as well as in Zapatista territory in rural Chiapas (Chapters One and Two). It is best, then, to recognize these projects as loci for the emergence of cultural

flows across a variety of media, rather than isolated online endeavours. In turn, the recognition of such media hybridity and interconnectedness may help to challenge Kowal's picture of network "fragmentation", and illustrate how detached "Zapatismos" arising in different social contexts may, upon occasion, be brought together.

New media technologies, especially those closely linked to the Internet, are associated in some scholarly literature with processes of individualization (Bennett and Segerberg, 2013: 1). Such scholarship, however, invites us to enquire about the connections between identity and the social uses of media technologies in practice. What would a Zapatista identity reflecting media nomadism, hybridity, and interdependence look like? Uneven and complex, quite probably; fluid, almost certainly, in a way that suggests far more complexity than a technological-determinist picture would allow. Perhaps the problem, then, lies not in understanding media,<sup>325</sup> but in understanding identity beyond the archetypal Western "in-dividual" self. "Zapatista identity", like any other, is highly fluid and changeable, being expressed in different ways according to distinct social, political, spatial, and legal contexts. Just as the musical practices studied throughout this dissertation highlight such difference as it arose in diverse settings, so the live musical performances examined in the final part of this chapter provided a platform for this difference to be negotiated in sound.

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<sup>325</sup> See McLuhan (1964).

## CONCLUSION

After a year of research from October 2012 to October 2013, and nineteen months processing my research data and writing up the results, I returned to Mexico from May to August 2015. By this time, the political climate in the country had dramatically changed. On 26 September 2014, municipal police in the southern state of Guerrero – probably accompanied by the federal police and the Army – attacked a convoy of students from the Escuela Normal Rural de Ayotzinapa (Ayotzinapa Rural Teachers' College), killing six people (including a driver and a football player) and forcibly disappearing forty-three students, almost all of whom remain unaccounted for at the time of writing.<sup>326</sup> In response to this attack, a broad base of Mexican activist groups, both Zapatista-sympathetic and otherwise, organized a series of ongoing protests. From 26 to 28 June 2015, nine months after the massacre, protesters filled the Explanada outside Bellas Artes for forty-three hours with music, panel discussions and theatre held in a number of performing areas on a scale that far surpassed the Other Campaign events I had previously attended.

These occurrences helped to place my research with pro-Zapatista groups in a broader context. On the one hand, outrage against murder and forced disappearance was not the exclusive territory of those ideologically opposed to the very existence of the Mexican state and supportive of the Zapatista movement. On the other, strong affinities did emerge between Zapatismo and the Ayotzinapa protests: one of the first things a number of the parents of the forty-three disappeared students did after 26 September 2014 was to meet with representatives of the EZLN in Chiapas.<sup>327</sup> In addition, in May 2015 several of these parents undertook a European tour coordinated by Other Campaign-affiliated groups based in various countries across Europe, during which they visited human rights organizations and held discussions with government representatives.

In Mexico, the Other Campaign had been isolated even among the wider Left, and Zapatismo the recipient of scant media attention. It is probable that the majority of solidarity events put on by the Other Campaign failed in their stated objective to use music and other forms of art to “raise awareness” about Zapatismo among the general

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<sup>326</sup> <http://www.proceso.com.mx/?p=391382> (accessed 22-07-15).

<sup>327</sup> <http://www.telesurtv.net/english/news/Ayotzinapa-Families-to-Meet-with-Zapatistas-20141115-0019.html> (accessed 30-06-15).

public. Projects aiming to produce and disseminate music by Zapatista groups containing defined messages appear, on the evidence presented here, to have had an even less realistic prospect of effectively “spreading the word”. Nonetheless, there was an important gap between pro-Zapatista actors’ prevailing rhetoric of “dissemination” and the effects of the activities structured around it.

Many scholars have emphasised the importance of unintended consequences of communicative activity, emphasising that “the meanings that emerge (in ongoing fashion) from communication are unlikely to be isomorphic with the original intentions of the multiple participants engaged in it” (Cooren et al., 2011: 1152). Specifically in relation to music, Turino (2008: 16-20) has highlighted the political potential inherent in the gap between the “possible” and the “actual” that musical experience and practice provide. Musical activities, for Turino, have particular value because they bring people together, create community, the possibility for identification and ephemeral unification with others (18-19). In a similar vein, Hesmondhalgh argues that music “represents a remarkable meeting point of intimate and social realms” which gains particular power due to its “semiotic indefiniteness” (2013: 2, 16).

Correspondingly, Other Campaign activities had rarely recognized effects that were best perceived, perhaps, during times of crisis. Small-scale live concerts in public parks and squares helped reinforce Other Campaign groups’ claims to public space, and created and refreshed links between activists, both musicians and organizers. At these events, the routine performance of support for the EZLN through music helped to maintain Zapatismo through different times as a shared identity. Compilation albums such as *Rola la lucha zapatista* brought together pro-Zapatista musical activity from a variety of places, and connected musical practices that activists considered to be examples of *autogestión* – a notion that was highly flexible but which, as I have argued, tended to implicitly refer to spaces of perceived creative freedom. In these activities, Zapatismo formed a locus around which the capacity (or even “human capital” [Coleman, 1988]) to organize could be maintained. In turn, this meant that when unexpected events like the Ayotzinapa attacks occurred, pro-Zapatista groups were ready, organized and equipped to support a civil society response.

In this dissertation, my principal point of departure is twofold: (1) that Zapatismo, in Chiapas, Mexico City and elsewhere, can be characterized as a missionary social movement, given the pervasiveness of the related goals of “spreading the word” and “carrying the message” in pro-Zapatista circles; (2) that pro-Zapatista activists have

often used music of a great variety of genres in order to effect such a communicative strategy. In the Lacandon Jungle during the EZLN's clandestine period (1983-94), indigenous members of the organization used music as a means to spread a message favouring armed struggle; in Los Altos after 1994, the EZLN created a music label that produced and disseminated compact discs of songs with messages aimed towards pro-Zapatista solidarity actors. Later on, in San Cristóbal de Las Casas, a local singer called Hernán performed many of the same songs in a restaurant with the aim of "awakening" his audience with the pro-Zapatista messages they contained. Mexico City-based Other Campaign activist musicians used music to disseminate pro-Zapatista messages in public spaces, and worked in digital home studios to create music with similar messages that they could subsequently disseminate online. Finally, the 2012 creation of the online compilation album *Rola la lucha zapatista* brought together a number of these practices in order to raise awareness about the Zapatista movement. Continuity between these diverse activities, then, emerged in the use of music as a medium for the communication of political messages and information.

In order to achieve the goal of disseminating political messages through music, this study shows pro-Zapatista actors manoeuvring in ways which occasionally created tensions between pragmatic strategy and dogmatic principle. In Chapter Two I positioned some of the compact discs produced by Zapatista music label Producciones Radioinsurgente as part of a strategy for cultivating ties with pro-Zapatista solidarity activists, and for representing the Zapatista movement before a global audience. In Chapter Three, the tensions involved in appropriating Zapatista songs for performance as background music in a restaurant in San Cristóbal de Las Casas were highlighted. I pointed out that in order to communicate pro-Zapatista stories and messages, these songs also had to contribute to this restaurant's profit-making strategy. Finally, in Chapter Seven we saw how the organizers of pro-Zapatista compilation albums negotiated a context in which creating profit on the back of the Zapatista image was understood to be morally reprehensible, while distributing CDs for free would send an implicit message that its contents were not worth the recipient's attention. Pro-Zapatista actors were often led to perform strategic roles in order to support the overarching purpose of spreading political messages, sometimes placing themselves into conflictive or compromising social positions, or even contributing to processes to which they were opposed, as was the case with Hernán's performances in a high-end restaurant in San Cristóbal de Las Casas.

Nonetheless, the argument presented in this dissertation is that the

communication of messages, while being a key structuring concept for pro-Zapatista musical activity, was not the most important feature of such activity in practice. Although dissemination of “the word” held a dominant position within the emic discourse of these pro-Zapatista actors, in this dissertation I look beyond the abstract, linear, one-way model of communication critiqued by James W. Carey in his book *Communication as Culture* (2009). As discussed in the Introduction to this dissertation, Carey sought to reposition “communication” as the co-present, ritual process through which a common reality – or culture – was formed. Further, Carey argued that the modern English linguistic division between “physical travel” and “communication” was rooted in nineteenth-century technological change (2009: 14-17; cf. Carey, 1998); thus, he created an opening for understandings of communication that moved beyond such dualist distinctions.

In a similar vein, this study portrays music as an unavoidably social, ritual, sonic, and material activity that cannot be reduced to a “vehicle for discourse” despite, perhaps, the best efforts of some pro-Zapatista activist musicians. I am interested in the ways that acts of communication serve to construct networks, organizations or entities across space, something reflected in the spatial organization of this study, which traces Zapatismo across local and global settings. Correspondingly, I highlight social dynamics that often went unrecognized within the discourses of pro-Zapatista musicians seeking to “spread the word”. Chapters One and Two pointed out ways that songs with pro-Zapatista messages were used to encourage different types of communities and relations, both under the expanding EZLN in the clandestine period and in post-uprising Chiapas, where the EZLN used compact discs to communicate with a network of nationally- and transnationally-rooted Zapatista sympathizers. In Chapter Three, I connected the performance of Zapatista songs in a restaurant for the purpose of “spreading the word” with processes of gentrification occurring in the historic centre of San Cristóbal de Las Casas. Chapter Five examined tensions between “presentational” and “participatory” modes of performance at Other Campaign events in Mexico City, arguing that the former was a privilege mostly afforded to pro-Zapatista musicians not dependent on these events as a source of income, and highlighting presentational performance as a source of prestige through which activist identity could be maintained and reinforced. Meanwhile, Chapter Six looked at the ways in which recording Zapatismo in sound inspired, and relied upon, the creation of digital home studios that reflected a Zapatista ideal of autonomy. Finally, in Chapter Seven I showed how *Rola la lucha zapatista* facilitated the cultivation and strengthening of local, national and international ties between pro-

Zapatista activist groups. While dissemination certainly occurred in each of these settings, it may not have been the most important effect of musically “spreading the word”; instead, a complex range of social dynamics emerged from this activity that involved the cultivation of group ties, the production and contestation of space, and the construction and contestation of “Zapatismo” itself. These gaps between the stated aim of activist musical practice and its effects, I argue, are vital to understanding the contemporary Zapatista movement.

In these settings, different identities associated with Zapatismo were activated through the performance of music in distinct contexts. Thus, Comandante David’s songs narrated a religious Zapatismo which aimed to persuade indigenous Catholics of the need for armed rebellion, while much of the music produced by Producciones Radioinsurgente positioned Zapatismo alongside a pan-Latin-American workers’ struggle, sidestepping the question of religious belief. In Mexico City, support for the EZLN was incorporated within an Other Campaign narrative that emphasised the importance of local activism, and aligned Zapatismo with a plethora of related causes, such as the conflict in Atenco in 2006 and the Acteal massacre of 1997. As they used digital home studios for the production of music, pro-Zapatista musicians in Mexico City positioned Zapatismo within an anti-state nationalism emerging from what was understood as the authentic creativity of the Mexican people.

In each of these cases, Zapatismo was “ventriloquated” (Cooren, 2010) in different ways, leading to the emergence of significant disjunctions between pro-Zapatista actors in these settings. For example, many pro-Zapatista activist musicians, such as the Chilean rapper Crismo and Chalco-based rapper Rekaxx, were anarchists with an ideological opposition to organized religion that belied the (musically expressed) religiosity of most indigenous Zapatistas in Chiapas. Indeed, the national and transnational geographical scope of Zapatismo presents a challenge: what practices can make this “imagined movement” meaningful across such a vast area, encompassing radically different social settings? How may diverse pro-Zapatista actors from distinct backgrounds who view Zapatismo through often radically different perspectives meaningfully share a “Zapatista identity”, or construct Zapatismo together? One answer suggested by this study is that these practices must negotiate sameness and difference in a way that activates relevant meanings of “Zapatista-ness” in different contexts. I have addressed these questions in the final chapter of this dissertation by examining music in movement, suggesting that travel and face-to-face encounter in new sites of musical



communion may help to create strong collective, affective senses and experiences of Zapatismo that, for many people, can move beyond this social movement's various context-contingent manifestations. Thus, the vision of "Zapatismo" presented in this study is one of an agonistic practice which is subject to continual re-creation and contestation: that is, an entity constituted in (musical) communication.

This study, therefore, contributes to knowledge in two key areas. First, it sheds light on the Zapatista movement by examining the music produced by indigenous Zapatistas and pro-Zapatista activist musicians in various sites across Mexico and the world. Taking a musical perspective allows us to perceive points of convergence and divergence within the Zapatista movement regarding, for example, religion, nationalism and indigeneity, and consider how tensions between these differing understandings of Zapatismo are socially and culturally negotiated. Second, this study can help us position music as a complex communicative practice, and thus better understand the multiple intersections between music and politics. "Musicking" (Small, 1998) is an emotional, social, bodily, ritual activity, and we should be especially drawn to focus on these elements of musical practice at those precise moments that they are sidelined – in this case through a discourse emphasising music's role as an aural "vehicle" for political text. In aiming to "spread the word" through music, I have argued that pro-Zapatista activists were establishing a set of social and power relations that affected space, social ties, organization and the shared reality constructed by participants in this movement.

Such gaps between discourse and praxis may be highly important for processes of political change. After all, we arguably live at a historical moment in which the control of large multinational entities and governments has come to depend increasingly on knowledge (Higgs, 2001; Coleman, 2003). Moreover, communication studies has a history of complicity with power; in the postwar United States, this field was fundamentally influenced by commercial and government funding to focus on "useful" transmission-based knowledge that could serve the country's interests abroad (Simpson, 1995). However, musical practice may be especially difficult to "know" about because it is inherently multifaceted: a social, acoustic, bodily, affective and usually visual activity, as well as one frequently conditioned by (linguistic) discourse. Although it arises within fields of power relations, music may offer opportunities for the evasion of this kind of control due to its very complexity. Despite typically being difficult to contain or constrict with everyday language, musical practice can serve as a powerful focus for the development of political organization and communities, as documented in this dissertation. This is to say

that, as well as being highly elusive – and even considered by many to be “non-*efficacious*” (Cross, 2001: 4-7) – musical practices frequently exert power in little-discussed ways.

In Chapter Five, I discussed the concept of “communicative waste” in relation to Other Campaign activist musicianship in Mexico City. In a direct sense, the musical activities explored in this chapter, as well as in this dissertation as a whole, were “wasteful”; pro-Zapatista musicians and activists often organized to disseminate messages to small or non-existent audiences, expending a great deal of effort for very little immediately perceptible gain. Nonetheless, as discussed above, in the wake of the 2014 Ayotzinapa attacks these activities suddenly exposed forms of utility which had previously been difficult to perceive. This occurrence thus directly revealed the political potential of the gaps between rhetoric, practice and experience that frequently arise within music-making. I want to end this study by suggesting that it may be part of the task of politically engaged ethnomusicology to explore these gaps, especially as they relate to activist practice. At the present juncture thoughtful, considered, and – above all – committed study of these gaps in protest musicianship may be invaluable for those seeking to use scholarship to effect positive change. We may learn to better understand, and participate in, social movements across a multiplicity of settings if we make an effort to listen to them, and experience the sounds they make.

## APPENDICES

### *Appendix 1. Consent form*

#### ***Documento de consentimiento***

Yo, ..... acepto participar en el proyecto de investigación que está realizando Andrew Green como parte de sus estudios de doctorado en el campo de la etnomusicología. Confirmando que entiendo los propósitos y el tema de su proyecto y sé que puedo retirar mi consentimiento del proyecto en cualquier momento.

Acepto que Andrew Green use mi nombre en este estudio      Sí      No

Firma

#### ***Documento de Consentimiento***

Yo, Andrew Green, confirmo que he explicado los propósitos de mi investigación a..... Acepto que puede retirar su consentimiento de participar en mi estudio en cualquier momento, y que en tal situación me puede contactar por correo [andrew.green.2011@live.rhul.ac.uk](mailto:andrew.green.2011@live.rhul.ac.uk). Me comprometo a mantener su anonimato a menos que me indique en este documento que acepte identificarse.

Firma,

*Appendix 2. Liberation theology liturgical songs sung in Chiapas prior to 1994. (Taken from Estrada Saavedra, 2007: 269-71)*

“Iglesia bonita”<sup>328</sup>

Hoy renace de nuevo la Iglesia  
Toda engalanada de fraternidad  
El dolor de los oprimidos  
Le está doliendo en el corazón  
Y recobra su fuerza de siglos  
Para conquistar nuestra liberación  
[...]  
Eres eco de los profetas  
Eres reflejo del salvador  
Eres árbol que a diario florece  
Porque tu retoño es la herencia de Dios

Today the Church is born again  
All adorned with fraternity  
The pain of the oppressed  
Is hurting its heart  
And it recovers its centuries-old strength  
To win our freedom  
  
You are an echo of the prophets  
You are a reflection of the Saviour  
You are a tree that flourishes each day  
Because your shoot is God's legacy

“Va a ser tan bonito”

Cuando el muro de la opresión  
Sea destruido desde el corazón  
Voy a cantar  
Cuando no haya imposición  
Y del pueblo sea su decisión  
Voy a cantar  
Cuando al fin las armas sean cambiadas  
Por arado, hospitales y aulas  
Voy a cantar  
Cuando sea la verdad escuchada  
La mentira por fin desterrada  
Voy a cantar

When the wall of oppression  
In the heart is destroyed  
I'll sing  
When there is no imposition  
And the people's will be done  
I'll sing  
When finally arms are exchanged  
For ploughs, hospitals and classrooms,  
I'll sing  
When the truth is listened to  
And lies finally banished  
I'll sing

“Cuando el pobre crea en el pobre”

Cuando el pobre crea en el pobre  
man  
Ya podemos cantar libertad  
Cuando el pobre crea en el pobre  
man  
Construiremos la fraternidad  
[...]  
Todos nos comprometemos  
en la mesa del Señor

When the poor man believes in the poor  
man  
We can sing of freedom  
When the poor man believes in the poor  
man  
We will construct fraternity  
  
We all commit ourselves  
At the Lord's table

<sup>328</sup> This song can be attributed to Roberto Vizcarra.

A construir en este mundo el amor	To create love in this world
Que al luchar por los hermanos	That, in fighting for our brothers
Se hace la comunidad	We create community
Cristo vive en la solidaridad	Christ lives in solidarity
Cuando el pobre crea en el pobre man	When the poor man believes in the poor man
Nace la organización	Organization is born
Es que empieza nuestra liberación	This is where our organization begins

### *Appendix 3. BURNE project in La Realidad, Chiapas*

In 2008, a university-based collective called BURNE<sup>330</sup> carried out a recording project with a Zapatista band in La Realidad, a JBG located in the remote Lacandon Jungle. BURNE was formed of a core of about ten students that had been visiting Zapatista communities during academic holidays since 2001 to work on a variety of projects.<sup>331</sup> As several were students of history, they became interested in Zapatista corridos for the historical narratives they contained:

If you wanted to do an interview about the organization, they'd tell you “no, there are things that we don't talk about [...] there are things that, weapons and things like that, we're not going to discuss”. But conversely, in music, they did tell us what we asked about. So we said, there's their history!<sup>332</sup>

BURNE proposed a recording project to the JBG at La Realidad, which was accepted. The collective then recorded an album of songs written and performed by a local Zapatista group called Grupo Juvenil 16 de Septiembre, and made a short documentary about Zapatista music. The thematic scope of almost all of these songs was limited to Chiapas, and they mostly recounted occurrences that had taken place as part of the EZLN's struggle for territory in the region. However, no means of recording music, such as that run by Producciones Radioinsurgente, existed in this area, and as such participants had to bring their own recording equipment, which in this instance consisted of a single analogue tape recorder. Since there was no soundproof space in which to record, initial recordings were full of the sounds of the jungle, which had to be removed later using digital audio software, after the original tapes were digitalized in Mexico City. A physical CD (with original designs created for free by a friend of the group) was then made of these digitalized tracks in an initial batch of five hundred. These CDs were sold for 100 pesos (£5 GBP) each, with the profits being sent back to the Good Government Council at La Realidad to contribute to the Banco Popular Zapatista (Zapatista Popular Bank), a fund used to sponsor development projects in autonomous communities. In 2008, BURNE launched a drive to promote the CD in Mexico City, organizing a free concert in Multiforo Alicia, an alternative cultural and political forum, in June of that year featuring live *son* and ska. This concert was advertised with a flyer carrying the slogans “Zapatista corridos: music of freedom” and “Buy a CD and support the Banco Popular Zapatista”.

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<sup>330</sup> “Brigada Universitaria de la Realidad a la Nueva Esperanza”. This collective no longer exists, but the research in this Appendix is based on interviews with two former participants.

<sup>331</sup> One of the projects they worked on was called “Semillitas del Sol”, and is discussed in Barmeyer (2009: 151); it was initially introduced by an Italian collective and slowly appropriated by local populations to better suit their goals.

<sup>332</sup> Interview, Hugo, 31-01-13.

*Appendix 4. Crismo's written account of his performance in CIDECI, Chiapas, August 2013*

Before performing at CIDECI for the concert opening the Zapatista Escuelita, I had a lovely image about what it might be like, but in the end it didn't work out like that. I have an almost dark memory of what happened. The place was very inviting and the atmosphere celebratory. There appeared at the beginning a type of rebellious joy on the part of those attending, until the musical groups and artists arrived to open the Escuelita. Lots of bands, well-known and unknown, Mexican and foreign. Some were really good groups, and others were terrible.

A few minutes passed and they started to play. One could see the people laugh and dance, share together in a really positive way, and I even participated in that sensation of conviviality. A few hours passed, while the attendees came and went; many had to leave to get to their designated communities, especially those furthest away, while others continued to arrive from different places around the world, and as such the place was never empty. Then, everything started to blur in my head, and instead of being a transgressive and revolutionary event – as I had imagined it – it transformed into a party of hippy specimens and pseudo-intellectuals from all corners of the globe. Happy to have the opportunity of a real revolutionary experience, just to ornament their [revolutionary] political discourse, and even better if their favourite postmodern artists were there, welcoming them. Many groups went onstage, we already had a list of all those who were going to perform in their moment, with a pre-allocated time slot, which was to be respected so everyone could participate in the spectacle. (I speak in the first person because I was part of the organization of the event at the time, together with the *coordinadora* [CVDC].) Many groups didn't respect this at all, some argued, saying things under their breath, faces sombre, an unpleasant, terrible moment.

I closed the event, but only after waiting several hours through the spectacle of the most well-known singers and others with the patronage of the chieftains of the Other Campaign. The Other Campaign, from what I can see and from what others have told me, only has the Zapatista image, nothing more; it's like seeing a political party more radical than the others, but just as bureaucratic. Personally, I think the music of Voces Clandestinas is not for parties, and even less to be shared with groups who compete with profuse selfishness and a greedy demeanour. Because of this, after suffering through all the pantomimes of the artists, many songs without sense, groups that thought they were the ninth wonder of the world, after hearing repetitive shouts of "Zapatista lives, the struggle continues", all the feigned atmosphere and the weariness in my head, it was my turn.

I took the microphone, with loads of people in front of me, and one section of the Zapatista organizers who were spending the night in CIDECI; I dared, without doubting myself, to say that my song was something different to all the groups that had just performed. I wanted to break the crystal ball of the utopian revolution that cast its shadow over everyone. "I'M NOT HERE TO SING THAT ZAPATA LIVES, I COME TO FILL YOU WITH HATRED AGAINST THE SYSTEM", or something like that, was what I declared. I had been looking for something transgressive and anarchistic; I didn't find it, so I did it myself. I sang many songs, but I remember one in particular, a song called "Ateos" (Atheists), with lyrics completely critical of the religious institution and the loss of the human will under the omnipotence of the iconography of the concept of God. This went against the suggestions of many who recommended that I not [sing this song] because I was in a place with religious force, pointing at a picture hung up on the wall of a bishop very dear to the Zapatistas. My rage overcame, and I sang with all my energy, as I always do. I didn't charge a single peso and don't know if the others performing did. I had a really good reception from the audience there, but nobody

danced or sang. I saw them with their faces full of hatred. That was my intention.

It is worth mentioning that what I experienced in CIDECI is not comparable, not minimally, to what I experienced in Oventic, where I felt another atmosphere and more mutual help; where I could share with some people from this community and speak without civil codes or pleasantries. And that's what I most cherish from my memories of Chiapas, with friends smiling and rebel commitment. Where I could collaborate in a better way with the artists, who in other places support with the same relish, all the social events – I'm talking about To Cuic Libre, Mexican Sound System, Rabia, and many more.


I'm nobody and nothing; just saying what my mental freedom drives me to say. But for the moment this is ALL I can say about my experience of San Cristóbal.


*Appendix 5. Translations of Tzeltal liturgical songs sung in the Ocosingo/Altamirano region of Chiapas prior to 1994, accompanied with melodies of first verse and chorus. Taken from a book of hymns entitled C'ayojin yu'un tseltalotic, and melodies transcribed as sung by one of the author's consultants. Translated with the help of the staff of the Curia of the Cathedral of San Cristóbal de Las Casas*

### Lecubuc jc'uxlejaltic

### Improve our way of life

Tenor  Tse'-eluc co' - tan - tic quer - ma - no Tse'-eluc co' - tan - tic ta a'tel

T.  Ay quip - tic lec ay - o - ti - c Jo - co - yal te Ca - jual - tic

Tenor  Ca'-be-tic yi - pal quer - ma-no P'i - ju - buc te co' - tan - tic Lec - u -

T.  buc te ca' - tel - tic Lec - u - buc j - cux - le - jal - tic

Tse'eluc co'tantic quermano  
Tse'eluc co'tantic ta a'tel  
Ay quiptic lec ayotic  
Jocoyal te Cajualtic

Gladden our hearts, brothers  
Gladden our hearts with work  
We have strength, we are well  
Thanks to the Lord

Ay sc'oblal te ca'teltic  
Ta ini bajlumilal  
Ay sc'oblal te jqu'inaltic  
Ta scuenta jcuxlejaltic

Our work in this land  
Is not in vain  
Our land is important  
For our existence

Ca'betic yipal quermano  
P'ijubuc te co'tantic  
Lecubuc te ca'teltic  
Lecubuc jcuxlejaltic

Let's do our best, brothers  
Let's educate our hearts  
Let's improve our work  
Let's improve our lives

Teme lec te jqu'inaltic  
Ya jtatic te jcoletic  
Jich ya sc'an te Cajualtic  
Jich ya sc'an te co'tantic

If our life is well  
We will find salvation  
That's what our Lord wants  
That's what our hearts want

Yotic me quermanotic  
C'opontic te Cajualtic  
Jun pajaluc  
Ta yohlil jcomonaltic

Now, brothers  
We ask of the Lord  
That we should desire the same thing  
In our community



Jocoyal quermanotic  
 Jocoyal te Cajualtic  
 Lom c'uxotic ta yo'tan  
 Tse'eluc me co'tantic yu'un

Thank you, brothers  
 Thank you, Lord  
 For loving us so much  
 This gladdens our hearts

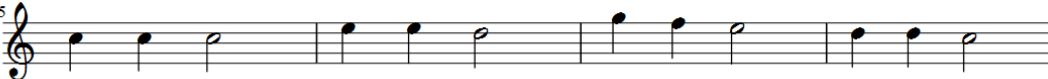
Cajualatcotic yotic  
 Tal calbatcotic wocol  
 Ac'a xweht jujun c'ahc'al  
 Te jwe'el cuch'elcotic

Since you arrived, Lord  
 We give you thanks  
 May we have food every day  
 To be able to live.

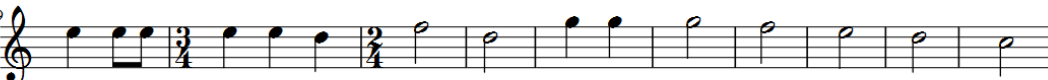
### Jtsob jbahtic me, Cajual

### Estamos reunidos, Señor

Tenor  8  
 Jtsob jbah - tic me Ca - jual Jtsob Jbah - tic me Je - sús

T.  8  
 Ta Ju - nax a - yo - tic Ta scuen - ta a - tu - quel

Tenor  8  
 Te jnop - te - sel - tic a - wu' - un Te jp'ij - te - sel - tic a - wu' - un

T.  8  
 Te li 'a - yo - ti - quix yo - tic Ju - nax me a - yo - ti - quix

Jtsob jbahtic me, Cajual  
 Jtsob jbahtic me, Jesus  
 Ta junax ayotic  
 Ta scuenta atuquel

We're together, Lord  
 We're together, Jesus  
 We're together  
 Because of you

Te jnopteseltic awu'un  
 Te jp'ijteseltic awu'un  
 Te li' ayotiquix yotic  
 Junax me ayotiquix

Your swift Coming  
 We had been alone  
 Now we're here  
 We're together

Ochan me soc awip  
 Ochan me soc awu'el  
 Ta co'tan me jo'otic  
 Te jayeb c'achc'al jtsob jbahtic

Enter with your strength  
 Enter with your power  
 In our hearts  
 The days that we are together

La' me, Cajual cu'un  
 Icbilotiquix awu'un  
 Ch'ul Espíritu la yicon tal  
 Ta tsoblej awu'un atuquel

Come, my Lord  
 You have called us  
 The Holy Spirit calls me  
 We meet together in your name.

## Te Jesus ya stsobotic

## Jesus unites us

Tenor Tso-boj bah-ti - quix yu'un Cri-sto Tso-boj bah-ti - quix yu'un Cri-sto Te

T. tal ta jlum - al - tic cu'un - tic Te tal ta jlum - al - tic cu'un - tic

Tsoboj bahtiquix yu'un Cristo  
Tsoboj bahtiquix yu'un Cristo  
Te tal ta jlumaltic cu'untic  
Te tal ta jlumaltic cu'untic

Now we are united in Christ  
Now we are united in Christ  
Who came to this land  
Who came to this land

Muc'ul ajualil, muc'ul ajualil  
Te jlumaltic ya yich'at ta muc'  
Te jlumaltic ya yich'at ta muc'  
Ochan, ochan, ochan.

Almighty God, almighty God  
Your children praise you  
Your children praise you  
Come, come, come.

## Talotiquix quermanotac

## Ya llegamos, hermanos

Tenor Ta - lo - to - quix quer - ma-no-tac Ta - lo - ti - quix quer - ma-no-tac

T. Ta sbi - hil yu'un te Cris - to Je - sús Ta ya - lel te le-quil

T. ach' c'op Ta schic-naj - te - sel j - co-lel - tic Ta ya - lel te le-quil

T. ach' c'op Ac'a cut - sil c'op - tay - tic te Dios

Talotiquix quermanotac  
Talotiquix quermanotac  
Ta sbihil yu'un te Cristo Jesús  
Ta yalel te lequil ach' c'op  
Ta schicnajtessel jcoleltic  
Ta yalel te lequil ach' c'op  
Ac'a cutsil c'optaytic te Dios

We're here, brothers  
We're here, brothers  
In the name of Christ Jesus  
To announce the Good News  
To announce our salvation  
To announce the Good News  
To ask God to take pity on us

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### **Filmography**

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