

# To what extent does the EZLN political economy framework offer a viable development alternative

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## To what extent does the EZLN political economy framework offer a viable development alternative to its followers?

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On January 1<sup>st</sup> 1994, 3,000 members of the EZLN (**Zapatista Army of National Liberation** or *Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional*) revolted in an armed uprising from eastern Chiapas and parts of the Lacandon Jungle (Hansen, 2002: 11) (See Figure 1). In the course of the uprising the EZLN took six towns from which Marcos, the rebel's irrepressible pipe-smoking spokesperson derives his name (Margaritas, Altamirano, La Realidad, Chanal, Ocosingo, and San Cristobal) (Poniatowska, 2002b: 373). A substantial literature has accumulated on the topic that features different aspects of the revolt. Many authors have emphasised the importance of NAFTA and the 1992 modification of article 27 as causal factors in the 1994 uprising of the Zapatistas (for example; Weinberg, 2000; Vergara-Camus, 2009; Rich, 1997). Others have focused on developments in the 1980s related to the debt crisis and the emergence of new forms of capital intensive farming in the 1950s (Collier, 1994). Another category of the literature has been concerned with claiming the "postmodern" character of the rebellion in Chiapas (Cleaver, 1998; Burbach, 1994).

As a work of political economy, the essay question posed will be addressed by postulating that the EZLN has a social base of support which can be investigated rather than focus on the discourse of the guerrillas that form the Zapatistas well-known public face (the postmodernist subject matter). This type of method has been chosen because of a general consensus in the literature on the autonomy of the communities vis-à-vis the guerrillas.

For example in Lorenzano's (1998) and Barmeyer's (2003) work suggests that the "EZLN is not only the 'community in arms,' but it is also an army which submits itself to the mandates of the community." (Lorenzano, 1998: 133) Harvey (1998: 168) has corroborated this by noting that the decision-making rested at all times with the social base of the EZLN during 1994, suggesting the limited autonomy of the armed guerrillas, or at least their heavy dependence on the base communities for at the minimum the material necessities of armed struggle (Barmeyer p131), or more broadly political legitimacy (Nugent, 1998: 357). This paper will also be consistent with Cook and Joo's (34) call for avoiding static, ahistorical accounts of rebellions which obscure contemporary peasant realities by postulating continuity between the subsistence logic of pre-colonial Mesoamerican culture and contemporary systems of production (for example; Bonfil, 1996; Vergara-Camus, 2009). Such an approach will avoid juxtaposing a fictitious indigenous model (in the sense that it is anachronistic) against a capitalist framework of development but rather assess the model in its contemporary, concrete manifestations and the political economic ways in which it has benefited its followers.

The central thesis of this paper is that the EZLN is a Polanyian reaction to a specific type of market subordination and that this circumstance ought to be central to understanding the extent to which the EZLN represents a viable political economy model for its followers. Furthermore it was the Mexican Revolution which triggered the emergence of these markets. A political economy framework is here defined as a system of production including its social, cultural, and political aspects. To be viable, a political economy framework must, at a minimum, ensure the material subsistence of its members. The Oxford English Dictionary (2001: 788) defines something as viable if it is "capable

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of working successfully." In order to assess whether the EZLN political economy framework works successfully, it will be necessary to know its aims. As implied from the method which we are adopting in order to tackle this issue, these aims will be extrapolated from the socioeconomic and objective position of the communities situated in the wider context of Mexican capitalist development and not from the grandiose statements of the Zapatistas.[1] Subjective elements will be included but not treated in isolation from this fundamental socioeconomic analysis.[2]

This endeavor is of importance because an analysis of the relationship between the outcomes of the Mexican Revolution and the viability of the EZLN's rebellion has not yet been completed. This essay will therefore seek to combat the necessary but excessive attention paid to the more contemporary factors, especially the constitutional amendments of 1992 and the signing of NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) in 1994.

To argue this proposition this paper will develop an argument in three sections.

The first section will comprise of an historical analysis of the Revolution and its aftermath up till the signing of NAFTA on January 1<sup>st</sup> 1994. Particular themes emphasised will be the "vertical" and gradual tidal shift in the mode of production pre- and post-revolution, the establishment of an internal market enabling commodity exchange, and the agrarian redistributions which characterised Mexico as a whole, particularly under Cardenas. This section will be lengthy reflecting the fact that it is more than simply contextual and will give empirical grounding to the subsequent argument.

Based on this analysis, the second section will attempt to grasp these events by claiming that Polanyi's double movement enables the student to better grapple with the character of the EZLN both in terms of land and labour subordination to the market mechanism. The work of Ellen Wood on the history of capitalism will also be used to further refine understanding of these markets in Chiapas. Some possible criticisms of this Polanyian interpretation will also be discussed in order to reinforce the credibility of this interpretation, covering potential falsifications of the above thesis. Additionally this section will specify the meaning of "market subordination" as proposed in the above thesis by assessing the relationship between states and markets in Chiapas and further demonstrate the paucity of ahistorical, "bourgeois thought" in assessing this connection.

The third section, taking into account the findings of the previous two sections, will move beyond them to elaborate on the concrete political economy framework offered by the EZLN, including its system of production, as well as its political and cultural aspects. By contrasting the capitalisation of the peasantry approach of Kay et al with the EZLN's land invasion strategy it will be shown that the EZLN offers a viable system of production to the extent that it offers its followers the opportunity to break with compulsory market participation. This aim will be derived from the preceding analysis. The role of ideas in the construction of EZLN community practices will also be covered. These will be discussed in relation to structural inequalities between the eastern lowlands and central highlands.

Finally this paper will conclude by returning to the thesis and key issue raised in the question of this paper in regards to the EZLN's viability and assess this in light of the preceding content.

## I

We necessarily begin with the pre-revolutionary regime in order to demonstrate that it was qualitatively different from the post-revolutionary era.

### El Porfiriato

The backwardness of the finca production would not be addressed under the regime of Porfirio Diaz (1876-1911). The contradictions and extreme inequalities of the 1846 Lerdo Law (designed to foster a progressive economy, but only led to campesinos being dispossessed and subsequently reabsorbed into large landed estates, not as rural proletarians, but as peons (Knight, 1990: 188)) were accentuated under a regime in which the amount of capital owned by US investors exceeded that owned by Mexicans (Weinberg, 2000: 45). Bartra has noted that primitive

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accumulation of capital is possible only if the direct producer is separated from his means of production *and* that the surplus accumulated is channelled into forms of productive investment. According to Batra, this was a central limitation under Diaz (Bartra, 1975: 129). Despite the huge amounts of foreign capital investment, there was little accumulation of capital in the Mexican rural sector. Sharecropping and peonage remained dominant which hampered the development of monetary relations and landlord repression and violence greatly inhibited the mobility of peasants, preventing the emergence of a labour market (Knight, 1990: 187). Even when limited monetary relations did emerge, much money earned was spent on the landed estate's tienda de raya (company shop) by peons on cane liquor, which greatly contributed to their subordination and increased indebtedness (Bobrow-Strain, 2007: 63).

Although ostensibly in some cases wage workers, many if not most landed workers remained immobile peasants bounded by debt servitude. In Chiapas this and a lack of roads to market coupled with a repressive labour regime meant that capital accumulation did not feature. Remarking on the geographical isolation and the social relations of Chiapanecan fincas (large estates), Bobrow Strain has stated that:

“With essentially free estate labor and cargo transport provided by indigenous porters who cost less to maintain than mules, landowners and merchants had no reason to invest in productivity” (Bobrow-Strain, 2007: 65-66)

In sum, foreign ownership en masse amounted to little improvement of the productive forces and to the progression of less coercive labour regimes in Chiapas.

## Post- Porfiriato

It is of little relevance to the thesis of the paper to recall the causal factors of the Revolution. It is sufficient to mention that Emiliano Zapata, who initiated agrarian reform to the benefit of his peasant army in the state of Morelos would have a significant impact on Mexico's future historical trajectory (Poniatowska, 2002: 375a). The 1917 constitution contains passages which demonstrate the influence of his peasant followers. For example Ejidos (communal lands) granted were not marketable commodities (Thompson & Wilson, 1994: 448). The constitutional promises included improved right for workers (an important social force since Diaz's railroad project) (Article 123), the right of the state to expropriate enterprises under the guise of national development (Article 27) and importantly the end of debt servitude and other forms of coercive labour practices (Article 22) (Latin American Studies, 2009).

However in assessing the document we should practice caution and keep in mind, as Chasteen has noted, the often striking contrast between rhetoric and practice (Chasteen, 2001: 219). The lack of agrarian reform in Chiapas during the immediate post-revolutionary period substantiates this remark; in 1930, 97% of Chiapanecan land remained in private hands (Figure 5) and in wider Mexico, according to Bazant's data, a mere 7.5% of all land distribution from 1915-1975 occurred during the period 1915-1934. Additionally as Collier & Quartiello (1994: 30) have noted, the practice of debt peonage continued for over a decade in some areas of Chiapas (especially in the more rural eastern and lowland areas) and even then it was the Indians themselves that had to fight for reform rather than the state following through on its constitutional promises.. Landowners threatened potential peon escapists with shooting, hostage taking and other methods (Bobrow-Strain, 2007: 66). Despite this inaction and resistance by landowners however, many peons were freed from debt servitude in eastern Chiapas (Bobrow-Strain, 2007: 32). A coherent state available for enforcing the strictures of the constitution was not formed at this historical juncture, but the emphasis had changed. As Knight (1985: 17) has put it “However gradual, this represented a 180 degree change in direction after the sustained period of hacienda consolidation during the Porfiriato.” Agrarian reform took off in the 1930s, especially under Cardenas (1934-1940), who made 17,890m land grants in his presidency; the most of any twentieth century Mexican president (Figure 5). In Chiapas, the highland peasantry were binded into the state corporatist model through the CNC (Confederacion Nacional de Campesinos) (Harvey, 1998: 56).

## ISI (Import Substitution Industrialisation) and post-1940

1940 marked a qualitative shift in the Mexican political economy. Avila Camacho (1940-1946) became president. This macro context is important since it marked the conclusion of the redistributionist epoch (Camacho only redistributed one-third as much land as Cardenas(Figure 2)). This had a significant impact in Chiapas where

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demographic increases caused problems which could no longer be solved through appeals to the SRA (Secretariat of Land Reform). During the 1950-60s, this led to the predictable colonisation of land in eastern Chiapas by displaced campesinos, no longer finding employment in coffee production and no further prospects for agrarian reform in the highlands (Collier & Quaratiello, 1994: 42). This colonisation acted as a safety valve for rural conflict between expanding ranches and campesinos. The extent to which the Lacandon rain forest was used for this purpose can be seen from the increases in land under cultivation in Chiapas between 1930-2000 in table 2 (over 2,500,000 hectares were 'created'). However, not all campesinos were granted sufficient land, and many which were granted soil which was unsuitable for production of basic staple foods (Weinberg, 2000: 66). This led many to supplement their agricultural enterprises with off-farm wage work. This process was most apparent in the 1970s when OPEC increased world oil prices and the Mexican government responded by beginning to exploit its internal reserves. As Collier & Quaratiello (1994: 107) notes, this opened up employment opportunities for the campesinos that had been dispossessed and requiring off-farm monetary incomes to supplement landed subsistence production.

The so-called ganaderización ("cattle-isation") in which the state awarded colossal subsidies to stimulate increased livestock production was a key causal factor in this colonisation and increases in wage work, due to the labour-light nature of cattle ranching (Bobrow-Strain, 2008: 108). Gaining support legitimated in the interests of national development, cattle ranchers geared production towards domestic markets. Those who did receive 70 per cent tax breaks on profits, provision of infrastructure to connect with national markets, credit, medicines and technical assistance from the state in Chiapas (Bobrow-Strain, 2008: 111). As well as subsidies the state supported cattle ranching through the UGRCH; an agency established in order to organise the property rights claims of municipal associations of ranchers with direct links to the PRI corporatist machine (Bobrow-Strain, 2008: 115). At the federal level, certificados de inafectabilidad (exemption certificates) were issued increasingly during Miguel Alemán's presidency (1946-1952) from the Departamento de Asuntos Agrarios y Colonization (Department of Agrarian Matters and Settling), thus exempting ranchers from land reform claims by dispossessed peasants (Bobrow-Strain, 2007: 114). To illustrate the success of the states support for ranchers, by 1970, 71% of cattle in Chiapas grazed on private estates. Furthermore cattle ranching on private estates almost doubled between 1950-1970 from 351,711 to 890,094. Cattle on social sector land increased also but private landholders, due to their proportionally higher share of cattle, gained significantly more from the increase (Figure 7).

Equally important, this process of ISI facilitated national consolidation. Since the 1940s this has been evident in the drive to create an internal market sufficient enough to consume the commodities produced by industry and the need to make peasant agricultural products accessible for consumption in the burgeoning cities where this acted as a subsidy for urban capitalists (Collier and Quaratiello, 1994: 33). On a national scale the statistics speak for themselves; highway construction more than doubled between 1940-1950 (Figure 4) and railway construction almost tripled between 1940-1960 (Figure 3). By the 1950s this process could be observed in Chiapas through the construction of access roads to the Pan-American Highway which linked previously isolated indigenous communities to regional, national and international markets (Whitmeyer & Hopcroft, 1996: 529).

### **Debt Crisis and Austerity**

The external event which shocked the Mexican ISI model and the indígenas of eastern Chiapas was the debt crisis of 1982. This balance-of-payments problem, as Medeiros (2009: 27) has suggested, led to increased leverage for those owners and generators of hard currency. IMF and World Bank loans became the only viable source of funding left. As is well known, these loans were conditional on macroeconomic adjustments congruent with Washington consensus principles of "fiscal-monetary prudence in the macroeconomic arena, trade liberalization, privatization, financial sector deepening and capital market-opening in the market arena, as well as tax reform and property rights" (Walton, 2004: 168). This decrease in state credit combined with increased competition from trade liberalisation led to the intensification of cattle production through capital accumulation in Chiapas (Bobrow-Strain, 2007: 175). It also led to the sale of Mexican SOES (State Owned Enterprises) to the tune of \$20 billion by 1995 (Medeiros, 2009: 119-120)

The decline of INMECAFE, a state agency established in 1959 to organize campesino coffee production is symptomatic of the wider withdrawal of the state credit, technical assistance and forms of protection. Its main

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function in Chiapas during the 1980s was to provide subsidies for campesinos to purchase inputs for coffee production, as well as provide a guaranteed market (Collier & Quaratiello, 2004: 106). As can be seen in Figure 6, the coffee crop is significant in social sector production and the principal crop grown on 340 ejidos in Chiapas. With the onset of the debt crisis the agency dropped significantly in market share (from 44% in 1982-1983 to 9.6% in 1987-1988) and was an eventual victim to the Salinas privatization agenda, leading to a lack of money to purchase inputs for campesinos and a problem in selling their crop because of lack of access to markets (Harvey 1995: 43). This crisis of coffee production was compounded in 1989 by the failure of the International Coffee Organization to produce an accord on production quotas, leading to a slump in world prices (Harvey, 1995: 43). The Salinas administration responded with the Solidaridad program, but it did little to cushion the deleterious effects of the coffee crisis for the poorest producers because the administration of funds was channeled through regional bodies, notorious for awarding benefits to those loyal to the PRI in the highlands, not reaching those in eastern lowlands and the Lacandon Jungle (Collier & Quartellio, 1994: 145). Neoliberal coffee restructuring also hurt large landowners who increasingly switched to increased cattle production; for peasants this meant a huge decrease in work on Chiapanecan estates (Bobrow-Strain, 2007: 112). As a result, some found employment in other parts of the country and outside Mexico (Collier and Quaratiello, 1994: 95). Others found work in the burgeoning tourist industry of San Cristobal (Whitmeyer and Hopcroft, 1996: 529). This is in contrast to the nineteenth century when Indian dispossession led to absorption of labour into social relations of debt servitude.

Alan Knight has commented that “modes of production do not shift like gears in a well-oiled gearbox; they change slowly, painfully, and grindingly.” (Knight, 1990: 186). If, like Halliday (1994: 60), we define this mode of production as the combination of the development of the productive forces combined with the type of social relations of production we can see that by 1994, the mode of production had undergone this slow shift. In terms of social relations, a shift had occurred from pre-revolutionary debt bondage to increases in the use of “free” wage labour. In terms of the productive forces, a shift from simple reproduction (to the extent that landowners did not invest improving capital) to forms capitalist accumulation (especially in labour-light cattle ranching) (Bobrow-Strain p176)) was evident even in Chiapas. Also, with reference to “horizontal” integration, Mexican investment in roads and railways had connected once remote Chiapas with the national and world economy. Less isolated private landowners were now forced to accumulate capital in order to remain competitive with cheaper commodities flooding the market, especially from the north. This shift in the mode of production has led Knight to label 1910 and its aftermath a “bourgeois revolution.” Knight states that it involved

“the destruction of the socio-economic impedimenta of the old regime: in Mexico’s case, the landed oligarchy and its daunting combination of agrarian and political power. And they further involve, positively, the establishment of an environment within which ‘bourgeois’, ‘capitalist’ values and practices can flourish, such an environment embracing: the legal protection of business; the provision of an infrastructure (transport, communications, currency); the consolidation of a national market (and, perhaps, the promotion of foreign markets); and, above all, the provision of political stability.” (Knight, 1992: 134)

Further reasons for this being labeled a bourgeois revolution will be expanded upon later. However it is to the theoretical consequences of this bourgeois revolution and how we should understand it after-effects theoretically to which we will now turn.

## II

It will now be proposed that Karl Polanyi’s Great Transformation provides an insightful theoretical framework for understanding the Chiapas rebellion. In its most basic formulation Polanyi’s thesis claims that when society is subordinated to the market mechanism a protective counter-movement will emerge from within society with the aim of undermining the markets unimpeded operation. This emerges because, as Polanyi stresses throughout his text, land and labour are fictitious commodities; they are not produced in order to be bought and/or sold (Polanyi, 2001: 75). Economic liberals, by treating the economy as a separate sphere, cause social relations to become “embedded in the economic system” rather than the other way around (Polanyi, 2001: 60). This is problematic because, as Polanyi states, “leaving the fate of the soil and the people to the market would be tantamount to annihilating them”

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(Polanyi, 2001: 131). This dialectical process of imposition and subsequent reaction is Polanyi's "double movement." In its original application Polanyi used the term to denote the utopian and impossible project of implementing a self-regulating market in nineteenth century. However the subsequent text will argue that this concept of double movement has wider explanatory power and can be applied to the EZLN communities and their historical antecedents.

## Labour

Polanyi held that economic liberals falsely separate the activities of man from his social existence by treating men as mere factors of production produced for sale on the market (Polanyi, 2001: 171). Polanyi (2001: 172) states that market expansion requires the liquidation of social structures in order for workers to be subjected to supply and demands as a factor. In doing so, societies compatible with the market form can emerge, replacing original communities with "atomistic and individualistic" forms (Polanyi, 2001: 171). This is so because a market economy requires a market society, in which all factors are mobile and can be bought/sold (Polanyi, 2001: 57). In Mexico, this trend is what anthropologist Guillermo Bonfil has termed ostracisation of "Mexico Profundo." [3] These communities, as Bonfil (1996: 119) has noted, have been a persistent target of indigenista policy. Evidence exists to suggest that indigenous promoters (agents of acculturation) were used frequently in government programs to cement this process, co-opted by the PRI through the Instituto Nacional Indigenista (INI) (Nash 1995, 12). Basic services such as schools and health clinics were also integral, as well as the promotion of the Spanish language in order to break the grip of indigenous tongues (Bonfil, 1996: 117). In Nash's field work in the highlands of Chiapas, this assault on indigenous culture led to the breaking of traditional institutions which used to secure social relations of reciprocity in Amatenago del Valle (Nash, 1995: 13). The other side of the coin is that a society enabling market economy must be established (Polanyi, 2001: 74). This other side is what Knight referred to earlier as the positive aspects of the Mexican bourgeois revolution. In pursuing this end, Cook and Joo (1995: 34) have aptly denoted post-1940s Mexico as a "bourgeois mestizo hegemony" in which the post-revolutionary state has "emphasized forging a strong homogeneous national mestizo culture through assimilation of indigenas (de-Indianization)." In particular this culture has been transmitted through educational practices which aimed at assimilating villages into the dominant national (Western) culture, but also in a wider "system of cultural control" (Bonfil, 1996: 119). The success of this effort can be found in the increases in temporary, generally seasonal employment that the campesinos of eastern Chiapas have engaged in throughout Mexico, the Americas and the US (King and Villanueva, 1998: 112) and was covered in the first section. [4] As Marx & Engels (1973: 73-74) once noted:

"The labourers who must sell themselves piecemeal, are a commodity, like every other article of commerce, and are consequently exposed to all the vicissitudes of competition."

However, the notion of market in regards to human labour, as Polanyi (2001: 238) notes, is always utopian and practically impossible due to the fictitious nature of the commodities involved. Analysis of resistance will be discussed in section III.

## Land

In contrast, soil has immobile properties and cannot be mobilised in the same manner as labour. Despite this, as Polanyi has suggested, infrastructure can facilitate the transportation of its produce (Polanyi, 2001: 189). We could at this point easily choose to focus on the 1992 constitutional amendments which outlawed land expropriation and permitted the selling off of hitherto sacrosanct ejido lands to investors (Thompson and Wilson, 1994: 448). This approach, however, would be blind to the post-revolutionary tendency of enabling mobility of the lands produce in Chiapas and Mexico. The key aspect enabling the commodification of the land's produce has been the development of infrastructure. Since the 1940s this has been central to Mexican industrial policy as noted earlier. [5] The conventional narrative states that this state-led infrastructural investment dried up with the debt, however the ostensibly social welfare oriented Solidaridad (established 1988) program increased Chiapanecan market integration and furthered the mobility of the social sector's agricultural produce through road paving work projects and other public works (Weingberg, 2000: 70). However after manipulation by caciques (local political bosses), little was left for

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input subsidies. In effect Chiapanecan smallholders were subjected to greater market exposure and competition without a simultaneous rise in social protection from the state such as tariffs, subsidies and other protectionist measures. Our previous discussion of the dismantling of INMECAFE is testament to this process. The significance of this mobilisation of the land's produce can be seen in the fact that by 1990, 67% of the maize produced by the Chiapanecan social sector was sold on the market (Weinberg, 2000: 70, Gilly, 1998: 333). Social sector land therefore, although a static factor of production, has been central to the national development drive and has not been isolated from industrialisation. Of course, this does not mean that we can ignore the changes to the social sector enacted in 1992. This constitutional amendment, which marked the near completion of the market form, rested on classical economic maxim of "no entails, no unalienable endowments, no common lands, no right of redemption" (Bentham cited in Polanyi, 2001: 189). But as Polanyi's argument suggests, the amendment of article 27 is only one side of the process of market imposition which relates to land ownership. The other, enabling the produce of the land to become mobile, leads as far back as Cardenas' agrarian reforms and the commencement of ISI development c.1940. In sum, the commodification of land was only consummated (legally) in 1992, but a longer historical perspective illuminates the longitudinal nature of the process.

## Critiques

Critics may respond that with regards to both land and labour, the Chiapanecan rebellion was a response to state (political) action, not market (economic) subordination. According to this view, congruous with those found in many conventional textbooks, the state would be seen as creating the conditions for revolt through "interference" in the market (for example Veseth, 2005: 13-17; Gilpin, 1987: 11-24). After all, we have emphasised indigenista policy, state-sponsored development projects and the withdrawal of state support for smallholder production as causal factors for the rebellion. Such a position separates politics and economics and can only interpret action by the state as political, or "interference" in the market. As Ellen Wood has recently argued the 'political' (impersonal role of the state) is of prime importance to the expropriation of the surplus and therefore is key to the underpinning of the so-called economic sphere (the market) within the capitalist mode of production and surplus extraction (Wood, 1981: 81).

Applied to Chiapas, the separation is equally untenable because it obscures the way in which the state has not obstructed the emergence of the market form. It has in fact worked to facilitate commodity exchange by deploying its politico-juridical powers which created a favorable environment for capital accumulation. The Chiapanecan state has enforced property rights, provided cattle ranchers with generous subsidies, attempted to establish a market for labour and land, made infrastructural investments and other forms of activity essential to secure the functioning of the commodity exchange.[6]

By obscuring history in this way, we can say that this possible critique of the earlier thesis is the product of "bourgeois thought" (In the strict sense that treating the state and market as mutually exclusive obscures from the historical origins of these institutions (Marx, 1955: 117)). This superficiality of the states neutral appearance suggests the need for overcoming the separation between politics and economics, a feature of economic life which Polanyi also recognized as peculiar to the market form (Polanyi, 2001: 222). In short market subordination can and should be thought of as inclusive of state action where it has operated in the interests of accumulation (and in Chiapas this has been the case for much of the twentieth century.) The Polanyian interpretation is thus maintained by adopting this wider (and necessary) definition of the market.

But we then only encounter the theoretical problem of why the Mexican Revolution was a "bourgeois revolution", since both states and markets existed in the Porfiriato. What distinguishes post- from pre-revolutionary Mexico? The answer is that participation in markets in bourgeois society as Ellen Wood has argued, such as post-revolutionary Mexico, has become an imperative (Wood, 1994: 15). With this in mind, what can be denoted as unique about the post-revolutionary character of Mexican and Chiapanecan political economy is not the existence of markets or a state but the nature of participation.

It is sufficient to note at this juncture that all participants in bourgeoisie society (campesinos and landowners) must buy and sell on the market "for access to the means of life, labor, and self-reproduction." (Wood, 1994: 25) There are

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several reasons for this development already covered (campesinos have become increasingly divorced from their means of production and simultaneously forced onto barely arable ejidos among others).

By contrast, pre-revolutionary market relations in Chiapas were not compulsory due to isolation and coercive social relations. Landowners invested little and, due to immobility, peons were arranged in nothing like a labour market and were the virtual property of estate owners. As a function of their isolation, landowners also were under little obligation to improve the forces of production and purchase inputs on the market. We can appropriately label 1910 and its aftereffects a bourgeois revolution due to the nature of participation in markets in Chiapas. This was the type of market form which has subordinated social relations to its logic.

Critics have already explicitly refuted this interpretation, claiming that the areas of the eastern Chiapas are the least integrated areas of Chiapas and that this constitutes falsification of the proposition that the EZLN in an anti-market reaction. Whitmeyer & Hopcroft (1996: 533) note that:

“If absolute market involvement and the vicissitudes of the market were the primary causal factor behind the revolt, we would have expected regions of Chiapas outside the Lacandona and the high-lands to have been most involved in it.”

They cite the growth of a tourist industry in San Cristobal as empirical support for their claim that market expansion was more advanced in the highlands than areas that rose up in what we have called an act of self-protection from market exposure (Whitmeyer & Hopcroft, 1996: 533). However, their mistake is to deal only with *absolute* market involvement. The logic demonstrated here denies the notion that the Lacandon Jungle could have been a site of revolt simply because it is less well integrated than the highlands. However, as noted before, due to political machinations, most relief programs did not reach eastern Chiapas. In the highlands the answer to disembodied social relations came “from above” but in the lowlands, the response had to be “from below”. The process of market imperative establishment was therefore much more shocking and rapid in the eastern parts of Chiapas, where campesinos encountered barely arable land and benefited little from state development funds in contrast to the highland communities which were protected through the PRI-affiliated CNC (Nash, 1995: 34, Collier and Quartiello, 1994: 39). Because of market exposure without “instruments of intervention,” (Polanyi, 2001: 132) eastern communities rebelled whilst the co-opted communities of the highlands remained largely inactive.

In sum we need to see the Lacandon settlers since the Revolution as becoming increasingly exposed to the market without adequate protection.

### III

To review: *The problematic of the EZLN communities is that they have become subordinated to post-revolutionary market expansion.* Participation in these markets has become increasingly compulsory for campesinos who increasingly must participate in markets labour, land, and its produce.

In response, the EZLN's occupation of 65,000 hectares of former private property has been central in negating these socially debilitating markets (Bobrow-Strain, 2007: 137) The establishment of independent organisation such the State Council of Indigenous and Peasant Organisations (CEOIC) has also been a major accomplishment of the EZLN, which carried out similar, often violent occupations of landed estates (Harvey, 1998: 211). On these invaded lands, EZLN members have constructed communities with new forms of association. In the heart of these radical areas many base communities have rejected any type of state support, indicating their autonomy from conventional institutions (and prevention of co-optation or absorption into a corporative model) (Harvey, 1998: 231). It can be suggested that these communities represent a viable alternative to others. This can be best demonstrated by first assessing the calls for capitalisation and demonstrate why it is not viable in light of the hitherto noted EZLN problematic.

## Capitalisation



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The aim of capitalisation, according to de Janvry (cited in Llambi, 1989:745) is “to create a commercial family farm sector and a ‘farmer road’ to capitalist development.” In order to achieve this viably, Cristobal Kay, a key proponent of this school has recently argued for a redistribution of resources in the rural sector in order to create a “level playing field” for less capitalised campesinos (Kay, 1997: 25). This would create a peasant sector which could compete effectively against larger farm enterprises in the context of post-NAFTA Mexico (Rich, 1997: 79). A large part of the explanation for this response is the lowering of tariff barriers which exposed campesinos to competition from highly intensified production of US and Canadian agribusiness and the vicissitudes of the world market as part of the “Washington Consensus” policy set (Rich, 1997: 73). The gravity of this policy decision for the social sector can be elucidated by noting that US corn producers, armed with access to advanced “Green Revolution” inputs are able to average 6.9 tons per hectare, compared to the mere 1.7 of Mexican campesinos (Weinberg, 2000: 69). Certainly within the post-revolutionary context of a national market based no longer on the backward social relations of the haciendas, but capitalist accumulation, as well as exposure to world market efficiency levels, Chiapanecan campesinos can no longer hide from these competitive pressures. In some areas the capital to make campesinos competitive has come from investors choosing to reach temporary accords with smallholders (Bobrow-Strain, 2007: 153). However Kay’s prescription would involve heavy state intervention to benefit the least efficient peasant producers to secure “capital, technology, and domestic and foreign markets, as well as knowledge and information systems” which would boost peasant production and improve rural livelihoods (Kay, 1997: 19). In short, peasant producers would secure their material subsistence by selling their products on markets to which they have favorable access and use various inputs and technology to increase efficiency.

But does this escape the capitalist logic which forces market participation for the means of life? Campesinos gain access to their means of production and sufficient capital to produce competitively, but must constantly revolutionise their means of production in order to remain competitive (unless further capitalised by the state). In this scenario, it becomes compulsory for peasant producers to buy chemical inputs in order to sell their products. Selling on the market necessarily involves buying. As David Harvey (2001: 238) notes, this is the logic inherent in competitive capitalist production which forces those who own the means of production to constantly reinvest.

## Creative communities

A more viable solution in light of the problematic therefore would be a more holistic approach which appreciates the long-term development of the Mexican market and its transformation of post-revolutionary social relations. This is demonstrated in much of the EZLN’s current organisational strategies. In concrete terms the EZLN communities offer an opportunity for labour to be taken off the market and for the reestablishment of land as central to cultural and material life. This had been made possible by the seizure of fertile lands once used by cattle ranching estate owners. In San Emiliano for example, families have succeeded in settling further up the valley where traditional Mayan crops such as corn can be cultivated (Barmeyer, 2003: 134). By constructing milpas (small plots of land) for the purpose of subsistence production on these lands, EZLN members have constructed a system of production which is sufficient to satisfy their material needs without recourse to wage labour or the compulsory sale of the land’s produce or, as in the capitalisation model, the purchasing of chemical inputs (Bobrow-Strain, 2007: 161). In an environment in which following article 27, “the decision to respect the private property and the will of private owners is not open to negotiation” (Chiapanecan state government cited in Harvey, 1998: 212) the land invasions have provided the basis for a way of life outside of the market. The communities have also been successful in replacing the state in some areas with indigenous schools and other services (Vergara-Camus, 2009: 373). This has been important in negating the overwhelming impact of the Mexican state’s cultural imperialism and protecting Mexico Profundo.

One critique of this model is that which has concerned former landowners since 1994: The peasant invaders do not accumulate capital and generate little surplus for reinvestment in improving the forces of production (Bobrow-Strain, 2007: 160). Peasants have even destroyed machine capital located on the properties which they invaded (Bobrow-Strain, 2007: 181). Of course, according to the so-called “productivist discourse,” which fetishises increases in productivity, the EZLN system of production is irrational on the grounds that peasant invaders live off the fecund farmland with little interest in raising productivity levels (Lee, 2007: 12). By viewing it through an alternative lens however, that of the “food sovereignty” paradigm, it is obvious that the EZLN communities are rational but directed

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towards different ends. Via Campesina define this model as the right of communities "...to maintain and develop its own capacity to produce its basic foods respecting cultural and productive diversity. We have the right to produce our own food in our own territory." (Via Campesina cited in Lee, 2007: 6) In this sense the assessment of the peasant invaders political economy framework is a microcosm of a larger debate around two competing discourses: the productivist paradigm which worships productive advances and epitomised by the WTO and the agro-ecological discourse which respects cultural specificities and is predominantly indifferent with regards to production levels, focusing on the material reproduction of its adherents (Lee, 2007: 12).

However, although EZLN model finds many parallels with this latter paradigm it is more than a return to past practices of subsistence production and the patriarchal organisational forms found in the highlands. The EZLN represents something new and can only be understood in relation to the 'subjective' components which fused with the objective conditions in eastern Chiapas. As noted in the introduction, these ideas will not be considered in isolation from their material circumstances as if they were a "free-floating resource," (Knight, 1992: 114) but considered in relation to socioeconomic realities.

## Subjective Elements

The first grassroots organising of note is ecclesiastical. The mark of Protestant and unorthodox religious groups is evident in eastern Chiapas where many dispossessed campesinos have been attracted by non-traditional religions offering empowerment and social cohesion through improved literacy, more open social structures and more opportunities for women than the traditional religious organisations predominant in the highlands (Coller & Quaratiello, 1994: 58). However Liberation theology, a radical branch of Catholicism which denounces the injustices of social order, also held sway in the poorer areas of Chiapas. "Consciousness raising" (engendering awareness of oppression) to expose institutional violence and break down hierarchies of privilege has been a primary method amongst these theologians (Chasteen, 2001: 272). For example in 1974, Samuel Ruiz, chief exponent of liberation theology and Bishop of Chiapas organised the Indigenous Congress. The objective was to make claims which would eradicate the structural oppression in Chiapas (especially the highlands/lowlands divide) by thrashing out some concrete proposals. This was achieved in consultation with residents. The Congress demanded rights to land, health, education and improved terms of trade for the poor of Chiapas (MacEoin, 1998: 418).

Maoist grassroots organising also offered concrete solutions to marketing, credit and general production issues.

Attempting to implement Mao's 'mass line' tactics in the struggle towards socialism, the radicals visited poor ejiditarios seeking to engage with them in a similar manner to Ruiz (Harvey, 1998: 59). The "mass line" approach claims that truth and understanding comes from immersion and learning with the masses. It therefore rejects, the vanguardism of the Leninist revolutionary approach (Hammond, 1978: 16). The Maoists were critical of existing groups on the Left in Chiapas, claiming that their insidious links with the PRI and undemocratic forms of organisation meant that they were disconnected from truly grassroots struggle (Gonzalez, 1998: 442). Because most poor peasants were located in eastern areas and this is where corporatism was weakest, Maoist grassroots radicalisation was most effective here. The influence of mass line is particularly apparent in Marcos's statement that "We do not want a revolution imposed from the top: It always turns against itself. We are not a vanguard." (Marcos cited in Debray, 2002: 349) But the concrete influences of these intellectual currents are no more apparent than in the political economic organisation of eastern EZLN communities.

## Gender Relations

Women for example are legally entitled to healthcare, education and hold political and military positions (Millan, 1998: 75). Around one third of the guerrillas working with base communities are women and major military operations have been conducted by women such the seizure of San Cristobal on 1 January 1994 was directed by a female indigenous woman, Ana Maria (Millan, 1998: 64). The diocese of San Cristobal, NGOs and EZLN sympathisers were also central in helping women to form cooperatives that integrated women into the EZLN system of production (Harvey: 1998: 224). The female cry from the Lacandon was uncompromising and demanded several rights for women (Poniatowska, 2002b: 55). These sentiments are reflected in the EZLN's Revolutionary Women's Law which

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codifies the rights of women across a broad spectrum of areas. For example article nine guarantees women the right to occupy military rank whilst article two and article four outline the rights of women to participate in community affairs in both production relations and political organisation (Millan, 1998: 75).

These practices contrast sharply with traditional Mesoamerican agricultural social relations in which women are subordinate in a patriarchal household (Bonfil, 1996: 29). Nash has noted how women in highland communities have been excluded from productive activities: cooperatives established have been undermined and leaders of this attempt to increase women's monetary income eliminated (Nash, 1995: 17). In contrast, Poniatowska has noted how women in EZLN lowland communities feel respected and their participation is no longer confined to menial tasks such as weaving (Poniatowska, 2002a: 381). Women have in fact been central to the very constitution of the lowland ejidos, clearing the Lacandon forest with men (Harvey, 1998: 223).

## **Government and Religious Institutions**

The role of Maoism and Liberation theology is no more apparent than in the democratic and decentralised nature of the community organisations themselves. For example, Barmeyer's (2003: 127) field research of community politics and the EZLN has revealed that it was the communities themselves which were decisive in the decision to rebel in 1994 and that this was decided by opinion poll after deliberation in smaller groups. Furthermore, as Nugent (1998: 357) has argued, the entire command structure of the guerrillas is based on this kind of full consultative processes within the communities. This relationship between the base communities and the guerrillas in which the latter are formally subordinate reflects the rejection or even "inversion," as Harvey has noted, of the relationship between the traditional vanguard and the masses, leaders and the led (Harvey 1998: 167).

In contrast political life in the highlands is dominated by caciques, co-opted into the corporatist system of government. Political organisation in the villages is based on esoteric hierarchies which are inaccessible to the poor. For example, a mayordomo is expected to organise communal parties for which he/she must pay and is typical of the village hierarchies which demand more monetary sacrifice the higher one ascends (Bonfil, 1996: 35). The exclusion of difference is also apparent: many of the campesinos in eastern Chiapas were former members of highland communities before they were expelled for their conversion to radical religions, such as Ruiz's theology (Nash, 1995: 20). By way of contrast Collier and Quartiello (1994: 58) have noted that the opposite is true in the lowlands; many ecclesiastical positions can be attained with little or no financial investment.

The political economy model on the territorial spaces invaded by the EZLN is democratic; subsistence based, and most importantly, escapes the logic of markets. As the above suggests, these practices are found most commonly in eastern areas of greatest material deprivation (eastern lowlands) and least market protection. Here an undoubted link emerges between intellectual forces and socioeconomic realities. Radical intellectual forces have been more influential in areas where protection from naked market forces has been lacking.

## **IV**

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion it is clear that land invasions by members of the EZLN are more consistent with their problematic than the strategy of peasant capitalisation. Moreover, they have been successful in terms of the aims derived from their structural position within Chiapas (that of market subordination in our extended sense). The main point of this paper was to argue that the EZLN is an act of Polanyian social-defense against market subordination and that this should be fundamental in considering the viability of its political economy framework. Furthermore this is incomprehensible without reference to the Mexican Revolution.

It was argued firstly that the post-revolutionary development path of both Mexico and Chiapas was one of a slow but definite shift in direction. This shift was from one based on simple reproduction to capitalist accumulation with landowners developing a propensity to invest more in the productive forces. Social relations of production also

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became less coercive and moved towards new forms of free wage labour. The national economy also became more interconnected through road and railways and then integrated with the world economy. Although not without a time lag in Chiapas due to vested interests on landed estates, these developments permeated the entire region. This shift in the mode of production is why we have agreed with Alan Knight's assessment of these events as tantamount to a "bourgeois revolution" with its consequent shifts in the Mexican mode of production.

The argument was then developed to show that Polanyi's concept of double movement provides a useful framework for understanding the EZLN. In support of the thesis we also encountered some critiques of this theoretical application to demonstrate that it represents a plausible interpretation; namely the state/markets discourse of "bourgeois" economic theory and the one-sidedness of Whitmeyer & Hopcroft's argument which only considers absolute market participation. The argument was then further developed by noting that the slow change in the mode of production had triggered the state to become complicit in the accumulation of capital in various ways, securing commodity exchange. Following from Knight's bourgeois revolution interpretation, it was also suggested in this section that the market cannot be confined to economics and the state to politics since they form a larger unity in Chiapas. It was therefore established that "market subordination" should, in order to retain its analytical meaning, be extended to include the state where it has assisted in the capital accumulation process.

Finally it was argued that in this context, the EZLN has provided a means of escape from this exposure to the market in eastern Chiapas, principally through the invasion of land. We have used Kay's alternative strategy of capitalisation to contrast with this model to demonstrate the viability of the EZLN approach in light of the EZLN's specific problematic regarding post-revolutionary market subordination. We have even gone further to show that the political economy framework which has emerged has been progressive and in no way a return to conservative forms of political, social or cultural organisation prevalent in the highlands. This can be seen in our brief demonstration of progressive gender and political practices. This was argued to be the result of radical ideas fusing with objective conditions of existence in the eastern lowlands where market subordination was most effective.

We can therefore conclude that the EZLN does offer a viable alternative approach based on relatively radical organisational forms. These have resulted from the fusion of Marxist and radical ecclesiastical doctrine with socioeconomic conditions in eastern Chiapas. Furthermore we can say that EZLN has a specific problematic which has been solved through these land occupations and conforms to a discourse which is alien to previous estate owners. It was the bourgeois revolution which led to this problematic, a slow historical process spanning the entire twentieth century entailing a critical shift in the mode of production. In this context the state used its politico-judicial powers to grease the wheels of market expansion. Only by adopting this longer time perspective can we understand the reasons for the EZLN communities' market subordination and the character of the subsequent reaction. It also enables an exposure of the state's role in the accumulation process.

Several implications follow from these conclusions. The first is that future research pertaining to this issue should be directed towards more long-term historical processes than focusing on NAFTA and other recent changes in order to appreciate the real reasons for their rebellion. This would entail a full understanding of the EZLN communities' problematic in terms of its post-revolutionary subordination by an expanding market linked to the emerging capitalist mode of production. In a more broad sense all twentieth century studies of Mexico should treat this event as a qualitative shift in Mexican social relations and incorporate it where relevant. According to this paper, future research would also benefit from analyzing the Chiapanecan market form in its entirety. Analysis should not simply restrict analysis of markets by excluding the role of the state since both of them are integrated into a larger whole.

Finally in terms of Mexican governance, any state policy which seeks market incorporation of indigenas or other social groups without adequate protection may cause another dialectical counter-reaction. Legislators should be sensitive to the fact that societies cannot be operated market principles alone.

## **Appendix**

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Figure 1. Collier & Quaratiello, 1994: 3

Figure 1. Area of Rebellion



Figure 2. Bazant, 1977: 191

Figure 2. Land Grants by Presidential Terms

| Presidents    | Term          | Thousands of hectares |
|---------------|---------------|-----------------------|
| Carranza      | 1915–1920     | 132                   |
| De la Huerta  | May–Nov. 1920 | 34                    |
| Obregón       | 1920–1924     | 971                   |
| Elías Calles  | 1924–1928     | 3,088                 |
| Portes Gil    | 1928–1930     | 1,173                 |
| Ortiz Rubio   | 1930–1932     | 1,469                 |
| Rodríguez     | 1932–1934     | 799                   |
| Cárdenas      | 1934–1940     | 17,890                |
| Avila Camacho | 1940–1946     | 5,519                 |
| Alemán        | 1946–1952     | 3,845                 |
| Ruiz Cortines | 1952–1958     | 3,199                 |
| López Mateos  | 1958–1964     | 16,004                |
| Díaz Ordaz    | 1964–1970     | 16,000 <sup>a</sup>   |
| Echeverría    | 1971–1975     | 10,000 <sup>b</sup>   |

<sup>a</sup> Corrected figure.

<sup>b</sup> President's message, Sept. 1, 1975.

Figure 3. Bazant, 1977: 193

Figure 3. Railway Construction in Mexico

| Year | Millions of ton-kilometers of freight | Year | Millions of ton-kilometers of freight |
|------|---------------------------------------|------|---------------------------------------|
| 1921 | 2,262                                 | 1960 | 14,004                                |
| 1930 | 4,041                                 | 1970 | 22,863                                |
| 1940 | 5,810                                 | 1974 | 30,819                                |
| 1950 | 8,391                                 |      |                                       |

Figure 4. Bazant, 1974: 193

Figure 4. Highway Construction in Mexico

| Year | Kilometers | Year | Kilometers |
|------|------------|------|------------|
| 1925 | 695        | 1960 | 45,089     |
| 1930 | 1,426      | 1970 | 71,500     |
| 1940 | 9,929      | 1975 | 185,000    |
| 1950 | 21,422     |      |            |

Figure 5. Bobrow-Strain, 2007: 136



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Figure 5. Private and Social Sector in Chiapas, 1930-2000

| Sector       | 1930      |         | 2000       |         |
|--------------|-----------|---------|------------|---------|
|              | Number    | Percent | Number     | Percent |
| Private      | 4,011,298 | 97%     | 2,443,694  | 33%     |
| Social       | 104,509   | 3       | 4,244,363  | 57      |
| Both sectors | 4,115,807 | 100%    | 6,688,057* | 90%†    |

\* Increase of land under cultivation between 1930 and 2000 was due to expansion into the Lacandón rain forest.

† The remaining 10% is in urban and national park areas not counted in 1930.

Source: *Censo Agrícola Ganadero*, 1930, and Secretaría de Reforma Agraria tables.

Figure 6. Harvey, 1995: 41

## Figure 6. Social Sector Composition (1988)

|   |                                    |                    |
|---|------------------------------------|--------------------|
| Number of <i>ejidatarios</i> and <i>comuneros</i> |                                    | 193 515            |
| Land surface in social sector (hectares)          |                                    | 3 130 892          |
| Share of total land area in Chiapas               |                                    | 41.4%              |
| <b>Land use in the social sector</b>              | <b>hectares</b>                    | <b>% of sector</b> |
| agriculture                                       | 1 278 147                          | 40.8               |
| forestry  | 700 381                            | 22.4               |
| pasture   | 923 182                            | 29.5               |
| other uses  | 229 182                            | 7.3                |
| rain-fed area                                     | 1 225 831                          | 95.9               |
| irrigated area                                    | 52 316                             | 4.1                |
| <b>Principal crop cultivated</b>                  | <b>No of <i>ejidos</i> and CAs</b> |                    |
| maize   | 1264                               |                    |
| coffee  | 349                                |                    |
| sugar cane  | 19                                 |                    |
| soy beans   | 16                                 |                    |
| beans   | 8                                  |                    |
| green vegetables                                  | 8                                  |                    |
| rice  | 3                                  |                    |
| <b>Inputs in the social sector</b>                | <b>No of <i>ejidos</i> and CAs</b> | <b>% of sector</b> |
| farm installations                                | 495                                | 28.9               |
| tractors  | 318                                | 18.6               |
| agroindustry equipment                            | 206                                | 12.0               |
| credit  | 951                                | 55.5               |
| public services                                   | 1390                               | 81.1               |

Figure 7. Bobrow-Strain, 2007: 111

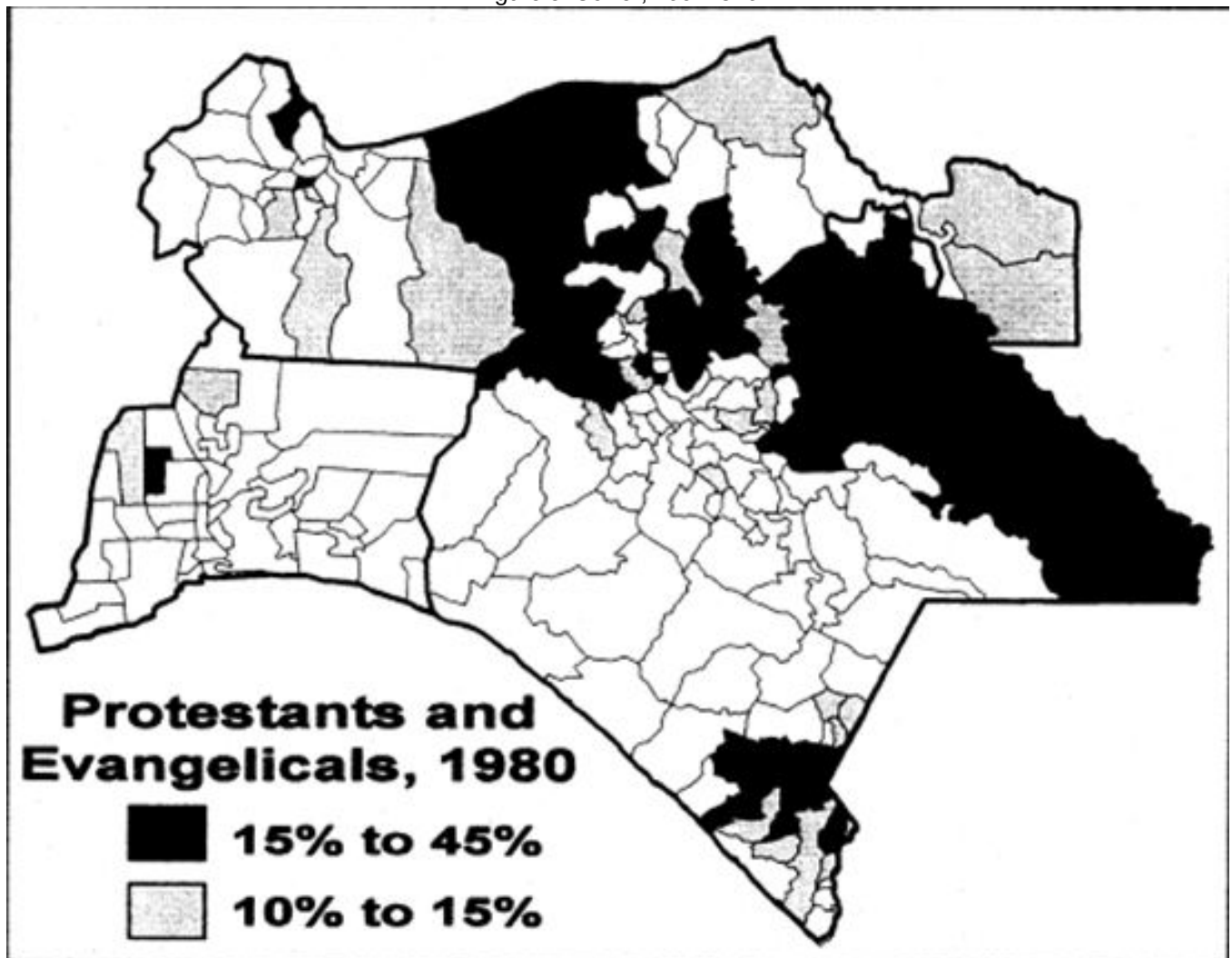
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| Year | All Chiapas |            | Private property* |            |
|------|-------------|------------|-------------------|------------|
|      | Total       | Fino grade | Total             | Fino grade |
| 1950 | 480,308     | 11,278     | 351,771           | 6,811      |
| 1960 | 682,512     | 57,982     | 525,086           | 49,954     |
| 1970 | 1,249,326   | 148,185    | 890,094           | 140,191    |

\* Larger than 5 hectares.

Figure 8. Collier, 1994: 379



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[1]Henceforth “Zapatistas” will be a term used to refer to the armed guerrillas, and “EZLN” to denote the base communities, even if these terms are used interchangeably in most literature.

[2] This is a method originally employed by Knight (1992: 114) in his analysis of liberalism and conservatism in pre-revolutionary Mexico. His method has been adapted for the purposes of this dissertation.

[3] “Mexico Profundo” is the title of a book by Guillermo Bonfil and a term used to describe Mesoamerican civilisation, especially its cultural and ecological dimensions.

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