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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SANTA CRUZ

# VISUALIZING DECOLONIAL DEMOCRACY IN THE OAXACA COMMUNE

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

VISUAL STUDIES

by

**Lorraine J. Affourtit**

September 2020

The Dissertation of Lorraine J. Affourtit is approved:

_____
Professor Martin A. Berger, chair

_____
Professor Jennifer A. González

_____
Professor Julia Bryan-Wilson

_____
Professor Leonard Folgarait

_____
Quentin Williams
Acting Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies

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**Abstract**
Visualizing Decolonial Democracy in the Oaxaca Commune
Lorraine J. Affourtit

As we face a global crisis of democracy, this dissertation highlights the importance of visual culture in social justice movements, giving new dimension to the refrain: "This is what democracy looks like!" *Visualizing Decolonial Democracy in the Oaxaca Commune* analyzes the visual culture of the Oaxaca Commune, a 2006 popular uprising and ensuing social movement in the southern Mexican state of Oaxaca. The Oaxaca Commune was a broad-based social movement aimed at changing the political climate of Oaxaca and addressing long-standing failures of and inequities within its representative democracy. I argue that visual culture projects were the driving force in envisioning, manifesting, and sustaining the Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca (APPO) and its compelling political model. APPO brought together over three hundred social, cultural, and political organizations for an experiment in what I term "decolonial democracy:" participatory democratic politics based in Indigenous communal practices, governance, and forms of resistance to colonialism and its heirs: imperialism, global capitalism, and neoliberalism.

This project is related to global trends in contemporary social movements waging experiments in participatory politics and direct democracy as strategies to combat racial, ethnic, and gendered oppression, austerity, corruption, poverty, and inequality. I signal how my case study fits into these trends while also attending to the specific visual dynamics of social movement culture and the particular geopolitics of

Oaxaca. I analyze three visual culture projects initiated in the Oaxaca Commune: graphic art created by youth activists and artists in Oaxaca City art collectives; the People's Guelaguetza Indigenous folk festival coordinated by APPO, the teachers' union, and Oaxacan Indigenous communities; and television broadcasts produced by Oaxacan women occupying the state radio and television station. In varying and often overlapping ways, I argue, each visual culture initiative drew from and revised cultural, artistic, and political traditions to galvanize public support for APPO and the political changes it pushed for. The wealth of visual material animating the Oaxaca Commune made it clear that the Oaxacan people were not only protesting the injustices of the current political system, but were also actively prefiguring the kinds of participatory politics they demanded.

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In closing, I want to acknowledge that during the eight years that I was getting my Ph.D., up to 4,000+ Black people were killed by police in the U.S., thousands of migrants were murdered, brutalized, raped, disappeared, and caged, tens of thousands of women and trans people have been killed or have suffered sexual violence, and many more thousands have been subject to social death, isolation, and human rights abuses as incarcerated adults in the prison industrial complex and minoritized Indigenous communities all over the globe. As I move into the next phase of my career as a faculty member in higher education, I re-commit to actively fighting for anti-racism, abolition, decolonization, and social justice.

I want to dedicate my dissertation to Barbara DeGenevieve, who has provided the ethical, aesthetic, and theoretical compass for my art and scholarship since I had the good fortune to study with her in 1997. I keep her photograph on my desk always as a reminder to be vigilant, audacious, and unrelenting! Thank you Barbara. I miss you every day. ~

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## Introduction.
## *Oaxaca in the Future Anterior I*

"Social movements not only have sometimes succeeded in translating their agendas into public policies and in expanding the boundaries of institutional politics but also, significantly, have struggled to resignify the very meanings of received notions of citizenship, political representation and participation, and, as a consequence, of democracy itself."[1]




[Figure 0.1. El Santo Niño APPO, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, 2016. Photograph by the author.]

[Figure 0.1] The Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca (*Asamblea Popular de los Pueblos de Oaxaca,* APPO), a grassroots coalition formed during the 2006 popular uprising in the southern Mexican state of Oaxaca (the Oaxaca

[1] Sonia E. Alvarez, Arturo Escobar, and Evelina Dagnino, eds., *Cultures of Politics/ Politics of Cultures: Re-Visioning Latin American Social Movements* (Boulder, CO.: Westview Press, 1998), 2.

Commune), unveiled this patron saint several months into the insurrection.[2] "*El Santo Niño APPO*" ("The Child Saint of APPO"), is based on the traditional Mexican saint icon *El Niño Dios* (Little God Child) that is often kept in home altars, carried during *posadas* (Christmas processions), and brought to mass during an early February religious celebration called *Candlemas*.[3] The APPO members who created El Santo Niño APPO did so in the manner of one of the most popular representations of the godchild – El Niño Dios de Atocha, a beatific doll sitting on a miniature wooden throne inside a glass vitrine. However, instead of the blue robe, brown cloak, feathered hat, and sandals of the traditional version, Santo Niño APPO wears a black shirt, black beret, jeans, work boots, and a red bandana around his neck. Instead of the staff and basket, he carries a slingshot draped across his torso, a few bottle rockets strapped to his back, and holds a metal shield that says "*Viva La APPO*" ("Long Live APPO") with a red star below, the APPO symbol. On his right arm, he carries a canvas bag labeled "*El inquieto*" ("the restless one"), which holds matches and a Molotov cocktail. Beside El Niño Santo APPO's throne, there is a shopping cart loaded with rocks, signaling the self-defense strategies of Oaxaca Commune activists and demonstrators in stand-offs with paramilitary police. The steely gaze of El Santo Niño APPO's blue eyes and his gently raised right-hand fingers, offering a benediction, evoke both urgency and clemency.

[2] All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.
[3] Lynn Stephen, *We Are the Face of Oaxaca: Testimony and Social Movements*, E-Duke Books Scholarly Collection (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013), 272.

*  *  *

APPO's El Santo Niño patron saint is an apt image to introduce this dissertation project. While the effigy does not fall into the media of the three visual culture initiatives I explore in the main chapters that follow, it offers a paradigmatic example of some of their effects. Like the various material, media, and performative cultures analyzed in these pages, APPO's El Santo Niño reimagines traditional forms and practices for new political aims. The Oaxaca Commune patron saint appealed to a broad population in a Catholicized country, but also playfully subverted the colonial Christian iconography for a hybrid aesthetic, exemplifying the popular assembly's own composite of political, social, and cultural processes and structures. In modifying revolutionary, aesthetic, ancestral, religious, and Indigenous traditions and practices and mobilizing them as part of a political transformation, APPO activated a diverse civil society to resist state repression, systemic inequality, and disenfranchisement, and to imagine and build a new space of political participation, self-governance, and autonomy.

This dissertation project is a case study focused on Oaxaca's popular uprising and ensuing social movement analyzed through the lens of its visual culture projects. Creative projects were vital for the formation of APPO and were the dominant site of widespread public discourse around the proposal APPO put forward for an alternative government structure and a mode of political participation that better served Oaxaca's minoritized populations. Visual projects in different media served to: broadcast and disseminate APPO's aims; galvanize the popular power necessary to grow APPO and

to mobilize its proposed changes; negotiate and deliberate the terms of those changes as well as the form and structure of APPO; and to create an imaginary within which to prototype these political transformations. The central aim of this dissertation is to analyze the ways in which the coalition of assemblies and organizations forming APPO in the Oaxaca Commune envisioned, manifested, negotiated, and sustained a new model of participatory democratic governance through multiform projects in the visual realm. APPO's model brought together rural traditional Indigenous governance and communal practices with urban-based state politics. This was a visionary model that needed public presentation in accessible and understandable formations to encourage its adoption by the heterogeneous coalition that APPO needed to bring together in order to create it.

**The Oaxaca Commune**

The Oaxaca Commune erupted in the summer of 2006 as a popular uprising responding to then-governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz's attack on the encampment (*plantón*) held by Oaxaca's Local Section 22 of the national teachers' union during their annual teaching strike.[4] Governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz (URO) sent in paramilitary police units in the middle of the night on June 14, 2006 to evict the teachers from the plantón. The

[4] Local Section 22 of Mexico's National Union of Education Workers (*Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación* – SNTE) and of its dissident faction, the National Coordination of Education Workers (*Coordinadora Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación* – CNTE), is one of the largest and most active dissident union locals, which since 1980 has been at the forefront of the Democratic Teachers' Movement, marshaling a three-pronged plan to democratize the SNTE, national education, and ultimately the country. I will provide more background on Section 22 and the Democratic Teacher's Movement in the first chapter.

paramilitaries used tear gas and physical force to disperse and frighten the teachers and their children, and then destroyed the encampment by tearing down tents and tarps and setting fire to personal belongings.

While the teachers' union had battled the government for decades, striking every summer for living wages and improved student resources, the general public had for the most part learned to ignore or irritably coexist with the union's plantón over the preceding thirty years. But when the tear gas lured downtown merchants and residents out into the streets that early June morning, the brutal attack they witnessed transformed their relationship to the teachers' movement. The governor's actions had inadvertently caused a political opening in which the union could ally with civil society around one urgent objective – ousting him from power. Over three hundred statewide civil society organizations across the sociopolitical spectrum gathered together with Section 22 to call for the governor's deposal, forming APPO, an assembly of assemblies and a movement of movements, which together organized the uprising over the ensuing seven months. The immediate crisis served to highlight larger-scale political issues that had long been building, and for the first time the Oaxacan people had the opportunity and the means to address them. While Mexico had been in a purported "transition to democracy" since 2000, when the election of President Vicente Fox ended seven decades of Institutional Revolutionary Party (*Partido Revolucionario Institucional* – PRI) rule over the country, the promises of a liberal democratic "sweep" of progressive changes proved empty for the country's most marginalized peoples and strained against the reality of continuing government

corruption and impunity. The situation was even worse in Oaxaca, and not only because of its high poverty rate and large Indigenous population. Even though the PRI had been ousted from the central government, the party's hold continued in Oaxaca state and reached its apotheosis with governor URO.[5]

**Decolonial Democracy**

Calling for the people to create their own democratic transition from below, APPO proposed what might best be termed *decolonial democracy*: participatory democratic politics based in Indigenous communal practices, self-governance and forms of resistance to colonialism and its heirs – imperialism, global capitalism, and neoliberalism. I introduce this term and definition with inspiration from Argentine thinker Walter Mignolo and his discussion of the Indigenous Chiapas-based Zapatista National Liberation Army (*Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional* – EZLN) project to "decolonize democracy;" Robin D.G. Kelley, Angela Y. Davis, and George Lipsitz in their varied interpretations and invocations of W.E.B. Du Bois' conception of "abolition democracy;" and Oaxacan scholar Gustavo Esteva's description of APPO as a form of "radical democracy."[6]

---

[5] The PRI came into power at the end of the Mexican Revolution (1910–1920) under the guise of revolutionary principles and then consolidated into a dictatorial one-party state that ruled Mexico from 1929–2000. However, in 2006 Oaxaca was going into its eighth decade with a PRI state government.

[6] Walter D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011); Robin D.G. Kelley, "Ending War?: Decolonial Democracy Against Neoliberalism." YouTube video, 1:32:05, from a talk filmed in April 2015, posted February 2017, https://youtu.be/-BuluasxjRQ; Angela Y. Davis, *Abolition Democracy: Prisons, Democracy and Empire* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2010); George Lipsitz, "Abolition Democracy and Global Justice," *Comparative American Studies An International Journal* 2, no. 3 (2004): 271–286, doi:10.1177/1477570004047906; W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in*

The concept of radical democracy is often associated in scholarship on Western politics and especially with the work of Chantal Mouffe and Ernest Laclau. However, Esteva and other scholars writing from within the Latin American post/ decolonial context, notably Walter Mignolo, Enrique Dussel, and Arturo Escobar, more often critique the theoretical tradition from which Mouffe and Laclau write than align with it. Mouffe asserts: "the fundamental characteristic of modernity is undoubtedly the advent of the democratic revolution."[7] Mouffe renders democratic practice as foundational to Western modernity and thus seems to situate radical democracy as nothing more than a scion of liberal democracy. As Macarena Gómez-Barris elaborates: "Rather than focus on revolution, Laclau and Mouffe describe the importance of deepening the ideas and values already present within but unfulfilled by liberal democracy...Though deepening or radicalizing democracy is certainly a worthy objective, we might note that liberal democracy has structural limitations, because its exclusionary idea of freedom is based on histories of debt, enslavement, theft, omission, dispossession, and obfuscation."[8]

The Latin American decolonial theorists mentioned above attempt to account for the structural limitations of liberal democracy by drawing on Peruvian thinker Aníbal Quijano's modernity/ coloniality paradigm to reveal the entanglements between the colonial project and the Western political institutions adopted by the

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*America, 1860-1880* (New York: Free Press, 1998, originally published 1935); and Gustavo Esteva, "Oaxaca: The Path of Radical Democracy," *Socialism and Democracy* 21, no. 2 (July 1, 2007): 74–96, doi: 10.1080/08854300701388146.

[7] Chantal Mouffe, *The Return of the Political*, Phronesis (London: Verso, 1993), 11.

[8] Macarena Gómez-Barris, *Beyond the Pink Tide: Art and Political Undercurrents in the Americas*, American Studies Now: Critical Histories of the Present 7 (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2018), 18.

enterprise of modernity. Quijano conceives of modernity as an epistemology inextricable from the European colonial project, thereby tracing the origins of modernity to the colonial conquest in 1492. As Mignolo explains in an interview:

> Modern/colonial empires (Western Europeans) were the founders and managers of a type of economy we today name capitalism. Quijano proposed coloniality to undrape the underlying logic of all Western (From Spain to England to the US) modern/colonial imperialisms. By so doing, Quijano made a second radical move: there is no modernity without coloniality, thus, modernity/coloniality are two sides of the same coin. Up until that moment everybody thought of modernity as a totality and colonialism as an unhappy situation that advancing modernity vision and ideals would end. Quijano's proposal was that coloniality is a necessary component of modernity and therefore it cannot be ended if global imperial designs in the name of modernity continue. Coloniality, in other words, is the darker side of Western modernity.[9]

Mignolo, drawing from Quijano, makes clear that positivist assumptions about modernity and its promise to mete out Western liberal ideals is a red herring – a favourable coupling covering over a dangerous double-bind. Mouffe's conflation of modernity and democracy that forms the basis of her concept of radical democracy thus distracts from acknowledgement of a colonial underbelly and the possibilities of democratic praxis "de-linked," as Mignolo suggests, from this "darker side." From this set of concerns laid out by Latin American decolonial thinkers, we recognize that liberal democracy has been folded into the metrics of global neoliberal capitalism,

[9] Alvina Hoffman, "Interview – Walter Mignolo/ Part 2: Key Concepts," January 21, 2017, https://www.e-ir.info/2017/01/21/interview-walter-mignolopart-2-key-concepts/. This interview elaborates on Mignolo's book, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity*. Also see: Walter Mignolo "Delinking: The Rhetoric of modernity, the logic of coloniality and the grammar of de-coloniality," *Cultural Studies*, 21 (2), 2007: 449-514; Aníbal Quijano, "Coloniality and Modernity/ Rationality," *Cultural Studies*, 21 (2), 2007:168-178; Aníbal Quijano, "Coloniality of Power and Eurocentrism in Latin America" *International Sociology*, Volume 15, Issue 2 (June 1, 2000): 215-232; Enrique Dussel, "Eurocentrism and Modernity" (Introduction to the Frankfurt Lectures) in *The Postmodernism Debate in Latin America*, eds. John Beverley, Michael Aronna, and José Oviedo (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995): 65-77.

which was in turn built on the modernity/ coloniality paradigm, such that it undermines the very ideals of "true" democracy as "rule by and for the people." A decolonial approach to democracy can thus be called "radical," we might say, to the extent that it not only acknowledges these complexities, but also operates from a model in resistance to the double-bind, with strategies to mitigate the particular effects of poverty and inequality enmeshed in liberal democratic structures.

For my purposes, using the term decolonial democracy advances two important aims of this study: highlighting how APPO was linked to and indicative of trends in global twenty-first century counter-neoliberal movements, but rooted in Oaxaca's particular geopolitics; and revealing how APPO serves as a compelling model of a radical, equitably horizontal participatory democracy based in ancestral Indigenous self-governance in resistance to the oppressive policies of colonialism and capitalism. APPO's model, I will argue, was envisioned and shaped through a variety of visual, audio-visual, and performative media produced through the extra-institutional creative practices undertaken by ordinary Oaxacan citizens in the Oaxaca Commune.

It will become clearer in the chapters that follow that APPO's creative projects and their connections to Indigenous forms of knowledge, lifeways, and organizing also generatively mine under the colonial regimes of vision, visuality, and occularity.[10] APPO's multi-sensory and multi-modal projects extend and exceed the visual, producing new ways of visualizing political transformation and prefiguring

[10] For a useful discussion within the discipline of visual culture studies on visuality as a "scopic regime" of Western hegemony and strategies for resisting and decolonizing hegemonic vision, see Nicholas Mirzoeff, *The Right to Look: A Counterhistory of Visuality* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2011).

radical democratic practice. Graphic art created by APPO-aligned artist collectives incorporated text as often as images; operated spatially, materially, and texturally on city architecture; and often, as I will explore, transformed the tactile qualities of their matrices via the action from which graffiti takes its name, *grafiare* – to scratch. The People's Guelaguetza festival was a multisensory performative event that relied on embodiment and incorporated interactive parades, music, dance, food and drink, and political rhetoric. And the CORTV broadcasts produced by APPO women were, of course, audio-visual phenomena that were also complemented and accompanied by radio programs created at the same station. The TV broadcasts vibrated with embodiment because they were often live, frequently unstable, and presented the bodies and voices of women familiar in their ordinariness but novel within the state television format. These projects remind us that the process of envisioning social change may be usefully explored through the visual register but cannot be exhausted in it. Equally, while I am a visual studies scholar, my analysis of APPO's projects complicates and challenges the very rubric of visual studies and suggests an approach to visual culture in the mode of an in-discipline or inter-discipline, since it cannot be comfortably or productively bound by the visual realm.

**Historiographical context and literature review**

Academic literature on the Oaxaca Commune is scant, especially in English, but three important studies by U.S.-based anthropologists informed my project – Lynn Stephen's ethnography, *We are the Face of Oaxaca*, Iván Arenas' dissertation,

*Rearticulating the Social: Spatial Practices, Collective Subjects, and Oaxaca's Art of Protest*, and Maurice Rafael Magaña's dissertation, *Youth in Movement: the Cultural Politics of Autonomous Youth Activism in Southern Mexico*.[11] Each study uses oral histories and participant observation to present ethnographic perspectives on the social movement and its participants, and each discusses visual material to some degree. Stephen's book focuses on the importance of oral testimony, Arenas concentrates on spatial politics and the creation of political subjectivities through social interaction in the barricades and in assemblies, and Magaña analyzes the role of youth activism.

My project begins with the assertion that the Oaxaca Commune's visual culture deserves as much in-depth analysis as other, more sociologically legible aspects of the movement. I aim to bring attention to the ways in which the creative practices of ordinary peoples in Oaxaca were vital to the political transformations that APPO envisioned (and in some cases, achieved). My research is in direct conversation with above texts and offers an approach to the subject of the Oaxaca Commune that opens new avenues of analysis and adds to scholarly understanding of this movement.

My research is also indebted to the work of Oaxacan scholar Gustavo Esteva, founder of *Unitierra* (University of the Earth) in Oaxaca and Chiapas. Esteva has called himself a "recovering academic" and his Unitierra school is based in the free

[11] Stephen, *We Are the Face*; Iván Arenas, *Rearticulating the Social: Spatial Practices, Collective Subjects, and Oaxaca's Art of Protest* (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2011), http://digitalassets.lib.berkeley.edu/etd/ucb/text/Arenas_berkeley_0028E_11846.pdf; Maurice Rafael Magaña, *Youth in Movement: the Cultural Politics of Autonomous Youth Activism in Southern Mexico* (PhD diss., University of Oregon, 2013).

exchange of ideas among youth learning sustainable practices of climate-conscious community-based food sovereignty, self-governance, and autonomy. Esteva wrote extensively on the Oaxaca Commune during the year in which it erupted in short-form articles, exploratory essays, and journalistic reports on APPO and its movement. His prevailing analysis of the Oaxaca Commune's social and cultural contexts, successes and failures, and political significance is that it "anticipates our future and carries a great burden of hope" – a takeaway I have tried to keep at the forefront of this dissertation.[12]

An edited collection of articles Nancy Davies wrote for the periodical *Narco News* in 2006 provided on-the-ground day-by-day reporting on Oaxaca Commune events as they unfolded.[13] Davies, an American-born journalist and long-time resident of Oaxaca, told the story of the Oaxaca Commune with the keen, intelligent, and sympathetic approach of an insider. I was fortunate enough to also speak with Davies in person about her and her husband's writing on the uprising and their experiences in Oaxaca from the time they first arrived in the late 1990's. She shared her personal archive of writings, photographs, videos, and notes and archives from the yahoo study

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[12] Gustavo Esteva, "The Asamblea Popular de Los Pueblos de Oaxaca: A Chronicle of Radical Democracy," *Latin American Perspectives* (June 30, 2016): 132-33, doi:10.1177/0094582X06297615, 133; See also: Esteva, "Oaxaca: The Path to Radical Democracy;" "The Oaxaca Commune and Mexico's Coming Insurrection," *Antipode* 42, no. 4 (September 1, 2010): 978–93, doi:10.1111/j.1467-8330.2010.00784.x; "Hope from the Margins / The Wealth of the Commons," Accessed March 3, 2019, http://wealthofthecommons.org/essay/hope-margins; Gustavo Esteva & Arturo Guerrero, *Eso Que Afuera Llaman Amistad*, Accessed October 9, 2018, http://archive.org/details/EsoQueAfuera LlamanAmistad [published in English as "Guelaguetza and Tu Chha ia: a Zapotec Perspective of What Others Call Friendship," in *The Palgrave International Handbook of Peace Studies: a Cultural Perspective*, ed.Wolfgang Dietrich (UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 352-372]; and Gustavo Esteva and Madhu Suri Prakash, *Grassroots Post-Modernism: Remaking the Soil of Cultures* (London: Zed Books, 1998).

[13] Nancy Davies, *The People Decide - Oaxaca's Popular Assembly*, First Edition (Natick, MA: Narco News Books, 2007).

group she started in the years following the uprising, all of which I drew from as crucial background for my research.

There is much more written about the Oaxaca Commune by those who participated in it, and some of these writings have been collected in publications for non-academic audiences. Two books in particular served as grounding for my own scholarly investigations, both published by independent Bay Area publisher PM Press. The first, *Getting up for the People*, includes graphic artwork by the Assembly of Revolutionary Artists of Oaxaca (*Asamblea de Artistas Revolucionarias de Oaxaca*, ASARO), essays by scholar and archivist Suzanne Schadl, and commentary by ASARO artists, all of which informed Chapter 2. The second is *Teaching Rebellion*, a collection of testimonies from Oaxaca Commune artists, activists, educators, and members of APPO put together by the grassroots group Collectives of Support, Solidarity and Action (*Colectivos de Apoyo, Solidaridad y Acción*, C.A.S.A.) in Oaxaca.[14] These testimonies appear throughout my study.

Several texts published in Oaxaca also provided direction for my project. *La Batalla por Oaxaca* (*The Battle for Oaxaca*), a collection of essays reflecting on the Oaxaca Commune in the year following, written by activists, scholars, journalists, and artists, provided perspectives internal to the region and the movement.[15] The collection, *Comunalidad, tramas comunitarias y producción de lo Común*

[14] ASARO (Group of artists), Mike Graham de La Rosa, and Suzanne M. Schadl, *Getting up for the People: The Visual Revolution of ASAR-Oaxaca* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2014); Diana Denham and C. A. S. A. Collective, *Teaching Rebellion: Stories from the Grassroots Mobilization in Oaxaca* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2008).
[15] David Arriaga, ed., *La Batalla Por Oaxaca* (Oaxaca: Ediciones Yope Power, 2007).

(*Comunalidad, Comunitarian Trauma and the Production of the Common*), created from the proceedings of the International Congress of Comunalidad in Puebla, Mexico in 2015, includes commentary on practices of comunalidad, connecting it to concepts in other Indigenous communities, cultural contexts, and worldviews from across Latin America, such as "good living"/ *buen vivir*/ *sumak kawsay* (Quechua, Andean context). The International Civil Commission for Human Rights Observation's *Report Concerning the Events of Oaxaca* contains hundreds of testimonies from Oaxacan people about the Oaxaca Commune's goals, gains, and losses, with attention to the human rights abuses perpetrated by state and national authorities to quell dissent and restore order. These personal stories served as supplement to my own interviews with Oaxacan citizens, and the report's juridical context concerning human rights laws in Mexico offered a broader understanding of the movement's stakes.[16]

This dissertation is in dialogue with the broader literature in social movement studies, politics, and Indigenous studies in the Latin American context. *Cultures of Politics/ Politics of Cultures*, a collection of scholarly research on Latin American social movements, provides for a wide variety of popular movements what I hope to offer for the Oaxaca Commune case study; that is, attention to the "less measurable, yet vital ways in which movements continue to contest culturally specific notions of politics and the political...to re-theorize the cultural dimensions of politics...[and] the

[16] Julie Webb-Pullman et al., "Report Concerning the Events of Oaxaca," International Civil Commission for Human Rights Observation (Barcelona, Spain: CCIODH, 2007), doi:10.13140 /RG.2.1.3261.8728.

political dimensions of the cultural."[17] In regard to scholarly work in Latin American Indigenous studies, *New World of Indigenous Resistance* features conversations between Noam Chomsky and scholars, educators, and activists from the Indigenous Americas about practices of autonomy, the preservation of cultural knowledge, and political struggle.[18] Macarena Gomez-Barris, especially in her book *Beyond the Pink Tide*, is a recent interlocutor whose work perhaps most closely aligns with my research aims and who has shaped my approach in tying this dissertation together.[19] While Gomez-Barris does not write about Oaxaca, her study, like mine, finds its primary investment in creative visual and cultural materials and their crucial roles in leftist political struggles during the backlash following the "pink tide," i.e., the period of so-called "progressive" democratic governmental shift across Latin America that according to many has failed to deliver meaningful political transformation.[20]

**Theoretical overview**

The primary theoretical foundation of this project triangulates from three main sources – the voices of Oaxaca Commune participants, commentary from Oaxacan thinkers (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous), and my own observations and analyses of primary materials, archives, events, and interviews. Secondary sources include literature outside of the Oaxacan context, from Latin American Indigenous

[17] Alvarez et.al., *Cultures of Politics*, xi.
[18] Lois Meyer and Benjamín Maldonado Alvarado, eds., *New World of Indigenous Resistance: Noam Chomsky and Voices from North, South, and Central America*, Open Media Series (San Francisco, CA: City Lights Books, 2010).
[19] Gómez-Barris, *Beyond the Pink Tide*.
[20] I will gloss the "pink tide" as it pertains to Oaxaca and regional movements in the next chapter.

activists, artists, and scholars; Indigenous studies more generally; decolonial studies; democratic theory; social movement studies; Latin American studies; postcolonial/ subaltern studies; and Black studies in the United States.

This project seeks to connect an in-depth analysis of the visual culture created by minoritized citizens in Oaxaca as part of APPO's movement with an investigation of APPO's political model and the Indigenous practices that inspired its structure. APPO's innovation was based on a very simple idea that was extremely complicated to carry out – bringing together the communal self-governance practices and lifeways of Oaxaca's original peoples with novel forms of participatory democracy to bear on Oaxaca's fractured urban state politics in order to build a model of a people's government for the state and eventually the nation. The shared Indigenous cultural heritage of APPO's strongest base membership, Section 22 teachers and Oaxaca's working poor, and its roots in communal lifeways, provided the backbone of APPO's model.

Jaime Martínez Luna (Zapotec) and Floriberto Díaz Gómez (Mixe), both Oaxacan Indigenous scholars trained as anthropologists, formulated a conceptual foundation for the practices of communal life in the state's Indigenous communities. Rejecting the pejorative and paternalistic term "*usos y costumbres*" ("uses and customs") used by the government to refer to the Indigenous communal norms practiced in the *pueblos*, Martínez Luna and Díaz Gómez generated a concept from within their own communities – *comunalidad*. Comunalidad does not have a direct translation and defies easy definition because it refers to a set of practices and

lifeways incorporating a range of expressions in different pueblos and with organic changes over time. However, to offer one introductory definition, comunalidad has been described as "the principle and practices of communal life and the source of indigenous identity in resistance."[21] While Martínez Luna, who has written most extensively on the subject, does not himself offer such a succinct definition, he writes that comunalidad is expressed in four main "pillars:" communal land (*territorio*); communal work/ community service (*tequio*); communal governance in popular assemblies (*asamblea*); and communal celebrations (*fiesta*).[22] Further, in order to distinguish from inept democracy that "supposedly represents the idea and action of everyone...[but]...carries at its heart all the elements for undoing the structures of social action,"[23] Martínez Luna proposes thinking of communal autonomous governance in assemblies as *comunalicracia*: "the selection of values and principles of each person, that are, however, supported by the common, by the people. It isn't mass-produced, it is relation, work, and sacrifice."[24]

APPO adapted the dialogical, consensus-based, horizontal and non-party affiliated asamblea structure to build an urban-based political space that would allow greater and more direct participation from women, Indigenous peoples, and the working poor. Drawing on Martínez Luna's scholarship, I conceive of APPO's adoption and revision of comunalidad and comunalicracia for the context of the

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[21] Meyer and Maldonado Alvarado, *New World of Indigenous Resistance*, 30.
[22] Jaime Martínez Luna, *Eso que llaman comunalidad* (México D.F.: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes y Fundación Alfredo Harp Helú Oaxaca México, 2010).
[23] Jaime Martínez Luna, *Comunalidad y Desarrollo* (México D.F.: CONACULTA, Culturales y Populares Indígenas y CAMPO, Centro de Apoyo al Movimiento Popular Oaxaqueño, 2003), 88.
[24] Martínez Luna, *Comunalidad y Desarrollo*, 87.

Oaxaca Commune, an urban, broad-based, pan-ethnic social movement, as a pioneering model of decolonial democracy. The visual initiatives that APPO and its smaller assemblies mobilized, I argue, prefigured, and in turn helped to manifest, this decolonial democratic model that APPO was actively building.

Simply put, prefigurative politics is the practice of prototyping in the present moment a desired future society. The term was coined in political parlance by New Left thinkers Carl Boggs and Winnie Breines in the 1960's. Boggs defined the term in relationship to radical communist politics: "By 'prefigurative,' I mean the embodiment, within the ongoing political practice of a movement, of those forms of social relations, decision-making, culture, and human experience that are the ultimate goal."[25] Breines extended the concept to New Left community organizing:

> In saying that the New Left sought community, I refer not only to the desire to create a sense of wholeness and communication in social relations, but to the effort to create noncapitalist and communitarian institutions that embodied such relationships (for example, counter-institutions). Prefigurative politics attempted to develop the seeds of liberation and the new society (prior to and in the process of revolution) through notions of participatory democracy grounded in counter-institutions; this meant building community.[26]

More recently, the term "prefigurative politics" has been invoked prolifically in New Social Movement literature to refer to "a range of social experiments that both critique the status quo and offer alternatives by implementing radically democratic practices in pursuit of social justice," especially global twenty-first century social

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[25] Carl Boggs, "Marxism, prefigurative communism, and the problem of workers' control," *Radical America* 6 (Winter 1977): 99-122, 100, https://library.brown.edu/pdfs/1124109138892414.pdf.
[26] Winnie Breines, "Community and organization: The new left and Michels' 'Iron Law,' *Social Problems*, 27(4) 1980: 419-429, doi:10.2307/800170, 421.

movements exploring alternate forms of governing and political organizing.[27] Marianne Maeckelbergh defines prefiguration, with particular attention to alter-globalization and counter-neoliberal movements, as "an enactment of the ultimate values of an ideal society within the very means of struggle for that society."[28]

A.C. Dinerstein adds a crucial perspective on Indigenous autonomy movements in Latin America, insisting that we must think prefiguration as part of autonomy initiatives expressed in "a complex collective action that includes the negation of the given; the creation of the alternative; the struggle with, against and beyond the state; the law and capital; and the production of excess."[29] Dinerstein's theorization of prefiguration proves most germane to this dissertation because it encapsulates the complexity of autonomy struggles and negotiations with the state in a process that is nonlinear, rhizomatic, and involves significant areas of tension, push-and-pull, accommodation, and subversion. Further, Dinerstein acknowledges important particularities regarding Indigenous subjectivity in relationship to the state. Indigenous autonomy cannot be absolute at this stage of decolonization, Dinerstein suggests, a warning that echoes in the work of Esteva.

When I spoke with Esteva in 2019 and told him about my project, he was

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[27] Flora Cornish et al., "Rethinking Prefigurative Politics: Introduction to the Special Thematic Section," *Journal of Social and Political Psychology* 4, no. 1 (May 24, 2016): 1, doi:10.5964/jspp.v4i1.640.

[28] Marianne Maeckelbergh, "The Road to Democracy: The Political Legacy of '1968,'" *International Review of Social History* 56, no. 2 (2011): 302, https://www.jstor.org/stable/44583883. See also David Graeber, "The New Anarchists," *New Left Review* 13, no. January-February (2002), https://newleftreview.org/II/13/david-graeber-the-new-anarchists; Luke Yates, "Rethinking Prefiguration: Alternatives, Micropolitics and Goals in Social Movements," *Social Movement Studies* 14, no. 1 (January 2, 2015): 1–21, doi:10.1080/14742837.2013.870883.

[29] Ana C. Dinerstein, *The Politics of Autonomy in Latin America: The Art of Organising Hope*, Non-Governmental Public Action Series (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 18.

reluctant to accept the term "decolonial" in regard to APPO, the Oaxaca Commune, or the other subject he often writes about – the Zapatistas. Esteva told me he prefers the term "radical democracy" because the etymology of the word "radical" is "from the root," which best expresses popular power as governing from below, where the people are, and the idea that rule from above will never serve the needs and interests of ordinary peoples. Esteva added that he does not like the term decolonial because he thinks it has become an academic trend, too far removed from his association of the concept with a movement he says came out of Peru in the 1980's. For Esteva, decolonization refers to a process of self-decolonization, whereby people "from below" were learning to recognize the ways in which they had internalized their own colonization and began engaging in a process of decolonizing themselves and their minds. In order to think APPO as separate from this, even though he says there were inflections of this ongoing process in the constituency of APPO, Esteva instead associates APPO and the Oaxaca Commune with the term radical democracy. Further, Esteva explains that movements like APPO are not simply fighting against neoliberalism or the government, but instead attempting to render these oppressive systems unnecessary.[30]

Terms like *pueblos originarios* (original peoples) remind us of Latin American Indigenous communities' existence prior to colonial invasion and control. Contemporary Indigenous subjectivity is always already so deeply embedded in

[30] Interview with Gustavo Esteva, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, February 27, 2019. One of Esteva's primary interlocutors in his thinking about radical democracy is C. Douglas Lummis, to whom he referred frequently in our interview. See C. Douglas Lummis, *Radical Democracy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996).

colonial relations with the state that not even extreme separatist structures of organization, such as the Zapatista autonomous territories in Chiapas, can claim complete disimbrication from the persistence of internalized coloniality. Nevertheless, projects like EZLN and APPO are invested in attempting this process. With the Zapatistas, it is manifested in a form of living and working, while in APPO it was manifested in a form of governance aimed at, as Esteva suggests, rendering the broken political structures of state politics unnecessary rather than abolishing the state entirely. This, I think, is the key of a "working alternative;" it must in some way work with/ against/ alongside what already exists, a dynamic that Dinerstein captures in her conception of prefiguration as the "art of organising hope."[31] Like Esteva and Dinerstein, I am convinced that while it is important to study the Western political tradition to which we so often attribute the institution of democracy, it is also crucial to stay attentive to what Conway and Singh call "a body of indigenous anti-colonial social and political thought in...settler-colonial societies which, although rarely using the language of democracy, nevertheless makes some convergent claims about the alternative political imaginaries available in their land-based traditions of governance."[32]

A brief return to Esteva's conception of radical democracy will help to clarify the connection I make between APPO's democratization initiative and the practice of prefiguration. As Conway and Singh summarize: "In Esteva's view, then, the APPO

[31] Dinerstein, *Politics of Autonomy.*
[32] Janet Conway and Jakeet Singh, "Radical Democracy in Global Perspective: Notes from the Pluriverse," *Third World Quarterly* 32, no. 4 (2011): 695, https://www.jstor.org/stable/41300342.

engaged in the struggle for, *and is itself an expression or practice of*, radical democracy in the sense of a localised, constructive, practice-based, horizontalist, non-statist and bottom-up form of co-operation, action-co-ordination and decision making, to which formal and participatory forms of democracy should always remain rooted, responsible, obedient."[33] That the Oaxaca Commune movement should be expressed as *in movement* toward, and also as an embodiment of, a political ideal and practice, is the essence of what is radical, i.e., "from the root" about APPO's proposal for a people's democracy.

This project brings the abovementioned methods of thinking prefiguration to bear on the particular case of the Oaxaca Commune, while elucidating the importance of analyzing APPO's prefigurative move through some of the primary visual media within which it was engendered. Grounded in my intellectual genealogy as an artist and visual studies scholar, this project also stays curious about the ways in which prefiguration operates in the visual formations of social movement culture, a facet of prefigurative politics that has seen topical explorations but relatively few in-depth visual analyses.[34] I examine the relationship between prefiguration in its socio-political dimensions and in its aesthetic and poetic dimensions, as it can be argued

[33] Conway and Singh, "Radical Democracy," 697; (my emphasis).

[34] A few examples of comparative explorations of social movement art and visual culture that suggest relationships between prefigurative politics and material/ media cultures are: Yates McKee, *Strike Art: Contemporary Art and the Post-Occupy Condition* (Brooklyn, NY: Verso, 2016); Dara Greenwald, Josh MacPhee, and Exit Art, *Signs of Change: Social Movement Cultures, 1960s to Now* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2010); and Meg McLagan and Yates McKee, eds., *Sensible Politics: The Visual Culture of Nongovernmentalactivism* (New York: Zone Books, 2012). However, none of these texts take an in-depth case study approach to a particular movement, engage with extensive visual analysis, or propose definitions of prefiguration that move beyond its extant signification in social movement studies to contend with its particular qualities in the visual realm.

that figuration is the foundational conceit of aesthetic practice. To my mind, the creative and imaginative possibilities of visual culture allow for making desired or proposed political transformations visible and comprehensible as viable alternative options. I resonate here with what Jarett Martineau and Eric Ristkes refer to when, invoking Fred Moten, Stephano Harney, and Jodi Byrd, they say that decolonial Indigenous creative practice involves "movement not simply away from colonialism, but away from any standpoint where colonialism makes sense."[35] Here, visual culture enacts the re-arrangement and re-negotiation of sense-making and making sense. As Dinerstein notes, "social imaginaries are not ideologies, myths, or illusions, but material dimensions of social practices."[36] APPO's visual projects offered material and performative dimensions of the social practices of comunalidad, invested with prefigurative imaginations of a more just political future.

Further, with investment in political philosophies that position democracy as an aspiration beyond immediate reach, accessible only via a combination of praxis and foresight, I attempt to establish a link between participatory democracy, visual culture, prefiguration, and the concept of the future anterior. The future anterior refers in French grammar to what "will have been," the anticipated past accomplishments of an imagined future time. Gilles Deleuze, Jean-François Lyotard, Alain Badiou, Jacques Lacan, and Jacques Derrida all tarry with the future anterior to support

[35] Jarrett Martineau and Eric Ritskes, "Fugitive Indigeneity: Reclaiming the Terrain of Decolonial Struggle through Indigenous Art," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 3, no. 1 (May 20, 2014): IV, http://www.decolonization.org/index.php/des/article/download/21320.
[36] Dinerstein, *Politics of Autonomy*, 81.

various theoretical notions.[37] Derrida's conception of future anteriority proves particularly germane to my study because he invokes a *démocratie à venir* ("democracy to come"), a "democracy that must have the structure of a promise."[38] If prefiguration opens options for the desired future political reality in the present, the future anterior might be thought of as the space of that political possibility, in our case a space of potential for a radical, or decolonial democracy. I am reminded again of Esteva's words, that the Oaxaca Commune "anticipates our future and carries a great burden of hope."[39] I will return to these threads in the chapters that follow.

**Methods and sources**

My methodology brings together traditional art historical approaches, including archival study, visual analysis of primary materials, and historical-cultural analyses of modes of display, dissemination, and reception, along with the ethnographic and anthropological fieldwork methods of participant observation and oral history interviews. Rather than presenting a strict ethnography, however, I have used the oral histories as part of the framework of my visual analysis and the backbone of my claims about the significance of the Oaxaca Commune's visual media to those who participated and were affected by the social movement. To make possible an in-depth

[37] See Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, European Perspectives (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990); Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester, MA: Manchester University Press, 1984); Alain Badiou, *Logics of Worlds. Being and Event, 2*, trans. Alberto Toscano (London/ New York: Continuum, 2009); Jacques Derrida, *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987) and *Politics of Friendship*, Phronesis (London: Verso, 1997), among others.
[38] Derrida, *The Other Heading: Reflections on Today's Europe*, trans. P.A. Brault and M. Naas (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1992), 78.
[39] Esteva, "Asamblea Popular," 133.

analysis of the art and visual culture objects and media, I put together my own archive of Oaxaca Commune visual culture – an archive that does not otherwise exist. The construction of this archive is another one of the contributions of this project, which would not have been possible without the access provided by a wide range of individuals, collectives, workshops, formal and informal archives, and institutions offered to me during my five years of fieldwork in Oaxaca.

The archives at the Institute of Graphic Arts of Oaxaca (IAGO) provided materials for historical study on the graphic arts of Oaxaca and Mexico as well as some photographic documentation of the Oaxaca Commune events. I photographed and archived the majority of my primary material culture for my study at the graphic art collectives where they were produced –Espacio Zapata, home of ASARO; Jaguar Print, home of Arte Jaguar and Jaguar Print; Taller Siquieros; and Gabinete Graphico. Photographic archives of in-situ installations, graffiti, and street art from 2006-2007 and beyond came from Mario Guzman at Espacio Zapata, Aler at Jaguar Print, along with a huge database of photographs provided by Itandehui Frano Ortiz, an artist, scholar, and activist who has documented graffiti and street art in Oaxaca over the past decade. I drew much insight from participant observation in collaboration with ASARO. The unparalleled opportunity to take part in and document street-art intervention during a protest march on the ten-year anniversary of the uprising in 2016 did much to enhance my comprehension of the collective artistic process and the role and importance of graphic art in the political atmosphere of Oaxaca.

My analysis of the Oaxaca state-sponsored Guelaguetza and the APPO-created

*Guelaguetza Popular* Indigenous folk festivals grew out of my observation of both contemporary festivals, the sate Guelaguetza in 2016 and 2018 and the People's Guelaguetza in 2016, 2017, 2018, and 2019. I supplemented this by studying materials and media held in Oaxaca, including video documentation of the Guelaguetza Popular from Oaxacan media collective *Ojo de Agua Communicación*; photos and videos from the archives of teachers' union Local Section 22 provided by the DVD collection at Section 22 radio station headquarters, *Radio Plantón;* newspaper and periodical archives and photographs from the *Biblioteca Juan de Cordova*; archival photographs of Guelaguetza festival antecedents at *Fundación Bustamante Vasconcelos*, and articles, books, and research archives at the Welte Institute for Oaxacan Studies (*Instituto Welte*). Finally, I looked at Oaxaca public television CORTV online video archives of the state Guelaguetza program to supplement my personal observations from attending the "official" event in 2016 and 2018.

Piecing together an archive for the women's media takeover proved to be most difficult, as the television broadcasts had appeared live on public television exclusively in a period of twenty-one days in 2006 and had not been well documented. I managed to track down roughly one hundred clips recorded on VHS tape off live television and then digitized by filmmaker Jill Friedberg, who had gathered the materials for her 2007 documentary about the Oaxaca Commune, *Un Poquito de la Tanta Verdad* (*A Little Bit of So Much Truth*). Some of the original recordings for Jill's clips came from Ojo de Agua, and I also used several clips from

Ojo de Agua/ Roberto Olivares' 2007 documentary, *Morena*.

In addition to these primary sources, invaluable information arose from my interviews and conversations with over fifty individuals and collectives, which took place during field trip visits to Oaxaca between 2013-2020. These interviews were conducted with those who had participated directly in the Oaxaca Commune and the visual initiatives I investigated. By far, Oaxaca Commune participants are the most important theorists of their own movement, and my research is indebted to their voices and stories. Because I chose not to produce a traditional ethnography with vignettes and testimonials, the interviewees' commentaries are for the most part not included in this dissertation apart from a few key quotes. However, the interviews provided crucial background and a source of historical, cultural, and political context as I formulated my analysis. They are the through-line that holds the sources of this study together.

**Chapter organization and outline**

Each of the three main chapters analyzes a different visual culture project created by APPO members. I investigate the ways in which each initiative promotes and manifests APPO as a new model of governance based in the ancient practices of Oaxaca's original peoples, and catalyzed public support and participation from particular sectors of the community. Chapter 2: *Scratching the Surface* investigates Oaxaca Commune graphic art, including prints, posters, graffiti, street art, and *tapetes* (sand art tapestries). I argue that artist collectives and their graphic artwork activated

Oaxacan leftist youth, Indigenous communities, peasants, and workers to come together to support APPO's movement. Graphic art installed on Oaxaca's city streets mapped out the politics of APPO's movement while reprising Mexican graphic agitprop, revolutionary iconography, and religious traditions, appealing to these different groups. The collectives operated as assemblies in which projects were conceived and discussed within practices of comunalidad. I posit that Oaxaca Commune graphic art disseminated APPO's questions, conflicts, and negotiations in bringing together traditional Indigenous communal practices and urban state politics to create a new form of democratic governance.

*Embodying Autonomy* (Chapter 3) proceeds from a genealogy and history of both the "official" Oaxaca state Guelaguetza Indigenous folk festival and the APPO-created alternative People's Guelaguetza. Offering a close reading of both guelaguetza festivals, I contend that Indigenous performance is mobilized for a political agenda in each case, on opposing sides of the political spectrum. I analyze APPO's strategy to transform the Guelaguetza into an "*arma de lucha*" ("weapon of the struggle"), contending that it operated through two multifaceted prongs – first to denounce a threat imposed from above and then to promote an alternative innovated from below. I argue that APPO "occupied" the state's visual logic, both critiquing and repurposing it for the movement. I analyze the ways in which APPO's Guelaguetza Popular offered a hybrid cultural-political forum presenting, with a renewed spirit of communal fiesta, visual and embodied modes of Indigenous self-representation.

Chapter 4: *Televising the Revolution* analyzes the television broadcasts produced by women from APPO occupying Oaxaca state radio and television station CORTV for three weeks in 2006. I argue that the women recuperated the public space of state television to create a forum for political deliberation and that through their programming, they waged a critique of gender, class, and indigeneity in APPO's social movement. I suggest a reading of the amateur aesthetics and *fugitivity*, or fleeting, elusive character, of the women's self-produced media. This reading highlights the ways in which the TV broadcasts initiated a decolonial feminist restructuring of APPO on public TV, visualized the popular assembly as a fluid, dynamic work-in-progress, and invited the kind of broad public participation, particularly from women and Indigenous peoples, that would be necessary for its realization as a model for APPO's democracy "to come."

Chapter 1, *A Pluricultural Universe*, provides the historical and political background necessary to contextualize these three main chapters, including a survey of the geopolitics of Oaxaca; a look at some of the regional Indigenous movements of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries; a brief history of the Democratic Teachers' Movement in Mexico and the dissident teachers' union Local 22 in Oaxaca; an overview the local political circumstances and events leading up to the Oaxaca Commune; and the context of APPO and its relationship to Indigenous governance. In connecting these genealogies, I begin to answer one of the most central questions guiding my research when I began this project in 2013-2014: What would help to explain why teachers are so feared and so reviled in Mexico that they have suffered

such harsh repression?

Toward the end of 2014, forty-three student-teachers from a teacher training college to the south of Oaxaca in Guerrero, Mexico were disappeared, and later suspected to have been murdered by the Mexican government. However, the case remains unsolved and the bodies missing. The staggering injustices of the "Ayotzinapa 43" were the shadow that fell over my initial research in Oaxaca and the subject of some of the first public graphic artworks that I observed when I was beginning my fieldwork. Mexican teachers' commitment to social justice and radical politics (including participatory forms of democracy), especially in states like Oaxaca with large rural, poor, and Indigenous populations had for many decades resulted in beatings, disappearances, and assassinations. With of all of this in mind, I sketch out in this first chapter the various reasons why teachers working in Indigenous communities in Oaxaca are invested in building an alternative political structure inclusive of the "pluricultural universe" that makes up Oaxaca state.

The dissertation's *Conclusion/ Coda: Oaxaca in the Future Anterior, Part II* looks briefly at the ways in which APPO's struggle continues and takes on new forms in Oaxaca's present moment, more than a decade after the uprising. I check in with the current state of each of the visual culture projects initiated in 2006 to see how they have persisted and changed. I consider the new challenges of nation-wide neoliberal reforms installed by the PRI administration and the new hopes in the wake of regime change with a progressive Mexican president. I search for where APPO is still alive, Oaxacans say "as an idea," and how initiatives among Indigenous populations are

bringing the movement for decolonial democracy back to the communities of Oaxaca's original peoples. I argue that Oaxaca's democracy to come is always already deferred, and thus still exists in the future anterior.

**Conclusion**

As the chapters ahead will make clear, the visual projects I analyze in the pages of this study were not simply presentations delivered by APPO to an approving public. Instead, they were modes of deliberation and negotiation designed to help build the assembly as such and to negotiate the terms of how it would function. To allow for this, APPO's move, then, was to bring tradition and novelty together to transform the urban political sphere for the crises they were navigating at the local level. Thus, this process of adapting the familiar to hybridize and manifest new political forms that were proposed/ envisioned was also inflected in the visual projects that bore this transformation out. While this process somewhat organically followed from the initiatives and creative responses of various groups under APPO, the archive of visual formations that the dissertation draws upon allows for a more nuanced and holistic view of how this complex negotiation tracked through various media and resonated in a multitude of directions.

Therefore, both APPO and the visual initiatives that introduced it and within which it was shaped combined tradition and innovation – drawing from and revising cultural, political, religious, and historical elements from the Oaxacan and Mexican context and modifying them for the conditions of the urban environment, the diverse

and shifting demographics of the movement, and the demands of the particular political moment in Oaxaca. This was an open-ended and ongoing process, in constant negotiation and re-negotiation as the conditions of the movement developed and changed, and as various sectors took leadership in suggesting important shifts or adjustments to the direction or structure of APPO. The process was and is visible in the creative practices that ratified it, which is why the literature on the Oaxaca Commune is productively supplemented and extended by a thorough analysis of its visual formations.

It is important to note, as I will illuminate in greater detail in the project's conclusion, that while this dissertation offers a historical study, the Oaxaca Commune and APPO are not are not dead, they are not even past.[40] APPO has all but disappeared from public view, but Section 22 teachers and organizations like FUL-APPO keep its dream alive.[41] The visual culture initiatives I analyze in this dissertation live on in various ways, which I will outline in the conclusion/ coda. But most crucially, the fight for social justice and equality, for dignity, health, education, and political freedom for women, Indigenous peoples, and the working poor in Oaxaca persists. And as I intend to continue research and analysis of this struggle – this project is just the beginning.

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[40] A paraphrase of William Faulkner, from his novel *Requiem for a Nun*, 1951.

[41] The United Front of Struggle of the Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca (*Frente Único de Lucha de la Asamblea Popular de los Pueblos de Oaxaca*, FUL-APPO) is an organization that grew out of the Oaxaca Commune and APPO, following the outward suppression of the uprising in November 2006. FUL-APPO is primarily made up of Local Section 22 union rank-and-file members and continues to organize in support of Indigenous education, better resources for teachers and students, and in opposition to the privatization of health care, education, and other social services, and to bad government in general.

## Chapter One.
## *A Pluricultural Universe*

This chapter provides a brief overview of the historical and political contexts of the Oaxaca Commune as background for the analyses of Oaxaca Commune visual initiatives that will follow in chapters two through four. APPO's movement had antecedents in regional Indigenous and peasant movements, the teachers' union struggle, resistance to the PRI in Oaxaca, and the ongoing fight for a more just, inclusive democracy in Mexico.

One aim in surveying Indigenous struggles in southern Mexico is to consider their various approaches to relationships with the nation state, self-governance, autonomy, and political power. These contexts bring to light the ways in which the Oaxaca Commune fits into an historical lineage of experiments in urban participatory politics rooted in Indigenous lifeways. But contextualizing the Oaxaca Commune also necessitates connecting Indigenous and teachers' movements and revealing how each struggle shared conditions produced by the Mexican government's post-Revolution project to consolidate a bitterly divided country into a harmonious, modern multicultural nation. Where Indigenous resistance to institutionalized forms of *indigenismo* and *mestizaje* meets the teachers' union radicalized by the post-Revolutionary push for socialism in education and then parting ways with PRI conservatism to embrace their Indigenous roots, we will find the path that leads us to the Oaxaca Commune and its visual activism.[42]

[42] Indigenismo is perhaps best described as a set of discourses about indigeneity for the most part constructed and promoted by non-Indigenous peoples. Many different formations of indigenismo have

**The geopolitics of Oaxaca, Mexico**

The Southern Mexican state of Oaxaca, bordered by Guerrero to the north and Chiapas to the south, is Mexico's most diverse state in many senses. It is the most bio-diverse state in the country, with the "highest faunistic and floristic biodiversity of the region" including at least "2,157 species records, from 15 taxonomic groups."[43] It is also the most ethnically diverse state, home to sixteen different officially recognized ethno-linguistic Indigenous groups and the only Mexican state with an Indigenous majority.[44] The officially recognized groups are: Amuzgo, Chatino, Chinantec, Chocho, Chontal, Cuicatec, Huave, Ixcatec, Mazatec, Mixe, Mixtec, Nahuatl, Popoloca, Trique, Zapotec, and Zoque. Each group has numerous subgroups with many variations in language and culture. At least one group has been

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circulated in Latin America. For our purposes, it is important to note that it has colonial origins. Bartolomé de las Casas, a Spanish Dominican priest and colonizer critiqued the conquest from within, using a form of indigenismo to argue against the inferior status of Indians and in turn to refute colonialism as illegal and immoral. In the post-Revolution period in Mexico, as we will see, indigenismo "became a core feature of national thought and politics...[and] central pillar of state policy...to achieve...the socioeconomic modernization of Mexico and the construction of a unified national identity. Mexican indigenismo was therefore a state-sponsored, integrationist, assimilationist, and developmentalist endeavor." Estelle Tarica, "Indigenismo," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Latin American History*, March 3, 2016, doi:10.1093/acrefore/9780199366439.013.68. See also: Alan Knight, "Racism, Revolution, and Indigenismo: Mexico, 1910–1940," in *The Idea of Race in Latin America, 1870–1940*, ed. Richard Graham (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1990), 78–80; Joshua Lund, *The Mestizo State: Reading Race in Modern Mexico* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2012). I will look at indigenismo more in depth in Chapter 3. Mestizaje refers, at its most basic, to racial and cultural admixture, as in the mixture of European Spaniards and contemporary Mexico's original peoples; I will elaborate on its meaning in the Mexican context below.

[43] Rolando Bastida-Zavala et al., "Marine and Coastal Biodiversity of Oaxaca, Mexico," *Checklist* 9 (April 1, 2013): 1, doi:0.15560/9.2.329.

[44] Figures differ as to exactly what percentage of the population of Oaxaca can be considered Indigenous, and these numbers are often calculated based on census data indicating that at least 37% of Oaxaca's peoples speak an Indigenous language. This is misleading because census data often excludes many of the illiterate and geographically isolated communities in the rural areas of the state. However, many sources site the uniqueness of Oaxaca's Indigenous majority and its status as the state with the largest Indigenous population, amounting to roughly 53% of Mexico's total Indigenous population across all states.

consistently omitted from the official list – the Black communities of the *Costa Chica* (a coastal area on the southernmost edge of Oaxaca state), descendants of African slaves brought by Spanish conquistadors. Mexican states are broken down into municipalities, a conquest-era division of the states' authority for oversight on local affairs. Because of its diversity, Oaxaca has 570 municipalities, with an average of about fifteen Indigenous communities in each municipality, amounting to more than 10,000 Indigenous communities across Oaxaca's eight designated regions: Cañada, Costa, Istmo de Tehuantepec, Mixteca, Papaloapan, Sierra Norte, Sierra Sur, and Valles Centrales.

Despite constituting a majority, Oaxaca's Indigenous population has been systematically minoritized for over five hundred years and for the most part lives in abject poverty with limited social service resources.[45] In keeping with the insidious nature of repression that characterizes policies toward Indigenous communities in Mexico (as elsewhere), minoritization and disenfranchisement of Oaxaca's original peoples often operates through programs that claim to support them. "Indigenous autonomy" laws that were put in place by the government have the purported aim of offering sovereignty to Indigenous communities; instead, they hamstring pueblos to political substructures ensuring the continued oligarchic hold of the PRI, which

[45] While I am only able to gloss the complex and centuries-long oppression that Indigenous Oaxaqueñxs have suffered, it is important to note that one can find at the center of many different forms of racialized and gendered oppression leading to the displacement, land dispossession, genocide, starvation, rape, disappearance, and incarceration of Indigenous peoples, the direct or indirect involvement of the U.S. government in Mexican policies. For more on these histories, see, among others, Greg Grandin, *Empire's Workshop: Latin America, the United States, and the Rise of the New Imperialism* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006); Shannon Speed, "Structures of Settler Capitalism in Abya Yala," *American Quarterly* 69, no. 4 (2017): 783–90, doi:10.1353/aq.2017.0064.

consistently marginalizes Indigenous peoples. Insubstantial social welfare programs intensify rather than mitigate "the same economic crisis that has struck communities of family farmers all over Mexico... It's all part of the neo-liberal economic model and the government's plan to create dependency instead of supporting production."[46] Education, too, has historically been a vehicle of Indigenous repression. Eleuterio, a primary school teacher from a town called Chinantla in the northern mountains of Oaxaca state explains:

> In Oaxaca, as in the rest of Mexico, there are two systems of education: the indigenous system and the general system. The general system could care less about indigenous cultures or languages and reflects the ongoing national effort to forget about the indigenous people in the name of progress. Originally, the state contracted [with] what they euphemistically called 'bilingual educators,' but the objective was to teach children Spanish. In the trainings they would tell the teachers, 'You're going to return to your community and forget that you speak a dialect, forbid that your dialect be spoken in the classroom.' That's what they call our languages: dialects. It's pejorative; it's a lack of respect.[47]

In what follows, I will revisit each of these themes of Indigenous social justice crises – institutionalized autonomy laws; land dispossession and economic disenfranchisement; and Indigenous culture and education – in relationship to the genealogy of regional Indigenous struggles to resist them.

**Regional Indigenous and peasant movements and massacres**

Many Indigenous and campesino resistance struggles have animated the Oaxaca and southern Mexican region since the colonial period, but a few key movements and

[46] Denham and C. A. S. A., 43.
[47] Ibid., 44–45.

historical events offer important background to the Oaxaca Commune. The first of these is the Coalition of Workers, Peasants, and Students of the Isthmus (*Coalición Obrera, Campesina, Estudiantil del Istmo*, COCEI), which, much like APPO, was a radical grassroots coalitional movement rooted in the practice of Indigenous autonomy, struggling for local political transformation and democratization. COCEI was formed in late 1973 in Juchitán, Oaxaca (a coastal area of Oaxaca state in the Istmo de Tehuantepec region) when a significant demographic of Indigenous Zapotec farmers seeking agrarian reform aligned with other Juchitecos disillusioned by the local government and pushing for union and election reform.[48]

Both a movement and a political entity (though not strictly a political party), COCEI ran in several elections and eventually won municipal elections in 1980 while the PRI was still in power nationally, making Juchitán the very first urban area to be run by a radical opposition group in Mexican history. Their political victory and success as an Indigenous resistance movement was supported by Zapotec cultural revival and in turn inspired significant creative and cultural growth, including a strong local identification with Zapotec language preservation.[49] "From its inception," historian Jeffrey Rubin notes, "COCEI conducted its activities in Zapotec, speaking to people in their courtyards and addressing meetings, demonstrations, and marches in the local language...Also from the beginning, COCEI carried out its public

[48] Jeffrey W. Rubin, "COCEI in Juchitan: Grassroots Radicalism and Regional History," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 26, no. 1 (1994): 109–36, https://www.jstor.org/stable/157860.
[49] Jeffrey W. Rubin, "Ambiguity and Contradiction in a Radical Popular Movement," in Alvarez et.al., *Cultures of Politics,*141–64.

activities with the customs and adornments of Zapotec ritual."[50]

While COCEI's successful campaign and municipal run in Juchitán gained them international recognition as a powerful Latin American Indigenous movement, Rubin's fieldwork research on COCEI reveals internal fractions, contradictions, and tensions. Still, he says, COCEI "forged alternatives to the discourses of nationalism and economic development through which outsiders characterized the city and sought to intervene there. By making use of these local capacities for cultural resistance and appropriation to construct an organized movement and gain formal political power, COCEI brought an enduring form of regional democratization."[51] This was particularly impressive because it was long before the PRI finally fell and gave way to what was intended to be the "democratic turn" in Mexico. The Zapotecs in Juchitán could not yet change national politics, but they made significant change in their local government by bringing together traditional Indigenous customs with urban state-based politics. In this way, COCEI was a precursor to what APPO would bring to Oaxaca two decades later.

During the same time period in the 1970's, in another region of Oaxaca called the Sierra Mixteca, the Triqui Indigenous community of San Juan Copola organized what would officially become the Movement of Triqui Unification and Struggle (*Movimiento de Unificación y Lucha Triqui*, MULT) in 1981. MULT promoted Triqui autonomy by defending communal lands and systematizing the cooperative sale and exchange of Triqui resources and agricultural products, including bananas

[50] Rubin, "Ambiguity and Contradiction,"155.
[51] Ibid.,"142.

and coffee.[52] MULT was supported by COCEI and affiliated with a national coalition of peasant groups on the political Left.[53] "Throughout the 1980's and 1990's," Stephen reports, "political assassinations and revenge killings became commonplace in the Triqui region;" in the face of these conflicts MULT "established a significant state and national political presence through large marches, rallies, and other events...[and] advocated for freedom for political prisoners, the resolution of land conflicts, and an equitable development of resources."[54] With the political party it helped to develop and back, the Unified Popular Party (*Partido Unidad Popular*, PUP), MULT was important in continuing COCEI's legacy of building political power around an alt-Left Indigenous platform and in broader efforts toward Indigenous organizing in Oaxaca.[55]

MULT was but one example of the late 1980's and early 1990's surge of organized movements of Indigenous peoples and the working poor across Mexico, especially in the southern states. The most infamous and influential of these was the armed insurgency of the Zapatista National Liberation Army, a group of Indigenous Mayans from the highlands of Chiapas, Mexico. As is well documented, the Zapatistas appeared on the international political stage on New Year's Day 1994, the day that the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) went into effect.[56]

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[52] Stephen, *We Are the* Face, 214.
[53] Ibid., 215.
[54] Ibid.
[55] Ibid.
[56] NAFTA, a trade agreement between the United States, Canada, and Mexico signed into law in 1994, was designed to bolster trade by lowering or eliminating trade tariffs and taxes for imports and exports across the three North American nations.

EZLN opposed NAFTA on the basis that it threatened the land, lifeways, and well-being of Indigenous peoples across Mexico. EZLN cited NAFTA in the displacement of millions of Indigenous peoples and dispossession of their communal lands resulting from land privitization; malnutrition, poor health, and lack of access to education because of cuts to social programs; economic hardship or collapse for low-income Indigenous farmers due to increases in export production; and forced migration of Indigenous community members following job and land loss.

In addition to its critiques of NAFTA, EZLN "consolidated the frustrations with one-party authoritarian rule" and roundly opposed the government of then-president Carlos Salinas de Gortari and what the Zaptatistas referred to as the state's neoliberal policies.[57] The Zapatistas were successful in drawing increased media attention to Mexico during the NAFTA negotiations to disseminate information about the endangerment to Mexico's Indigenous peoples posed by free trade and to call international attention to the lives of the largely forgotten Indigenous Mayan peoples of southern Mexico. Bringing together the legacy of beloved *campesino* leader and revolutionary icon Emiliano Zapata with internet savvy, clearly articulated demands, poetic revolutionary rhetoric, and a charismatic leader, *Subcomandante* Marcos, the neo-Zapatistas launched a "global appeal to refuse the reality of neoliberal globalisation."[58]

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[57] George Yúdice, "The Globalization of Culture and the New Civil Society," in Alvarez et.al., *Cultures of Politics,* 364.

[58] Dinerstein, *Politics of Autonomy*, 100. Emiliano Zapata was one of the leaders of the Mexican Revolution, leading poor Indigenous farmers and peasants in the defeat of the authoritarian "Porfiriato" government of General José de la Cruz Porfirio Díaz Mori (1876–80; 1884–1911). I will expand upon

The EZLN uprising was initially an armed struggle, with the army holding thirty-eight municipalities in the central highlands and throughout the Lacandon Jungle, where the Zapatistas proclaimed autonomy.[59] The pressure that the Zapatistas put on the Mexican government under the presidency of Ernesto Zedillo led to the creation of the San Andrés Peace Accords on Indigenous Rights and Culture in 1996 after almost two years of negotiation between EZLN and the government. The accords were meant to confer a broad spectrum of Indigenous rights and forms of sovereignty and autonomy for Indigenous peoples not just in Chiapas but also across Mexico. However, the Mexican government broke their agreement with EZLN by failing to legalize the San Andrés Accords. After a nationwide EZLN mobilization in 2001 to again put pressure on the government to sign the accords into law, the administration, at that time headed by Vicente Fox, instead passed a very diluted version of the agreements that they called the Indigenous Law.[60] The Indigenous Law "restricted the degree of indigenous autonomy to communities within single municipalities, denied constitutional recognition of indigenous peoples as subjects with the right to decide upon their own forms of governance and development, and

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this background in Chapter 2. Subcomondante Marcos was the name given to the persona of Rafael Sebastián Guillén Vicente, a Mexican professor, in his role as leader of the EZLN and neo-Zapatista movement from roughly 1994-2014. While Marcos was the iconic "leader" of the movement in name, his role can be seen as a cross between sponsor/ spokesperson and media provocateur, since EZLN practices horizontality in leadership and "rule by obeying" governance. Indeed, "subcomandante" literally means "sub-commander" or "second in command," since any leader of EZLN answers to the rank and file. In 2014, Marcos declared that the persona of the subcomandante had been a "hologram."

[59] Richard Stahler-Sholk, Glen David Kuecker, and Harry E. Vanden, *Latin American Social Movements in the Twenty-First Century: Resistance, Power, and Democracy*, Latin American Perspectives in the Classroom (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008), 120.

[60] Hilary Klein, "A Spark of Hope: The Ongoing Lessons of the Zapatista Revolution 25 Years On," NACLA, January 18, 2019, https://nacla.org/news/2019/01/18/spark-hope-ongoing-lessons-zapatista-revolution-25-years.

maintained a paternalistic relation in which the federal government would provide social services to indigenous communities."[61] The Zapatistas rejected the Indigenous Law outright, abandoned negotiations with the government and broke ties with the state completely, turning their focus instead to establishing regional autonomous zones in the highlands of Chiapas with their own schools, clinics, agricultural development, and internal organization.

The Zapatistas' public emergence and struggle permanently shifted international understanding of Indigenous existence, oppression, and calls for sovereignty. But as a tragic consequence of increased Indigenous and peasant visibility and resistance, the 1990's also produced some of the most brutal repressions and massacres of the late twentieth century. One such massacre took place in a town near Zapatista territory in Acteal, Chiapas in December 1997. Acteal is home to Tstozil Mayan Indian peoples and is an impoverished, mostly Christian community. While in church in the days leading up to Christmas, forty-five members of a local organization called *Las Abejas* ("The Bees"), a pacifist Christian social justice group aligned with the Zapatistas and made up of peoples from forty-eight different Indigenous communities in Chiapas, were murdered by paramilitary gunmen. Among the dead were twenty-one women, fifteen children, and nine men.[62] Four of the women killed had been pregnant, and were shot or bayonetted in their swollen bellies;

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[61] Neil Harvey, "Globalisation and Resistance in Post-Cold War Mexico: Difference, Citizenship and Biodiversity Conflicts in Chiapas," *Third World Quarterly* 22, no. 6 (2001): 1048, https://www.jstor.org/stable/3993461.

[62] Mark Lacey, "10 Years Later, Chiapas Massacre Still Haunts Mexico," *The New York Times*, December 23, 2007, https://www.nytimes.com/2007/12/23/world/americas/23acteal.html.

others were raped and beaten.[63] The paramilitaries were found to be a PRI government-backed group, some of them Tzotzil Indigenous peoples themselves, paid to put down EZLN sympathizers in the region. After a nearly six-hour long massacre, during which villagers were hunted and murdered systematically, government soldiers came in to remove dead bodies and scrub blood from the village walls, disposing of evidence. The government then dismissed the massacre as a local conflict of inter-community violence and refused to take any punitive action against the killers.[64] The Acteal massacre has haunted Indigenous movements in Mexico ever since. It is both a reminder of the brutality that Indigenous organizing inspires in those in power as well as the necessity to keep struggling for dignity and autonomy.

Another key set of struggles occurred in San Salvador Atenco, a small farming community near Mexico City. Campesino and Indigenous resistance in San Salvador Atenco brought about a major victory in 2002, when residents successfully blocked President Vicente Fox's plan to expropriate 5,000 hectacres of Indigenous communal *ejido* lands to build an international airport.[65] In response, Atenco residents allied

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[63] Luis Alberto González Arenas, "The Woman Who Won't Let Mexico Forget a Massacre," *Slate*, March 27, 2018, https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2018/03/the-woman-who-wont-let-mexico-forget-a-massacre.html.

[64] Jared Olsen, "Mexico: Ghosts of Acteal," *Pulitzer Center*, November 20, 2018, https://pulitzercenter.org/reporting/mexico-ghosts-acteal.

[65] The modern ejido system was created as a program of land reform following the Mexican Revolution and the end of the Profiriato. The success of Emiliano Zapata's campesino revolution led to the inclusion of Article 27 in the new constitution, which was drafted in 1917. The article stipulated the breakup of privately owned land into communal ejidos, which would be owned by the government but protected for indefinite campesino use in local agriculture and farming. This land reform initiative did not start until the Lázaro Cárdenas presidency in 1934. Since then, ejidos have allowed farming communities, typically populated by Indigenous peasants, to cultivate and oversee communally-held lands that in turn provide their ways of life, sustenance, and economic security. The roll-back of ejido laws to accommodate privitization in support of NAFTA in 1992 was a detonator of the EZLN

with EZLN and created the Community Front in Defense of Land (*Frente del Pueblo en Defensa de La Tierra*, FPDT) to block the Mexican government's campaign of forced displacement. FPDT staged a series of protests against the proposed airport, including marching into Mexico City masked, on horseback, and wielding machetes; and a demonstration during a public speech by the state governor, followed by a three-day standoff with police. Their efforts and the solidarity of the Atenco community succeeded in forcing the government to cancel the airport plans.[66]

FPDT and a MULT offshoot organization, MULTI, were active in 2006 in the lead-up to the Oaxaca Commune. Just weeks before the Oaxaca City uprising began, another conflict arose in Atenco. When FPDT members were arrested for simply selling flowers at a local market in Atenco, civil society rose up to denounce the arrests and took the town square. The governor of Mexico state sent in 3,000 state police to put down the uprising, leading to hundreds of arrests and injuries and at least two deaths, including that of a 14-year old boy.[67] Forty-seven women later testified to sexual assault by police while they were detained.[68] In the face of this brutality and government impunity in refusing to take responsibility, protest and social justice groups formed solidarity manifestations all over Mexico. In Oaxaca, the Atenco repression was fresh on the minds of those who suffered state violence on June 14th

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uprising. See David Craven, "Lineages of the Mexican Revolution (1910–1940)," *Third Text* 28, no. 3 (May 4, 2014): 223–34, doi:10.1080/09528822.2014.899789.

[66] Denham and C. A. S. A., 373.

[67] Francisco Goldman, "Opinion | The Atenco Warning," *The New York Times*, June 29, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/29/opinion/atenco-mexico-pena-nieto-yosoy132.html.

[68] Jose Olivares, "Women Testify Against Mexican Police For Sexual Torture In International Court," NPR.org, November 19, 2017, https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwoway/2017/11/19/550502559/women-testify-against-mexican-police-for-sexual-torture-in-international-court.

and participated in the Oaxaca Commune uprising that followed.

Although MULT split in 2006 due to internal factionalism around political party affiliations, some of the members who exited the organization formed the independent group MULTI, which then aligned with APPO. MULTI's coalition with APPO was crucial for Indigenous organizing in the Oaxaca Commune and Indigenous participation in APPO. Along with a few other organizations, including the Indigenous Front of Binational Organizations (*Frente Indígena de Organizaciones Binationales*, FIOB), MULTI created a regional APPO assembly, the APPO Mixteca.[69] In an interview with Stephen, one of the FIOB/ APPO Mixteca members explained: "We acted under the mandate of the resolutions of APPO. One of the resolutions was to broaden the struggle to other regions and sectors. [We] decided to initiate takeovers of city halls...get the word out about what was going on in the capital city, and get people involved."[70] Another member emphasized the importance of MULTI women in APPO organizing in the Sierra Mixteca town of Juxtlahuaca: "The MULTI was there and the majority of them were women. This is an organization that has a lot of organizational force and convocation power. They would send delegations of women from one community at a time that would stay for a whole week."[71] MULTI's coalition with APPO formed pan-ethnic solidarity in regions of Oaxaca crucial to APPO's growth and success.[72]

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[69] Stephen, *We are the Face*, 218.
[70] "Francisco" qtd. in Stephen, *We are the Face*, 218.
[71] "Centolia Maldonado" qtd. in Stephen, *We are the Face*, 221.
[72] I will elaborate on the importance of allyship between MULTI and APPO in Chapter 2.

**Usos y costumbres and comunalidad**

Most of Oaxaca's Indigenous communities practice self-governance through what has been referred to as usos y costumbres (UyC) – the norms of communal living and governance that Indigenous peoples have practiced in some form since before the Spanish conquest and colonial era. A core practice of uses and customs is local decision-making in horizontal, consensus-based peoples' assemblies. Local leaders are elected through the popular assembly, without political parties or ballot voting, via a *cargo* system in which community members rotate unpaid leadership roles as part of community service and civic engagement.[73] As Esteva points out:

> The key features of a cargo system, differentiating it from liberal notions of representative democracy, are (a) the blend of religious and secular responsibilities (cargos include responsibility for organizing fiestas as well as for running community business) and (b) the fact that the cargo-holder can act only in consultation with the community...The cargo system is derived historically from Spanish/ Iberian municipal structures, but has become identified with indigenous communities in Meso America and the Andes.

The 1995/ 1998 Law of Indigenous Rights of Oaxaca legalized UyC, recognizing rights for almost three-quarters of Oaxaca's municipalities (418 out of 570) to elect local officials in popular assemblies.[74]

During the colonial period, UyC customary governance practices had been a significant form of Indigenous resistance, allowing Oaxaca's original peoples a modicum of autonomy to run their own daily lives, even while they were still under

[73] Esteva, "Oaxaca," 82, footnote.

[74] According to Poole, the Law of Indigenous Rights initially included more provisions, but the legalization of usos y costumbres in 418 municipalities was one of the few actually implemented. See Deborah Poole, "Political Autonomy and Cultural Diversity in the Oaxaca Rebellion," *Anthropology News* 48, no. 3 (2007): 10–11, doi:0.1525/an.2007.48.3.10.

the ultimate authority of colonial powers. However, while uses and customs allows for relative local Indigenous autonomy, the paternalistic regulations securing them simultaneously serve government interests, whereby central powers release negotiations for local affairs to municipalities in exchange for party loyalty in state elections. Vote trading and *caciquism* (control through political bosses) ensure that the conservative hold of the PRI continues in the state authority. Therefore, the term usos y costumbres is an outwardly imposed, by some accounts pejorative, and ultimately limited way to describe Oaxaca's Indigenous communal structures. This term more effectively conveys the state's attempt to appease Indigenous sovereignty than to support and preserve it, and is also connected to the effort to prevent or control Indigenous political participation at the state level.

Comunalidad is the term that many Indigenous communities prefer to describe their communal lifeways, since it was conceived by Oaxacan Indigenous scholars Martínez Luna and Diaz Gómez in the context of Indigenous movements in the state during the 1970's and 1980's. As noted in the Introduction, Martínez Luna identifies four main elements through which comunalidad is expressed in Oaxacan communities: 1) territorio – communal land; 2) asamblea – communal authority through popular assemblies; 3) tequio – communal labor through unpaid, voluntary community service; and 4) fiesta – communal celebration. These practices are forms of communal living, reciprocity, and mutual aid that support Indigenous survivance, even in conditions of extreme poverty. Comunalidad, Martínez Luna says, is grounded in belief systems – Indigenous *cosmovisión* or worldview – characterized

by thinking of the world from the perspective of "we," not just individuals connected, but *part of* one another and of nature.[75]

By contrast, the Law of Indigenous Rights of Oaxaca had "very serious limitations and omissions. The most serious is the fact that it was given the character of a complementary law, to be applied when there is no other pertinent law. This has made it easy for the three branches of government to ignore or to violate it openly."[76] Benton suggests that the Law of Indigenous Rights was at least in part a government strategy, a preemptive move to prevent Indigenous unrest in Oaxaca at a moment when the EZLN uprising was erupting in Oaxaca's neighboring state.[77] While comunalidad was practiced in Oaxaca's Indigenous pueblos long before it was named as such, institutionalized autonomy laws securing UyC followed from the emergence of EZLN on the international radar in the mid-1990's. Chiapas and Oaxaca each have the largest Indigenous populations and the highest poverty rates in Mexico. With the eruption of the Zapatista insurrection in Chiapas, the Oaxacan government perceived the possibility that a similar uprising could erupt in their state. Therefore, Oaxacan state government officials quickly reached agreements to adopt the Law of Indigenous Rights, which would offer a form of autonomy to Oaxacan Indigenous communities while largely preserving the political status quo.

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[75] Jaime Martínez Luna, "El Concepto de Comunalidad" (1st International Assembly for Community Development Across Borders, Cuajimaloyas, Oaxaca, Mexico, 2018).
[76] Esteva, "Oaxaca," 83.
[77] Allyson Benton, "The Origins of Mexico's Municipal Usos y Costumbres Regimes: Supporting Local Political Participation or Local Authoritarian Control?," *Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económicas*, Colecciones de Documentos de Trabajo del CIDE, no. Numero 226 (February 2011): 36.

**The Democratic Teachers' Movement, national teachers' union, and Local Section 22**

The fallout from the Law of Indigenous Rights' obvious limitations and the new consciousness about indigeneity and autonomy that EZLN transformed Mexico's Democratic Teachers' Movement and, in particular, the goals of the dissident national teachers' union locals in the south. The Democratic Teachers' Movement was founded in opposition to the teacher's union itself – the National Union of Education Workers (*Sindicato Nacional de los Trabajadores de la Educación,* SNTE). Formed in 1943 by the PRI government, the SNTE is the largest and most powerful union in Latin America, with currently over 1.8 million members. But the SNTE is also a corporatist union and a product of the PRI's post-Revolution strategy to centralize power by incorporating labor unions into the government regime. Thus SNTE has historically manufactured consent and secured votes for the PRI's uninterrupted seventy-year regime (which recently returned in 2012 with PRI President Enrique Peña Nieto). As Rincones points out, SNTE also consolidates extreme economic power, with each member remitting 1% of their salary to the union, an amount that gets added to funds provided by the government. At the same time, he explains, government safeguard of the SNTE ensures limited oversight on funds management.[78] This has led to the gross misappropriation of union money by

[78] Rodolfo Rincones, "The Context of Teachers' Democratic Movements in Mexico," in *The Global Assault on Teaching, Teachers, and Their Unions: Stories for Resistance*, eds. Mary F. Compton and Lois Weiner, First edition. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 218.

government cronies in union leadership.[79] Nonetheless, one must be a SNTE member in order to teach in primary or secondary schools in Mexico, and the union controls teachers' salaries, benefits, and promotions.

In the face of SNTE's state-party control, bureaucracy, and corruption, teachers from Mexico's poorest states and those with the largest number of rural Indigenous schools, namely Chiapas and Oaxaca, started a democratization movement within union ranks beginning in the late 1970's. In 1979, they formed the National Coordination of Education Workers (*Coordinadora Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación,* CNTE), a dissident democratic faction of the SNTE. Today, about 350,000 of SNTE's teachers are members of the CNTE. Oaxaca's Local Section 22 (of both SNTE and CNTE) is considered one of the strongest and most active locals, with about 83,000 members. Section 22 has been mobilizing collective action as part of the Democratic Teachers' Movement in southern Mexico over the last four decades. CNTE's stated mission was and still is threefold: to democratize the SNTE union, to democratize national education, and ultimately to democratize the country.[80] Just as the SNTE was always already aligned with government interests, from the beginning, CNTE's goals went far beyond labor demands, extending to the

[79] The most scandalous case was that of Elba Esther Gordillo, PRI party loyalist appointed SNTE "president-for-life" in 1989 and one of the most powerful players ever in Mexican party politics. In 2013, she was arrested on charges of corruption and embezzlement of over $200 million U.S. in union funds. See Will Grant, "'La Maestra' of Mexico Faces Her Biggest Challenge - BBC News," February 27, 2013, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-21608426.

[80] Interview with Omar Olivera Espinosa, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, October 3, 2018.

political transformation of the nation. In turn, Section 22 is much more than a labor union local, since it is at the forefront of a decades-long social movement.[81]

In fact, the teaching profession in Mexico has long been the site of ideological struggle, political discord, and bloody battles both on the political Left and Right. "How did they become such an organized force both in the government's corporative labor and political system, as well as in the working class and social movement that challenges the government?" asked journalist Dan La Botz.[82] La Botz explains how primary and secondary educators had leading roles as political advisors in the Mexican Revolution, which had as one of its goals the establishment of a "free, secular, public education for all."[83] The Secretariat of Public Education (*Secretaría de Educación Pública*, SEP) was created in 1921, with the writer and philosopher Jose Vasconcelos in charge. Vasconcelos "launched a national literacy campaign with volunteer teachers, and as head of the SEP he continued to promote the idea of education as a vehicle for the emancipation of the Mexican people. Vasconcelos compared his teachers to missionaries and evangelists of the revolution. The teacher had a sacred mission: "the uplift of the poor, the oppressed, and the uneducated."[84] Vasconcelos authored the controversial essay "*La Raza Cósmica*" ("The Cosmic

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[81] Some scholars refer to the alignment of trade unions with broader social movements as "social movement unionism" or "social justice unionism." See Kim Scipes, "Social Movement Unionism or Social Justice Unionism? Disentangling Theoretical Confusion within the Global Labor Movement," *Class Race Corporate Power* 2, no. 3 (December 17, 2014), doi:0.25148/CRCP.2.3.16092119; Lois Weiner, "Teacher Unionism Reborn," *New Politics* XIII–4, no. #52 (Winter 2012), http://newpol.org/content/teacher-unionism-reborn.

[82] Dan La Botz, "The Long Struggle of Mexican Teachers," *Jacobin*, August 10, 2016, https://jacobinmag.com/2016/08/mexico-teacher-union-strikes-oaxaca/.

[83] La Botz, "Long Struggle."

[84] Ibid.

Race"), making a claim for mestizaje, specifically the racial mixing of the *mestizo* Mexican subject (Spanish and Indian) as part of post-Revolution unification and national progress. Mónica G. Moreno Figueroa has described mestizaje as "the ideological myth of formation of the Mexican nation...[that] boosts an implied rhetoric of inclusiveness while concealing processes of exclusion and racism."[85] The post-Revolution educational project took part in these operations of concealed racial discrimination and epistemic violence, and so in turn did Mexico's teachers.

But during the 1920's, teachers began to suffer violent and sometimes murderous attacks when, as sometimes the only literate members of rural communities, they were active in facilitating the logistics of the transfer of private lands into ejido communal properties. Taking on this role as "advocates for the peasants, opponents of the Church, and campaigners for continuing and deepening the revolution made them targets for the landlords who sent the *pistoleros* (gunmen) of their *guardias blancas* (white guards) to assassinate the local schoolteacher, an all-too-common occurrence in that era."[86] During the Socialist presidency of Lázaro

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[85] Mónica G. Moreno Figueroa, "Naming Ourselves: Recognising Racism and Mestizaje in Mexico," in *Contesting Recognition: Culture, Identity and Citizenship*, eds. Janice McLaughlin, Peter Phillimore, and Diane Richardson, Identity Studies in the Social Sciences (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2011), 1, doi:10.1057/9780230348905_7.There are many definitions of mestizaje, and my discussion here is condensed to simply highlight how Vasconcelos used the idea of the superiority of racial admixture for cultural uplift and the promotion of education. For more on this concept, see Lourdes Martinez-Echazabal, "Mestizaje and the Discourse of National/Cultural Identity in Latin America, 1845-1959," *Latin American Perspectives* 25, no. 3 (1998): 21–42; and Linnete Manrique; "Mestizaje: The All-Inclusive Fiction," in *Relating Worlds of Racism: Dehumanisation, Belonging, and the Normativity of European Whiteness*, eds. Philomena Essed et al. (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2019), 141–64, doi:10.1007/978-3-319-78990-3_6. For more on how mestizaje was part of a pedagogical *and* aesthetic project in the Vasconcelos era, see Leonard Folgarait, *Mural Painting and Social Revolution in Mexico, 1920-1940: Art of the New Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

[86] La Botz, "Long Struggle."

Cárdenas beginning in 1934, teachers became even more radicalized, and therefore more reviled by the ruling class. Cárdenas initiated a socialist education project, also generally atheist in character, causing increasing tensions in a country where the Catholic Church had overseen education for many years before the Revolution. This led to more teachers' assassinations and school burnings. Cárdenas' successor Ávila Camacho, who was more conservative, created the SNTE in 1943, which then became the "locus of struggle between the religious right, the state-party, and leftists."[87] While teachers had been nurtured in the role of social agitators, "as the state moved rightward after 1940 this role became increasingly inconvenient. As a result, the SEP tried to rein in the radical tendencies it had previously instilled in its army of civil missionaries."[88]

In the middle of the twentieth century, the first dissident teachers' movement emerged, leading union wage strikes in Mexico City, which were also tied in to the wave of pro-democracy movements that were sweeping Mexico at the time. These movements reached a crucial turning point in 1968, the same year that teachers and students all over the world were leading social justice struggles. Democracy demonstrations dominated the lead-up to the Olympics in Mexico City. Many of these protests took place on the campus of the National Autonomous University of Mexico (*Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México*, UNAM). But they were abruptly quelled by state force on October 2, 1968, when police and military troops sent in by

[87] La Botz, "Long Struggle."
[88] Tanalís Padilla, "Rural Education, Political Radicalism, and *Normalista* Identity in Mexico after 1940," in *Dictablanda*, eds. Paul Gillingham and Benjamin Smith (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 341, doi:10.1215/9780822376835-016.

the government opened fire on student protesters, executing hundreds and beating, jailing, and disappearing thousands in an incident that became known as the Tlateloco Massacre.[89]

The main site where the student movement and the teachers' movement merged in Mexico was in the *normales rurales* or "rural normal schools," a system of rural teacher training colleges designed to incorporate Indigenous education into the national education initiative. The idea was that normal school student teachers would hail from Indigenous communities like the communities where they would work, and they would be trained in instructing rural students for both intellectual growth and agricultural knowledge. Graduates of these colleges were generally promised a teaching position upon completion of the teacher-training program.[90] Padilla quotes Moisés Sáenz, the undersecretary of education from 1924-1930, who insisted that the "two goals of rural education were 'the incorporation of the great mass of indigenous people into the Mexican family, [and] the formation of a rural spirit.'"[91] While Sáenz was a student of philosopher John Dewey, as was Vasconcelos, David Craven points out that Sáenz critiqued Vasconcelos' "dreamy Hispanofile ethnocentrism,"

[89] NPR.org, "Mexico's 1968 Massacre: What Really Happened?," December 1, 2008, https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=97546687.
[90] Maider Elortegui Uriarte, "Un recorrido histórico de las Escuelas Normales Rurales de México: el acto subversivo de hacer memoria desde los acontecimientos contra los estudiantes de Ayotzinapa," *Estudios Latinoamericanos* 0, no. 40 (August 9, 2017): 157-178, 157. doi:10.22201/cela.24484946e.2017.40.61600.
[91] Padilla, 343.

suggesting that instead of Indian assimilation, education should support "adjusting civilization to the Indian."[92]

The first normal school was created in 1922 in Michoacán, and soon there were about thirty-five schools spread throughout rural areas of Mexico.[93] "The schools were coeducational, structured as cooperatives, placed a strong emphasis on self-sufficiency and self-governance, and adopted a socialist educational philosophy that emphasized teachers as both cultural and political leaders," Padilla explains.[94] During the erosion of democracy in 1960's Mexico that inspired the demonstrations in Mexico City, the normal school system was facing major overhauls, defunding, and shut downs, setting off a wave of protests by the student teacher "*normalistas*" who saw this as an attack on radicality and social justice in the education sector.[95] The state recognized "a direct correlation with the links between the student community, the teachers and the popular movements...especially insurrectional ones" and closed about half of the schools by 1970.[96] Vaughn deftly emphasizes the complex dialectics of the post-Revolutionary education system in which the normales rurales formed a leftist enclave: "If the school functioned to inculcate a state ideology for purposes of rule, it also served communities when they needed to contest

[92] David Craven, *Art and Revolution in Latin America, 1910-1990* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 31.
[93] Elortegui Uriarte, "Un recorrido histórico," 157.
[94] Padilla, 343.
[95] Ibid.
[96] Normalista César Navarro qtd. in Padilla, 355.

state policies. It provided ideological, technical, and organizational tools to do so...[and] Teachers facilitated this dual construction."[97]

In primary and secondary schools in the rural areas of Oaxaca state, the abovementioned "dual construction" was typical, with regional affiliations and the specifics of different communities dictating the extent to which teachers offered standardized or alternative forms of education. "For many years," writes Oaxacan Professor Fernando Soberanes Bojórquez, "we teachers of indigenous education [had] been instruments of education policies that...tended toward the disappearance of original peoples by enabling their incorporation, assimilation, or integration into the dominant mestizo culture," until the teachers recognized that they needed to "critically review the kind of education we were imparting."[98] As Section 22 teacher Omar Olivera Espinosa explains, the focus in the union had been on class struggle until the EZLN uprising directly impacted the teachers' movement. It was the Zapatistas, Olivera Espinosa says, that inspired Section 22 initiatives for creating and supporting educational structures that addressed the specific needs of rural Indigenous populations. Olivera adds that with the Zapatistas' emergence, Section 22 teachers began to reflect on their Indigenous roots, realizing that "if there is, in this country, a pluricultural universe, it is the teachers of Section 22, because we [come from and work in] all sixteen pueblos of Oaxaca."[99]

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[97] Mary Kay Vaughan, *Cultural Politics in Revolution: Teachers, Peasants, and Schools in Mexico, 1930–1940* (Tuscon, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 1997), 7 qtd. in Craven, *Art and Revolution*, 32.
[98] Fernando Soberanes Bojórquez, "Noam Chompsky and Indigenous Education in Oaxaca, Mexico," in Meyer et.al.,*New World*, 105–6.
[99] Interview with Omar Olivera Espinosa, Oaxaca, Oaxaca, October 3, 2018.

This transformative new consciousness led to union and educational initiatives inspired by neo-Zapatismo and based in the practices of Indigenous communal life in Oaxaca. The Coalition of Indigenous Teachers and Promoters of Oaxaca (*Coalición de Maestros y Promotores Indígenas de Oaxaca*, CMPIO) was created in 1995 as an "internal pedagogical movement for the purpose of constructing educational proposals appropriate to the needs and reality of original peoples" and *Plan Piloto* was conceived as the "school-based structure" of this initiative.[100] Section 22 slowly brought comunalidad, already familiar to the teachers since the majority come from Indigenous communities, into union dialogue and educational initiatives in the wake of EZLN.[101] But at the same time that the Zapatista movement was propelling changes in the union, it was also transforming state responses to Indigenous organizing. The same year that CMPIO was formed saw the initial stages of implementation for what would eventually be the Law of Indigenous Rights of Oaxaca.

As Section 22 took an increasingly leading role in mobilizing Mexico's Democratic Teachers' Movement, the public image of the Oaxacan teacher became virtually synonymous in the popular imagination with that of a political activist and the teachers' movement emerged as one of the most divisive forces in state politics. The general (especially urban) public are frequently affected by the union's most controversial strategies: *plantónes* (sit-ins and encampments in public places), *bloqueos* (physically blocking city streets, highways, and airports), and *megamarchas*

[100] Soberanes Bojórquez, "Noam Chompsky," 107.
[101] Interview with Omar Olivera Espinosa, Oaxaca, Oaxaca, October 3, 2018.

(large-scale political marches). Oaxacan citizens who do not support the union argue that the teachers are lazy and stage manifestations and sit-ins to avoid working. It is not difficult to see the irony inspiring public disapproval: the teachers are fighting for education but they are constantly involved in union activities that ostensibly take them out of the classroom. This fundamental disconnect, added to decades of government smear campaigns, created a very serious image problem for the teachers' union and a constant struggle for public support. In the mainstream press, Section 22 is often called "militant," "delinquent," "violent," and "combative."

And yet, most of Section 22's tactics are based in civil disobedience and their primary mode of struggle is the yearly plantón in the zócalo of Oaxaca City. Beginning each May on or around National Teacher's Day in Mexico (May 15), Section 22 teachers, often joined by other CNTE-allied union locals in nearby states, stop all classes and occupy the zócalo during the summer months. This strategy is used to push negotiations with state authorities for their continuing demands: living wages, improved working conditions, and student resources, especially for the poor, rural Indigenous schools. In these schools, students often arrive hungry and without shoes, and teachers often spend up to 20% of their own wages on school supplies.[102] Each year, the plantón ends when union leaders are able to reach an agreement with state authorities. In 2006, thousands of Section 22 teachers had been occupying the zócalo since May 22 to push for contract negotiations. It was Oaxaca governor Ulises

[102] Interview with Marcelina Paula Rosales Toledo, Edita Ojeda Sánchez, and Julian Jiménez Ramírez, three Indigenous teachers from the same district in an Indigenous community of Oaxaca state, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, June 16, 2016.

Ruiz Ortiz's refusal to negotiate with the teachers in 2006 and his decision to instead violently attack the plantón that led to the Oaxaca Commune.

**Fuera URO! (URO Out!)**

Governor Ruiz Ortiz took office in 2004 in what was not only widely considered a fraudulent election, but was openly declared as such, according to Esteva: "The opposition challenged the outcome in the Federal Tribunal, which acknowledged the fraud but refused to nullify it, on the pretext that it was a local matter."[103] As soon as he came into office, URO immediately instituted repressive tactics to quell dissent, including jailing and disappearing activists and replacing Oaxaca newspaper employees with his own party loyalists. "Censorship of the press," Stephen explains, "was accompanied by continued harassment and repression of the leaders of a wide range of organizations."[104] Further, URO undertook public works projects widely criticized as destructive to the city's cultural heritage. First, he built an "Administrative City" outside the center of Oaxaca and moved the governor's and state senate offices there. Then, he pushed forward "modernizing" renovations of Oaxaca City's historic center, which included replacing areas of cobblestone in the zócalo with cement and uprooting trees that were over a hundred years old. URO's projects were seen as thinly disguised attempts to prevent the protest encampments that were often staged in the zócalo. Further, journalists uncovered how the governor

[103] Esteva, "Oaxaca," 84.
[104] Stephen, *We Are the Face*, 75.

used his monopoly over the construction contracts to pad the pockets of his wealthy investors and "funnel state funds into PRI's presidential campaign."[105]

URO was considered an exemplar of the ongoing failure of the democratic transition that government leaders had promised since PRI lost the 2000 presidential election. He was seen as the apotheosis of the PRI regime, which had reached exaggerated extremes of impunity. In short, URO was popular with almost nobody in Oaxaca, and the June 14th repression was the last straw for an already angry populace. The collective disdain for URO created solidarity among APPO members and opened a space for dialogues about other political problems in the state, which the popular assembly then expanded its agenda to address.

### *Tod@s Somos APPO* (We are all APPO)

On June 17th, 2006, just a few days after the *desalojo* (eviction) of the teachers from the plantón, a strong base of Section 22 teachers and members of approximately 365 organizations came together to form the Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca. The coalition that APPO forged between the teachers' union and Oaxacan civil society provided support for Section 22's labor and education-related aims, which were getting nowhere with URO in office. But APPO also offered a chance to bring broad political change to Oaxaca. APPO brought together an unprecedentedly diverse range of social and political organizations across the state, including Indigenous rights groups, women's organizations, artist collectives, workers'

[105] Poole, "Affective Distinctions," 201.

associations, and activist coalitions, who all agreed that URO had to go. According to Davies, one of the first documents drawn up by APPO stated: "Given that sovereignty resides in the people and for the people who have the inalienable right to expel their governments when those do not comply with the mandate for which they are elected, the people of Oaxaca are justified in soliciting the revocation of powers in the State of Oaxaca."[106] The call for the ouster of URO was the glue that cohered APPO, which in turn supported the development of a more heterogeneous social movement and a broader set of goals.

APPO made efforts to balance leadership among Section 22 teachers and members of the other organizations, as Esteva puts it, "subordinating the leadership of the union to the popular assembly."[107] Modeled on Indigenous communities' autonomous self-governance practices in communal popular assemblies, APPO was "referred to as 'a different participative democracy,' ...united despite differences of ideas and ideologies" and called for "everyone to organize popular assemblies at every level: neighborhoods, streets, blocks, unions, and towns."[108] In the first weeks of its existence, APPO mobilized marches, protests, and manifestations. One march had over a million participants, amounting to roughly a third of Oaxaca's state population.

[106] Davies, *People Decide*, 23.
[107] Esteva, "Asamblea Popular,"130.
[108] Davies, 38, 42.

Following the initial marches, smaller popular assemblies under the APPO umbrella started popping up in rural areas around Oaxaca City and occupying town halls. As Davies reported on June 27, 2006:

> Ten municipal town halls have been taken over in Oaxaca state, among which are Juchitán, Zimatlán, Huautla de Jiménez, Teotitlán de Flores Magón, Matiás Romero, Huajuapan de León, Puerto Angel, and Puerto Escondido. Farmers have marched in from Tuxtepec. Inhabitants of San Salvador Atenco, in Mexico State, have made their way toward Oaxaca City. Followers of the popular uprising in San Blas Atempa retook their municipal building in solidarity with the teachers' movement. The government buildings of Pinotepa Nacional, Tuxtepec, San José Chiltepec, Valle Nacional, San Pedro Pochutla, and Asunción Nochixtlán have all been occupied. The APPO reports that popular assemblies will take place statewide.[109]

Stephen notes that APPO was growing quickly partly because all of the national attention was on the presidential election, which Governor URO was also actively involved in: "Governor Ruiz Ortiz was famous within the PRI for his ability to deliver votes...Ruiz Ortiz promised to deliver one million PRI votes from Oaxaca for Roberto Madrazo in national elections on July 2, 2006."[110] In a poor state like Oaxaca, votes are often bought in national elections with payoffs of cash or goods as minimal as a bag of cement, beans, or rice. In response to URO's promise to deliver votes in the 2006 elections, however, one of APPO's first major successes was in organizing a "punishment vote" against the governor's party, causing the PRI to lose the majority of congressional seats and for opposition candidates in the senate race (Gabino Cué Monteagudo) and presidential race (Andres Manuel López Obrador) to

[109] Davies, 24.
[110] Stephen, *We Are the Face*, 82.

win in the state by a record number of votes.[111] Following its historic shutout in Oaxaca for the first time in eighty years, the PRI also lost the presidential election. However, calling the win between the two opposition party candidates became very complicated when López Obrador was said to have lost by 0.58%, one of the narrowest margins in history.[112] The controversy over the election results set off months of recounts and chaos. Meanwhile, in Oaxaca City, APPO took over the abandoned Governor's Palace, and "declared itself the governing body of Oaxaca on the morning of July 5, 2006."[113]

APPO's most telling accomplishment during the Oaxaca Commune, according to many analyses in the independent press, was its success in taking over Oaxaca City as the de facto government for six months after centralized state powers, including governor URO, fled the city. Esteva explains:

> From June to October 2006, there was no police in the city of Oaxaca (population 600,000), not even to direct traffic. The governor and his functionaries met secretly in hotels or private homes; none of them dared to show up at their offices. [APPO] had posted 24-hour guards in all the public buildings and radio and TV stations that it controlled. When the governor began sending out his goons to launch nocturnal guerrilla attacks against these guards, the people responded by putting up barricades. More than a thousand barricades were put up every night at 11pm, around the encampments or at critical intersections. They would be taken down every morning at 6am to restore normal traffic. Despite the attacks, according to a human-rights organization, there was less violence in those months (fewer deaths and injuries) than in any similar period in the previous ten years. Unionized

[111] Stephen, *We Are the Face*, 82.
[112] In 2006, López Obrador was running on a platform with the PRD party. He ran twice more – in 2012, again running on a PRD platform, he lost; in 2018, he ran under the Morena party and finally won. López Obrador is currently the President of Mexico at the time of writing, signaling a huge shift in Mexican politics to the left.
[113] Davies, 44.

> workers belonging to the APPO performed basic services like garbage collection.[114]

In this way, APPO not only called for a new form of governance, but also actively, functionally took on that role, while at the same time continuing to negotiate its structures and goals and to shape its constituencies. Thus APPO was situated as a prefigurative movement of movements from its start, bringing the ends and means of the struggle together in its daily operations, but also, crucially, expressed in its visual culture initiatives.

As the passage above suggests, a significant means of APPO's exercise of peoples' power were the barricades that neighborhood members of APPO set up every night from 11 PM – 6 AM. The barricades were both "a new strategy for self-defense...[and] a space where neighbors got to know each other, shared ideas, and developed new strategies for organizing. The barricade was emblematic of the fundamental aims of the social movement to construct autonomy and direct democracy."[115]

The diversity of APPO's membership meant that there were factions and conflicts within the assemblies. Some of these tensions fell along lines of local versus national organizations and the particular concerns of each type of group. Other disagreements were related to political ideologies and forms of struggle, such as decisions concerning whether to use non-violent civil disobedience or "by any means necessary" tactics. Therefore, APPO held forums frequently in order to organize

[114] Esteva, "Oaxaca," 81.
[115] Denham and C.A.S.A., 31.

consensus around a list of aims and demands. At the National Forum for "Building Democracy and Governability in Oaxaca," which took place in Oaxaca City about two months into the Oaxaca Commune on August 16-17, 2006, APPO created a statement that included this summary of objectives:

> Today the Oaxacan agenda is being created from the perspective of citizens, of civil society, brought together in APPO, which is in effect taking measures in the municipalities, communities, neighborhoods, organizations, etc., against authoritarianism and the string of oppressive PRI governments, forming a movement that began with teachers' demands and transformed into a widespread social phenomenon, whose destiny begins to take shape with the results of this forum. However, it is not a simple task, it is a process that will take time, because it is contributing to a political transition, which today we all claim and must build, recognizing the *legal pluralism and autonomy of indigenous pueblos, as well as respect for their forms of social and political coexistence as the basis of a new political constitution for the state of Oaxaca, being the governing axis for the welfare of everyone, without discrimination based on ethnicity, age, sex, social status, or religious belief. The new constitution should guarantee non-discrimination, the inclusion of women at all levels in the decision-making, and the legal recognition of original peoples*, and only when we achieve that will we achieve total victory.[116]

The forum had over fifteen thousand representatives from across the state in attendance, showing the rapid growth of APPO in just a few months.[117] The wording of this document is testament to transformations that had taken place within APPO and the movement, reflecting the development of civic dialogue via multiform graphic art expressions installed in public spaces, which I will explore in Chapter 2; increased attention to Indigenous autonomy following the People's Guelaguetza,

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[116] Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación, Coordinadora Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación, and Section XXII, "Construyendo La Democracia y La Gobernabilidad En Oaxaca," in *Foro Nacional* "*Construyendo La Democracia y La Gobernabilidad En Oaxaca*" (Oaxaca de Juárez, Oaxaca, 2006), 3, emphasis in original.
[117] Stephen, *We Are the Face*, 90.

which I will analyze in Chapter 3; and necessary changes around gender parity after the CORTV media takeover, which I will investigate in Chapter 4.

## Chapter Two.
## *Scratching the Surface*

[Figure 2.1-2.2] June 14, 2016: At 8:30 AM, *compañeros* start to gather at the graphic workshop Espacio Zapata in central Oaxaca City to prepare for the mega-march marking the ten-year anniversary of the desalojo that started the Oaxaca Commune. Irving has been working since 3 AM that morning, he says. Prints are in drying racks from the last few days of preparations. The artists have created large-scale woodcuts with thin chip-board wood plates, cut to the shapes of various images – the head of a woman with a bandana over her mouth, a man with his arms bound behind his back, Emiliano Zapata with a campesina woman, a hooded youth with a slingshot and a bandana. There are also serigraph images that Mario and Carlos printed last night. Each features a child with arms folded across their chest and an indignant expression with text above saying either: "My teacher is not a rebel," or "My teacher is not a delinquent," "she is fighting for a better education for us." The woodblock and serigraph have been printed across several sheets of delicate tissue paper like a puzzle and are now carefully pieced together, glued at the seams, and cut out with an x-acto blade. This process takes several hours. While working, the artists, all males between the ages of roughly 18-30 years old, listen to hip-hop music and drink coffee; some of them dance around. There's lots of chatting, camaraderie, and anticipation. Mario, the de facto father figure of Espacio Zapata, oversees the operation in his own quiet way. He seems to be the one most mindful of time, and given that the march has already begun, he rushes around making sure work is happening. The other guys are relaxed, chat, and take their time.



[Figure 2.1. Preparations at Espacio Zapata for the Oaxaca Commune anniversary mega-march, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, June 14, 2016. Photograph by the author.]



[Figure 2.2. Preparations at Espacio Zapata for the Oaxaca Commune anniversary mega-march, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, June 14, 2016. Photograph by the author.]

When it is time to rush to meet the march, everyone grabs supplies – prints, buckets of wheat paste, rollers, rubber gloves, spray paint – and get into cabs. They meet the march just outside of the center of town. The crowd has been marching for about two hours from the State Institute of Public Education (*Instituto Estatal de Educación Pública de Oaxaca*, IEEPO). Two days ago, early Sunday morning, June 12th, the teachers' union Local Section 22 blockaded the IEPPO building as part of their annual summer strike and police attacked them in retaliation.



[Figure 2.3. Artist collectives wheat-pasting prints alongside mega-march, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, June 14, 2016. Photograph by the author.]



[Figure 2.4. Stencils and spray-paint additions during mega-march, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, June 14, 2016. Photograph by the author.]




[Figure 2.5. "Viva La Ful-APPO," Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, June 14, 2016. Photograph by the author.]

[Figures 2.3-2.8] Right away, the artists begin. The process goes like this: they follow along with the march on the sidewalk and locate a good space to "get up" – i.e. a good size piece of wall or fence for pasting on. Quickly, they roll the wall with wheat paste begin adhering the prints in pairs or groups of three. More paste is applied once the prints are up to fully adhere them to the surface. Sometimes this process is difficult and clunky – the surface resists the print or paste and the print does not stay up. Multiple rounds of paste are necessary to adhere it. At least once, one of the more intricate prints (a winged angel of victory with a gun held aloft) begins to tear and will not stay put. The boys are short and their prints are sometimes taller than they are; they stand on one of the empty paste buckets to get it pasted up. The others stand by to offer encouragement. Mario chants "*Si se puede!*" ("Yes we can!") and everyone breaks their seriousness with laughter. At last, Aler (from Jaguar Print) rips the print where it won't stay up and fills in the rest of the image with spray paint. After the prints are on the surface, other compañeros add to the composition with stencils and spray-paint in red, black, and neon orange: the names of the various art collectives that participated in making the images and installing them now (ASARO, URTARTE, JAGUAR PRINT, GABINETE GRAFICO); slogans such as "2006–2016," "*14 de junio no se olvido*," "*nací para venecer*," "*muerte mal gobierno*," ("don't forget June 14th," "I was born to overcome," "death to bad government,") and other decorations, including red clown noses on the stencils of President Peña Nieto that are already up around town, a capital "A" with a circle around it – the anarchy symbol. Jaguar Print artists also create stencil of a boy

holding the handle of a blank sign, adding different messages to the sign each time they spray-paint the stencil: "*Oaxaca resiste,*" "*Oaxaca despierta*" ("Oaxaca resist," "Oaxaca awake").




[Figure 2.6. "Ni perdón, ni olvido," Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, June 14, 2016. Photograph by the author.]

While the artists work, marchers stop and observe or take pictures. Some clap or encourage, others just watch and document with cameras and phones. The street art and its performative installation energize and enliven the crowd. Chants get louder and the marchers voice the slogans seen in the graffiti. Toward the end of the march, one man with a megaphone warns the crowd every time they stop to watch the artists that they should keep moving in order to get to the zócalo, because the rest of the day's programs will be starting there soon. Still, many marchers stop to take pictures

of the artists' work. A little boy marching with his father stands in front of one of the pasted up prints that depicts Zapata and a campesina woman and smiles proudly while his dad takes a photo. Other marchers observing this scene chant "*La lucha sigue, Zapata vive!*" ("The struggle continues, Zapata lives!").




[Figure 2.7. "2006–2016," Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, June 14, 2016. Photograph by the author.]

The march is peaceful and moderately paced, animated by chants and songs. A man in a pickup truck with a bullhorn toward the front of the march adds encouragement and discourse about the teachers' union struggle and its demands. The Chilean protest song "Venceremos" ("We Will Overcome") gets a particularly potent

show of collective emotion. One woman stops on the sidewalk, turns toward the oncoming marchers, and holds up a clenched fist of solidarity while passionately singing. Many others stop to take her photo – the scene is no doubt emblematic. It is 2016, but for many here, today feels eerily reminiscent of 2006 in its energy, intensity, and in the stakes of the lucha. So it is both the tenth anniversary of the day that permanently transformed Oaxacan politics and the beginning of a social movement resurgence to address ongoing, related, and new political crises.




[Figure 2.8. "My teacher is not a rebel/ delinquent," Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, June 14, 2016. Photograph by the author.]

For the group from Espacio Zapata, artist collective Assembly of Revolutionary Artists of Oaxaca, this anniversary also marks their own beginnings as a collective.

Although they did not formally found the assembly until October 2006, *grafiteros* (graffiti artists) and street artists who would later solidify ASARO and create Espacio Zapata first came together to respond to the June 14th uprising ten years ago with their artistic talents and the tools that they had at hand. Through their affinities for print media and political protest and their belief in APPO's cause, artist-activists began to cohere artist collectives that radically altered the visual landscape of Oaxaca, gathered support for APPO, and diffused and deliberated some of the movement's pressing issues on the walls and streets of Oaxaca City.

*  *  *

In this chapter, I analyze graphic art in a variety of media, including graffiti, street art, prints, posters, and tapetes created by Oaxaca City artist collectives beginning in 2006, in order to examine the ways in which it aided in the development of APPO and its new model of participatory politics. I argue that graphic art created a matrix of visual discourse that mapped out the political terrain of APPO's movement onto the spatial terrain of Oaxaca City, drawing from and revising Mexican graphic agitprop, revolutionary iconography, and religious traditions to galvanize Oaxacan leftist youth, pan-ethnic and multilingual Indigenous communities, peasants, and workers in support of APPO's movement. Present from the start of the uprising in highly visible public spaces and throughout the various shifts and transformations of the Oaxaca Commune, graphic art initiated, reflected, and disseminated a dialogue among civil society about key issues of the movement, the development of APPO,

and the future of Oaxaca's democracy. In its more contested forms of expression such as graffiti and street art, graphic art also became a critical element of APPO's campaign to establish "ungovernability" in Oaxaca City, which was necessary for attempts to unseat Ruiz Ortiz. Additionally, since the artist collectives operated as assemblies under the umbrella "assembly of assemblies," APPO, they negotiated and modeled the evolving ethos and principles of APPO, including practices of collectivity and assembling, which were actively being adapted from comunalidad to the urban context of the uprising. Therefore, I posit that Oaxaca Commune graphic art and the processes of its creation registered and disseminated publically, in real time, the complexities of a movement negotiating between the incorporation of traditional Indigenous communal practices and the demands of state politics to develop a new form of democratic governance. The visual interference of graphic art in the urban landscape thus became the grounding matrix for many of the other initiatives of the Oaxaca Commune, visual and otherwise, and, as evinced in my observations of 2016 actions described above, continued to sustain the ethos and ideas of APPO as the movement has evolved in the years following the uprising.

**Prefiguring democracy: interstices, 'cracks,' anarchy**

This chapter's argument connects with the overarching thesis of the dissertation project though attention to the intersection between prefigurative politics and street art. In his book *Anarchism and Art*, Mark Mattern engages sociologists Erik Olin Wright and John Holloway to analyze how various forms of popular art, including

graffiti and street art, "exemplify anarchist principles and commitments that, taken together, prefigure deeper forms of democracy than those experienced...in today's liberal democracies."[118] The ways in which Mattern links principles of anarchism, participatory democracy, prefiguration, and graffiti/ street art offers a useful frame for understanding how graphic art functioned in the Oaxaca Commune. Mattern draws on Wright's theory of "interstitial" strategies of progressive change, differentiated from "ruptural" and "symbolic" strategies, to refer to "efforts occurring 'in the spaces and cracks within some dominant social structures of power.'"[119] Mattern then likens the notion of interstitial strategies to Holloway's call to "crack capitalism," through "forms that will represent 'the embryos of a new world, the interstitial movements from which a new society can grow.' These new forms are to be created in the interstices and cracks that can be found within capitalism."[120] Mattern brings together these two concepts and their shared association with anarchism to "[address] artistic and popular cultural practices found in the interstices – in the cracks and on the margins – of dominant institutions of state and capital."[121] Such practices, Mattern argues, are prefigurative in that they "[realize] and [express] alternative anarchist values in everyday cultural production, circulation, and reception, while promising a

[118] Mark Mattern, *Anarchism and Art: Democracy in the Cracks and on the Margins*, SUNY Series in New Political Science (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2016), 1.
[119] Erik Olin Wright, *Envisioning Real Utopias* (London: Verso, 2010), 322, qtd. in Mattern, *Anarchism and Art*, 5.
[120] John Holloway, *Crack Capitalism* (London: Pluto Press, 2010), 11, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ucsc/detail.action?docID=3386305, qtd. in Mattern, 6.
[121] Mattern, 7.

more democratic future."[122] While it may not be prudent to characterize art practices as "promising" anything in particular, what is salient in Mattern's formulation is his exploration of the prefigurative potential of art as operating in the creation of publically visible cultural forms in which "we can see alternative futures."[123]

Some members of Indigenous communities operating via the governing principles of asamblea and social organizing in comunalidad that I laid out in the first chapter associate their communal governing practices with forms of contemporary anarchism.[124] The same holds true for many of the members of the artist assemblies that I will discuss in this chapter. However, the anarchism in Oaxacan graphic artist collectives more closely resembles those forms most traditionally associated with the term, involving direct political action, sometimes through more aggressive tactics of social protest and dissent. But Mattern explains that many iterations of contemporary anarchism couple active resistance to and rejection of state and government with tactics that could be referred to as dissenting coexistence: "Through direct action, contemporary anarchists...[find] and [create] spaces within existing structures of state and capital where anarchist principles can be realized, albeit tempered by the need to

[122] Mattern, 7.
[123] Mattern, 11.
[124] I personally heard this comparison more than once in informal conversations with Indigenous community members, and in one memorable discussion in the summer of 2016 taking place after a public screening of the documentary "Accidental Anarchist: Life without Government" (John Archer and Clara Glynn, BBC Storyville, 2017) in Oaxaca City. In the film, Carne Ross, a former British diplomat, decides to leave his post to travel the world looking for alternative forms of democracy and finds versions of anarchic people power in various geopolitical contexts. During the Q&A discussion, a man from an Indigenous community in the Sierra Norte region in the mountains outside of the city commented that if Ross wanted to see examples of functional anarchy, why did he not travel to the Zapotec pueblos of Oaxaca where it is happening every day?

coexist with dominant institutions of state and capital."[125] This resonates with A.C. Dinerstein's conception of the politics of autonomy in Latin American Indigenous movements, which I outlined in the Introduction. To reiterate, Dinerstein insists on Latin American Indigenous autonomy politics as "a complex collective action that includes the negation of the given; the creation of the alternative; the struggle with, against and beyond the state; the law and capital."[126] Mattern and Dinerstein both highlight that anarchist principles and forms of resistance do not necessarily involve seizing of the state, but instead refer to operating in creative modes of intervention through the discovery or innovation of in-between spaces.

Mattern points out that "the term 'graffiti' is derived from the Italian *graffiare*, meaning 'to scratch.'"[127] While Mattern does not explicitly correlate this etymology with his previous comments about how anarchist prefiguration of democratic ideals operates in the interstices and cracks of the dominant order, the image of graffiti "scratching" evokes both the political cracks and fissures alluded to in the sociological theories of Wright and Holloway as well as the "matrix" invoked in this chapter's argument – the material matrix of the cracked and fragile walls of Oaxaca's colonial architecture, the discursive matrix inscribed on these walls by graphic artists, and the web of connections, collaborations, and collective action mobilized therein.

[125] Mattern, 23.
[126] Dinerstein,18.
[127] Mattern, 83.

**APPO-affiliated artist assemblies**

Two of the first artist collectives to organize under APPO were Arte Jaguar and ASARO. Arte Jaguar formed in 2004, with members from the original collective Stencil Zone (ca. 2002), and has since become Jaguar Print (ca. 2014). During the Oaxaca Commune, the collective was primarily focused on stencils and street art, but they expanded to include indoor murals, paintings, and print editions after forming Jaguar Print. Aler and one of the other founding members who is no longer active had been involved in the teachers' movement as long as they could remember because both of their fathers are teachers. Aler was born in Nochixtlán, an area about an hour north of Oaxaca City, and moved to the city for middle school and high school. He remembers initially learning about art from a book series created by the teachers' union in the 1980's called "*Aprendiendo Hacer*" ("Learning to Do"). Arte Jaguar came together when Aler and the other members (among them, Aker and Adrian, who still remain) were art students at the Benito Juarez Autonomous University of Oaxaca (*Universidad Autónoma Benito Juárez de Oaxaca*, UABJO). They formed the collective in order to bring their stencil work into the city streets, and were often creating street art to support various student and teacher movements. In 2006, Arte Jaguar got involved in the uprising rather organically, as their initial goal was just to support APPO's movement. They participated in APPO marches and rallies and often created stencils to display alongside these public events.[128]

ASARO became the formal moniker of a group of artists who began working

[128] Interview with Aler, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, July 14, 2016.

together collectively at the start of the Oaxaca Commune. As one ASARO artist explained: "ASARO was organized as part of the different levels that the social movement of Oaxaca has. We are an assembly of artists who are unified by the goal of liberty in expression. We denounce the problems in a broken system. Our objective is to propose an alternative counterculture to the one that has been planted in Oaxaca, with a central focus on graphics. Most of us are between 18 and 28 years old."[129] Mario Guzman, the unofficial patriarch of ASARO, is from the state of Veracruz but came to Oaxaca in 1993, when he was 18 years old, to study at UABJO. After finishing school, Mario went to Oaxaca's rural seaside Costa Chica region to work with Afro-Mexican youth and continued to do so for thirteen years, teaching them printmaking, he says, as a tool for fighting racism.[130] It was when he returned to Oaxaca City that Mario began making relationships with people in political organizations, and in 2006 he joined the Marxist-Leninist Popular Revolutionary Front (*Frente Popular Revolucionario*, FPR) and the communist party it coordinates with. In addition to getting involved more militantly in Oaxacan politics, Mario made a personal decision at that time to dedicate his artistic practice to sociopolitical issues.[131]

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[129] Guillermo Pachecho qtd. in Alonso Aguilar Orihuela, "En el Instituto de Artes Gráficas de Oaxaca Inauguran exposición Grafiteros al paredón," ASARO Blogspot, http://asar-Oaxaca.blogspot.com/search/label/PRENSA, 2007, qtd. in Stephen, *We Are the Face*, 260–61.

[130] Interview with Mario Guzman, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, September 2, 2013. The Costa Chica is on the southern Pacific coast of Oaxaca and stretches into the neighboring state of Guerrero to the south. This area has the highest concentration of African descendant Mexicans in the country, ancestors of slaves that were brought to Mexico during Spanish colonization. The area is exceptionally poor, even in a state that is the second poorest in the nation, and its residents suffer from discrimination and isolation. The Mexican government did not officially recognize this population until 2015.

[131] Interview with Mario Guzman, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, September 2, 2013.

When the Oaxaca Commune began, Mario and the next generation of art students at UABJO, mostly young men, and including the members of Arte Jaguar, were bringing their creative practice to the streets in support of APPO. The majority of them, like Mario before them, had studied with Shinzaburo Takeda. Takeda is a Japanese-born artist who has taught at UABJO for more than thirty years, instructing many generations of young artists the tradition of woodblock printmaking from his home country.[132] Takeda felt that he could not get directly involved with political protests in Oaxaca because of his immigrant status, but encouraged his students to use their art to contribute to the social movement.[133] The loose coalition of artists that began collaborating on street art as part of APPO attracted other young people who had not been formally trained in print media but were enthusiastic to learn the craft and be part of the social movement.[134] Both Mario and Aler explained that during the frenetic first months of the uprising, stencils and graffiti were the most expedient media for artists to work with, allowing them to quickly cover large areas of the city with images and messages that were accessible to the public and easy to interpret.[135]

Analyzing the graphics mobilized by artist collectives in 2006 as a grounding matrix of Oaxaca Commune visual discourse also allows for attention to the particular effects and possibilities of print media. Print-based mediums are created from a

[132] According to Takeda, he brought the very first woodblock carving tools from Japan to Oaxaca when he arrived in the 1970's (Interview with Shinzaburo Takeda, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, August 28, 2013). In any case, given that Takeda had mentored so many of the artists who eventually formed the various artist assemblies in 2006, he was undoubtedly responsible for securing woodblock printing as the chief medium of graphic art during the Oaxaca Commune.
[133] Interview with Shinzaburo Takeda, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, August 28, 2013.
[134] Interview with Mario Guzman, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, July 27, 2016.
[135] Interview with Mario Guzman, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, September 2, 2013; Interview with Aler, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, July 14, 2016.

matrix, a grounding material on which a composition is created and from which it can be impressed upon a receiving material. Graphic art created in support of APPO both emerged through traditional print matrices (cardboard stencils, woodblocks, serigraphy screens) and built a discursive visual matrix on city walls to impress upon viewers APPO ideologies, provocations, questions, problems, and proposals that were to be deliberated in the public spaces that APPO was actively reclaiming.

**Public space, street art, and ungovernability**

As mentioned in the previous chapter, reclamation of public space in the Oaxaca Commune was specifically entangled with disdain for Ruiz Ortiz due to fallout from one of the governor's initial moves once he took office in 2005. Within his first 100 days, the governor had launched an initiative, without consulting city residents, to renovate Oaxaca City's zócalo. The first part of this renovation included re-locating important government offices from the central buildings around the zócalo to suburbs outside of the city center and converting the government palace and other buildings into museums. The second part involved removing trees that had populated the zócalo for centuries and replacing some of the cobblestoned areas with concrete.[136] Ortiz cited motivation in bolstering Oaxaca City tourism. However, many city residents considered his uprooting of the trees as part of increasing privatization of the city's historical and cultural heritage. Further, they believed that Ortiz's principal aim in the renovations was to discourage political dissent in the form of

[136] Poole, "Affective Distinctions," 201.

rallies and sit-ins or plantones, which were historically undertaken in the zócalo, in front of the buildings that housed state representatives. [137] The largest and most long-standing of these is the Section 22 teachers' union plantón, taking place annually during the summer months.

Unilateral renovations like the one Ortiz initiated in Oaxaca City's zócalo should have been prohibited by UNESCO.[138] The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization designates world heritage properties as part of its stated aim to "protect sites of outstanding universal value."[139] Oaxaca City was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1987, justified on the basis of the "1200 listed monuments of civil and religious architecture" that populate the city and surrounding areas.[140] UNESCO cites this imperative to safeguard cultural heritage alongside another aim: "protecting freedom of expression: an essential condition for democracy, development, and human dignity."[141] However, UNESCO lists graffiti and "politically motivated acts" under "Other Human Activity" as one of the fourteen primary threats to World Heritage Properties.[142] Because graphic art like that which erupted out of the Oaxaca Commune operates in and on public spaces, including buildings considering monuments of "outstanding universal value," it throws these two UNESCO aims into irreconcilable conflict. Indeed, protection of the city's

[137] Poole, "Affective Distinctions,"197-99.
[138] In fact, as Poole notes, UNESCO did threaten to pull Oaxaca's status as a World Heritage site during the controversy surrounding Ortiz's zócalo renovations in 2005. Nothing came of the threat even though the renovations were pushed through. Poole, "Affective Distinctions," 201.
[139] According to criteria listed at http://www.whc.unesco.org, accessed March 1, 2016.
[140] Ibid.
[141] Ibid.
[142] Ibid.

UNESCO status is often cited in sanctions against graphic and street art on public walls and buildings. Ruiz Ortiz had in fact mandated whitewashing of graffiti and street art as part of his campaign for office.

Therefore, UNESCO regulations, along with Oaxaca government privatization, blocked publically disseminated political art while allowing for the state's accumulation of tourist revenue and capital from construction contracts kept within government hands. Further, Ortiz's thinly disguised repression of dissent through a violent defense of his newly renovated zócalo on June 14, 2006 made it very clear that the city's treasured public spaces were both sites and subjects of the people's struggle. Against this background, APPO came together to oppose Ortiz on a larger scale and to carve out a new public space in the form of a popular assembly.

[Figure 2.9] The first stencils and graffiti in the days following the June 14th desalojo and preceding APPO's formation on June 17th, were denunciations of governor URO and the paramilitary police that he had sent to destroy the plantón. Likenesses or representations of the governor as animals considered odious – a rat, pig, donkey, or raccoon – appeared on walls all over the city center, sometimes accompanied by slogans that were quickly gaining traction in the movement: "¡*Fuera Ulises*!" ("Ulises Out!") and "¡*Ulises Asesino*!" ("Ulises Murderer!"). This first resounding "NO!" to URO in the form of street art was critically important for the solidarity necessary to cohere APPO, a coalition that brought together a dissident teachers' union – often unpopular with the general public due to their radical tactics – with diverse groups from all over the sociopolitical spectrum and concerned citizens

who had not previously been involved in local politics. Initial graphic interventions underscored this vital coalition-building, the collective rejection of URO's authority, and, as scholar-activist Itandehui Francisco Ortiz puts it, the "symbolic denigration of [the governor's] character."[143] Moreover, the graphic denunciations supported the campaign to depose URO not just on the basis of his character but also by establishing ungovernability in Oaxaca City, the condition allowing for citizens' legal right to call for the governor's removal. According to Muñoz:

> Literature on governability in Latin America defines it as the maintenance of governmental/ institutional stability (Abente Brun, 1996; Coppedge, 1996; Foweraker, 1998). Governability is often contrasted with ungovernability, characterized by social chaos or political power vacuums demonstrated in cabinet crises, legislative stalemate, violent protest, armed rebellion or military coups...Coppedge advances a broader definition, linking governability to the relationships between 'strategic actors' with the capacity to 'disturb public order or economic development.' Such actors include political parties, state-powers, and various social actors such as indigenous people. [144]

The extralegal/ illegal nature of graffiti in Oaxaca bolstered the campaign to establish ungovernability by highlighting URO's lack of authority over and control of his jurisdiction.

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[143] Itandehui Franco Ortiz, "El deleite de la transgresión. Graffiti y gráfica política callejera en la ciudad de Oaxaca," (M.A. Thesis, Escuela Nacional Antropología e Historia, Mexico D.F., 2011), 139.
[144] Alejandro Anaya Muñoz, "Explaining the Politics of Recognition of Ethnic Diversity and Indigenous Peoples' Rights in Oaxaca, Maxico," *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 23, no. 4 (2004): 426, https://revistas-colaboracion.juridicas.unam.mx/index.php/derechos-humanos-cndh /article/view/5614. Also see Diego Abente Brun, "Paraguay: Transition from Caudillo Rule," and Michael Coppedge, "Venezuela: The Rise and Fall of Partyarchy,"in *Constructing Democratic Governance: Latin America and the Caribbean in the 1990s*, eds. A. F. Lowenthal and J. I. Dominguez, (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996): 118-132; 3-19; and Joe Foweraker, "Transformism Transformed: The Nature of Mexico's Political Crisis," *Essex Papers in Politics and Government,* No . 46 (University of Essex: Department of Government, 1988).




[Figure 2.9. Montage of graffiti denouncing Ulises Ruiz Ortiz,
Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, 2006. Photographs by Itandehui Franco Ortiz.]

As demonstrated in the vignette that starts this chapter, stencils and tissue prints allowed for rapid production and the possibility to create endless combinations and compositions when installed on city walls. Political street art is typically installed in

two types of situations – at night, under threat of arrest by police for defacing public property, or during marches. Both of these situations call for speed, either to avoid getting caught or to keep up with the progression of people in the march. Such street art pieces are manifestations of collective work because most of the time they require group execution. Typically, a group of at least five artists will collaborate at a given time. The public observes this collaborative process during marches, but even when street art appears after an overnight installation, collaboration is suggested in the scale of the artworks. Repeated stencils and wheat-pasted prints can give a sense of the scope of a collective's work in terms of how many variations of a composition are visible throughout the city and how geographically spread out they are. Graphic street art also has the unique effect of creating palimpsests on city surfaces, suggesting alliances among (or tensions between) artists and collectives in the incorporation and extension of images or the transformation of vestiges of one another's works into a new composition.

In the call and response of their inscriptions, Oaxacan artist collectives also made use of the idiosyncrasies and imperfections of the spaces on which they installed their graphic works – the dereliction and decay of city walls. [Figure 2.10] This street art piece by the collective Arte Jaguar employs a hole in the plaster facade of a city building revealing the brick underneath. The two-part stencil piece combines a denunciation of URO (imagined once again as a pig) with a declaration of ungovernability via a mockery of URO's repressive paramilitary force, pictured here as a police-robot with shielded helmet and a broom, "cleaning" city streets of

dissidents and their graffiti messages. The irony of a grotesque pig demanding militarized political repression and sanitation, delivered through the very form of graffiti that signifies the dissent the governor remains inept at preventing, is the precipitating message of this Arte Jaguar piece.



[Figure 2.10. Two-part stencil graffiti piece by Arte Jaguar,
Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, 2006. Photograph by Itandehui Franco Ortiz.]

This piece also provides a visual paradigm for the previous discussion regarding Mattern's provocation (via Wright and Holloway) in positing that the anarchic prefiguration of democratic futures takes place in the cracks and interstices of capitalist formations. According to Mattern: "Pursuing an interstitial strategy entails identifying existing cracks and fissures [in dominant institutions], while opening new ones where possible. Over time, these cracks and fissures can be widened, drawing

new and more participants into them...This strategy focuses on the present, but with an eye to the future of gradual emancipation."[145] Mattern misses an opportunity in his chapter on graffiti to consider how street art's literal interventions in the fractured edifices of the capitalist order utilize architectural fissures to highlight structural disorder in need of creative reimagining. Street art such as the example in Figure 2.10 operates on the UNESCO-protected colonial architecture of Oaxaca's state capital, a city in which tourism is the sole economic growth industry. Thus this piece by Arte Jaguar guides a productive reading of Mattern's argument and an extension of its implications by revealing overlapping and intermingling conceptual layers germane to our case study. Graffiti's etymological root in graffiare (to scratch) cues us to the ways in which street art's exploitation of super-structural surface inconsistencies – the figurative and literal "cracks" in the dominant order and the structures that contain it – ultimately expose how architecture deemed sacrosanct both by the United Nations as cultural heritage and the Mexican state as means of capitalist accumulation in tourist revenue stand as the material evidence of the ongoing and unyielding entanglements of colonialism and capitalism.

**Collectivity and visual grammar**

While the first works of graffiti denouncing URO appeared on city walls without attribution to specific artist collectives and assemblies, street art evinced growing internal cohesion and organization under APPO in the months following. As

[145] Mattern, 5.

this happened, graphic art also demonstrated internal practices of collectivity that mirrored the ethos and principle structure of APPO, which was actively being adapted from comunalidad as a chief goal of the movement. ASARO collective members have explained their assembly structure and its connection to APPO and Indigenous comunalidad this way:

> Our structure is not vertical but horizontal. This manner of organizing ourselves is based on the APPO's example, an example which itself retook the model and method of organization of the indigenous communities of Oaxaca. For us, this way of organizing ourselves works in the following way: when there are important issues to discuss, a meeting is convened and all members who can participate come to our workshop and sit in a circle. In order to make our jobs easier, we have formed commissions who are in charge of various tasks inside ASARO. The principal commissions are those of organization, press and propaganda, political formation, and finances. In general, someone from these commissions convenes the assembly. Once together, information is shared topic by topic and what to do and how to do it is discussed for each issue. At the assembly, everyone has a right to speak and to give their opinion until, in the end, when all proposals for a particular issue have been opened up, we vote for each proposal and the one that has the most votes defines our subsequent course of action. Whether a new or old member, each vote counts equally. Decisions made are thus those of everybody and the resulting art is everyone's – that is one of the reasons why the art is signed as ASARO and not individually (security is another).[146]

I quote this passage at length because it is indicative of how the social organization of artist assemblies like ASARO closely followed that of the larger assembly, APPO, forming a micro-model within a model for the decolonial democratic proposal that APPO was actualizing. Practicing this structure on a smaller scale, assemblies like ASARO operated collective action through graphic art formations as a mode of asamblea and a microcosmic example of the movement's in-process goals.

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[146] "ASARO, Art by the People and for the People," in Arenas, *Rearticulating the Social*, 352.

Artist collectives' graphic artwork visually testified to the collective and collaborative work of the assemblies as horizontal, heterogeneous, and inclusive. Collaboration and collectivity were already key for Oaxacan graphic artists, who share space, equipment, and resources for the production of their artwork in *talleres*, or workshops. Print media in particular demands the use of specialized equipment, tools, and costly materials, so artists typically operate in communal spaces and often assist one another in the production of images. Just transferring a heavy lithography stone or pulling a large woodblock print through the press may require more than one set of arms to execute. These collaborative practices were easily adapted to the structure of APPO and the ideology of collectivity at its center. In effect, the prints, posters, and street art created by artist collectives and installed in the city testify to the collective work that went into them in the sense that they incorporate visual markers of shared resources and collaborative production. The repetition of logos, stencils, and slogans across the graphic artworks provide points of visual convergence that formulate a collective message while also suggesting that collectivity in the form of popular assemblies offers avenues for creative forms of dissent.

[Figures 2.11-2.13] ASARO created a logo for the collective that appeared in street art, pamphlets and flyers, and was watermarked on prints. ASARO's logo most clearly signals collectivity through shared attribution, since ASARO artists sign most of their prints and street art with only the collective's name. But in the design of this simple logo, ASARO also sends a powerful message about its methodology, collective work, and alliance with APPO. The logo features the barrel of a gun

pointed at the viewer with a disembodied finger on the trigger, but instead of shooting a bullet, the gun shoots the APPO icon of a red star, as if it will imprint the viewer with the star. Though the Oaxaca Commune was a non-violent movement, the aggressive visual logic of the logo provocatively employs symbols of violence, while inverting the message to instead suggest counter-attack to combat direct state violence by "weaponizing" art, i.e. using art as a tool to fight back. The dual meaning of "making an impression" comes into play here, too, as the logo speaks to both the act of creating a visual impression through the stamping/ print process and the concept of impressing upon the viewer the ideology of APPO. This double meaning operates through a prefigurative aesthetics, as the star symbol will ostensibly imprint the viewer once the trigger is pulled. It therefore portends the viewer's allegiance with APPO through the symbolic act of donning the APPO star. Interestingly, although the logo is for ASARO, the suggested "impression" left with the viewer is instead the APPO symbol. In this way, ASARO situates itself as an artist assembly under the umbrella of APPO, and poised to garner APPO members, not necessarily ASARO members.

[Figure 2.11] In this digital version of the ASARO logo, the gun barrel and trigger finger are rendered in a sketchy, draftsman style. The vertical, horizontal, and diagonal lines cutting across the image suggest an architectural structure or a sketched work-in-progress. We might read this as reflecting that the work-in-progress nature of APPO itself, as a process of creating and negotiating the collective, for ASARO (and in turn, APPO), was always shifting and changing with the membership of the

assembly, adjustments of its goals, and the dynamic of practicing *horizontalidad* (horizontality), all of which resulted in the construction of spaces of consensus and action.




[Figure 2.11. ASARO logo, ASARO, 2006.
Digital image courtesy of Mario Guzman and ASARO.]




[Figure 2.12. ASARO logo graffiti, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, 2007.
Photograph by Itandehui Franco Ortiz.]



[Figure 2.13. ASARO watermark, ASARO, 2016.
Courtesy of ASARO. Photograph by the author.]

Repeated images, slogans, and concepts across graphic works produced by artist collectives created a visual grammar for APPO's movement and testified to collectivity and collaborative work. [Figures 2.14-2.18] Images of a figure crouched on the ground rendered in stencil pieces, street art, and print media suggest both the individual vulnerability and collective strength of the minoritized populations that APPO brought together for collective action. The message of isolated images and their specific meanings is ambiguous, but when read together, their signification begins to crystalize. Are these figures crouching down or about to get up? For the most part, their gazes are cast downward and their expressions wistful. They seem at rest on the ground and yet somehow relegated to that posture outside of their own control, as if circumstance has forced them there.




[Figure 2.14. *El Revolucionario Verdadero*, ASARO, 2006. Courtesy of the Center for the Study of Political Graphics, CSPG Archive 26721. Photograph by the author.]

[Figure 2.14] The young boy in street clothes and sandals in this four-color stencil print on craft paper appears to be drawing something on the ground in front of him with an outstretched finger. Behind him a young girl is pointing to the words stenciled above her head in red lettering: "The true revolutionary is guided by great feelings of love."[147] Below that floats the drippy white stenciled lettering "ASARO." The shadows of the girl and boy intermingle on the ground and together with the spacing and depth of the composition suggest that they are in an outdoor space next to a wall bearing the stenciled message. Thus the theme of graphic intervention and messaging is multi-layered, evoking a street art piece within a stencil print on paper.[148] [Figure 2.15] A variation of the previous stencil that was spray-painted on the wall of a city street in Oaxaca features just the figure of the boy. His posture and downward gaze are nearly identical, but his right finger is no longer extended as if drawing. The omission of the extended finger makes all the difference for the significance of the image. No longer involved in a specific action of inscription, the crouching boy gazes inexplicably downward. It is unclear whether he has been struck to the ground and is potentially hurt, or if he is resting, waiting, or about to rise up from the ground with a rock in his hand. Because he is not drawing, the figure appears more sorrowful.

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[147] This quote is of one of Argentine Marxist revolutionary Che Guevara's most famous sayings.

[148] The stencil print on paper is an archived artwork at the Center for the Study of Political Graphics in Los Angeles. Based on archive notes, this piece was likely created as an archival work or a test print on craft paper but recreated many more times as a street art image. As with most of the stencil works created by collectives in Oaxaca, any single iteration suggests many more multiples, the majority of which were installed on public walls and surfaces in Oaxaca City. My point is not to isolate the analysis of these images to the iteration or medium from which I read them, but instead to explore the various ways in which visual/ textual themes in multiples proliferated a discursive matrix for APPO's movement.



[Figure 2.15. Street art by ASARO, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, 2006. Photograph by Itandehui Franco Ortiz.]

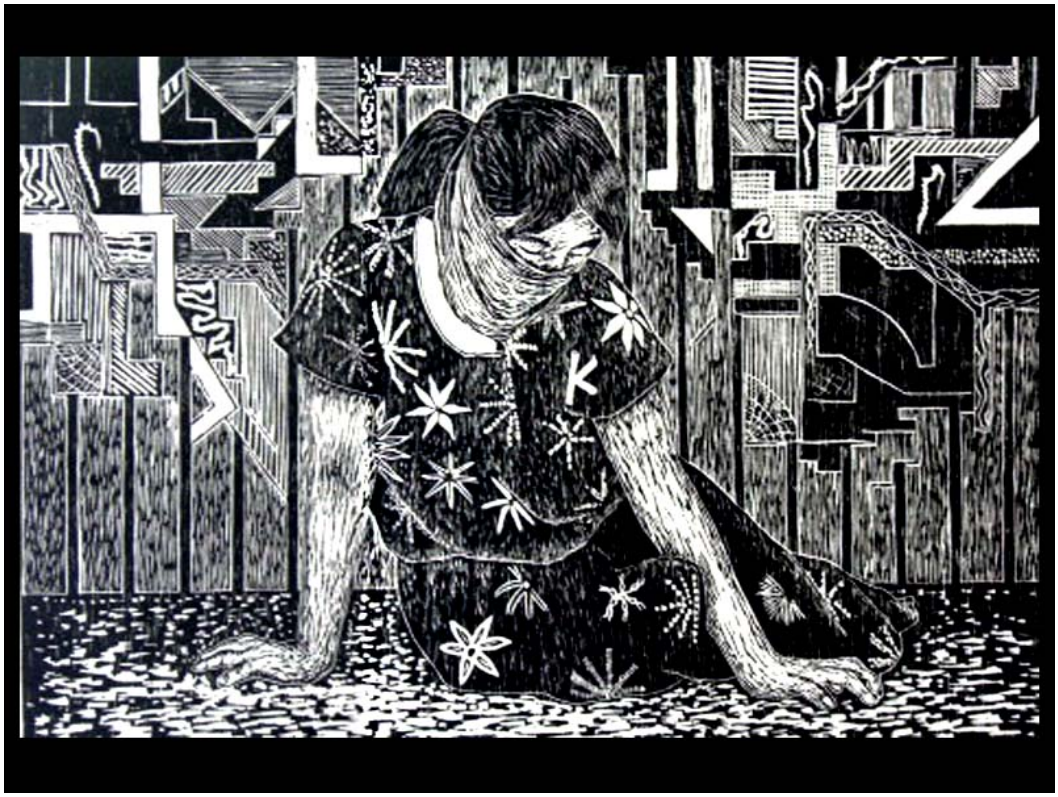



[Figure 2.16. Street art by ASARO, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, 2006. Photograph by Itandehui Franco Ortiz.]

[Figure 2.16] In this street art piece by ASARO, the squatting figure is legible as a Mixe Indigenous woman based on her clothing, *rebozo* shawl, and *huarache* sandals. A bandana covers her nose and mouth and over her right shoulder she carries a bag, which she holds in her right hand. With her right elbow on her right knee, her posture at first appears as one of restful pause in a stooped position; however, coupled with her mournful downward gaze, it suggests a heaviness and the comportment of bearing weight on her back. She has the appearance of a mother figure in the tradition of the *pietà* that indicates mourning something lost, perhaps a child or spouse. Both the rebozo and the type of bag she holds are often used to carry infants. In this case, both are without human cargo, which implies loss. Next to the woman's head, spray-painted lettering spells out the collective's name.




[Figure 2.17. Street art by ASARO, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, 2006. Photograph by Itandehui Franco Ortiz.]



[Figure 2.18. Woodblock print, ASARO, 2007.
Photograph by Itandehui Franco Ortiz.]

[Figure 2.17-2.18] These two images vary the theme once again, with the figure of a young woman identifiable as Tehuana (from the Istmo de Tehuantepec region of coastal Oaxaca) in her traditional flowered dress with a pocket at the front. In both the street art piece (figure 2.17) and the woodblock print (figure 4.18), she wears a bandanna around her nose and mouth, supports her weight with one arm, and caresses the ground with the slightly-cupped, palm-down hand of her other arm. In the street art piece, she faces her right-hand side and spray-painted letters behind her read

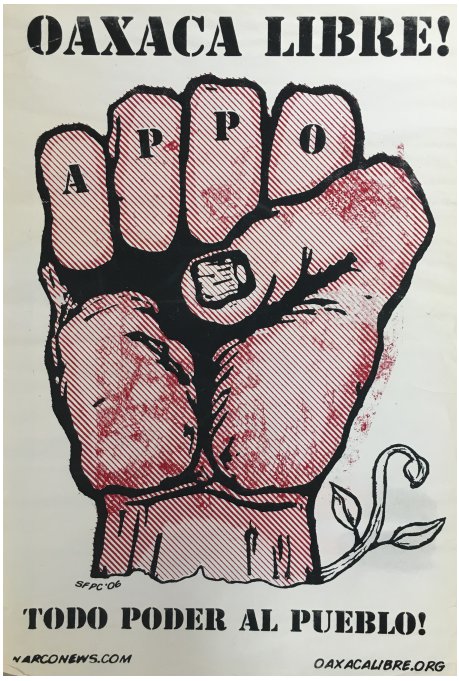
"Don't forget the 14th of June," a reminder of the desalojo repression. Haphazardly and unevenly sprayed white zigzagging lines overlapping her figure propose a movement or dynamism that is antithetical to her posture's stasis. In the woodblock print, she faces her left and is not accompanied by any text, just a dynamically geometric background wall behind her and a textured ground underneath her. Again, as with the white spray-paint in the stencil, the dynamism of the black and white shapes and lines in the background of the print oppose the stillness of the figure and create an uneasy tension.

Understanding that these enigmatic figures appeared at varying but close-in locations throughout the small capital city and at different but overlapping moments during the Oaxaca Commune, it is useful to consider the images in conjunction and the accretion of meanings in the nuances of varying details, since it is likely that several iterations were seen by at least some viewers. The figures, considered in this context, might read as both ducking down *and* about to arise. As isolated and individual figures, they appear to be crouching down in suspended animation, sorrowful, burdened abjection, or longing. If we look at them instead as a not-yet-assembled group, the action of rising up may suggest participation in collective resistance and the tension of stasis and dynamism in the compositions can be read as potential energy on the brink of exploding into kinetic energy.

Finally, slogans and images repeated across street art, prints, and posters from both artist assemblies and APPO show evidence of collective work and create coherence for the movement across its assembly iterations through the coupling of

visual and textual language. [Figure 2.19] This APPO poster features a large hand making a fist, growing out of the ground like organic matter. From the roots of the disembodied hand sprouts the shoot of new plant growth. Letters on the fingers spell out "APPO." The poster combines the familiar icon of the raised fist of solidarity with the suggestion of the organic growth of APPO's movement from the ground up, or "from below." Above the image are the words "Free Oaxaca!" and below "*Todo Poder al Pueblo*" ("All Power to the People"). This second slogan was then adopted for street art from Oaxacan artist collectives.

[Figure 2.20] For example, in this stencil and graffiti street art piece the spray-painted lettering, "Todo el Poder al Pueblo" comes together with the demand for federal police to stand down from repressive tactics in occupying Oaxaca City. On the rim of the bullhorn that the central figure holds at their chest is the message: "*Fuera PFP!*" ("PFP Out!") With their head cocked to the right and mouth agape, the central figure appears to be yelling this demand through a loudspeaker. The figure wears a hat that says "ASAR-O" and to their left "APPO" is spray-painted in a contrasting red. Behind the figure, dark silhouettes of fists raised in the air suggest a marching crowd. The convergence between APPO posters and graphic art through the repetition of key slogans, each time with related messaging added, reinforces the unifying effect of collective work taking place across political and artistic organizations and proposes *el pueblo* as both the site and source of political agency.




[Figure 2.19. *Oaxaca Libre*, APPO, 2006. Courtesy of the Center for the Study of Political Graphics, CSPG Archive 43062. Photograph by the author.]




[Figure 2.20. *Todo el poder al pueblo*, ASARO, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, 2006. Photograph by Itandehui Franco Ortiz.]

**Visualizing el pueblo: unity across diversity**

But who exactly was being hailed as "the people?" APPO's message of unity had to be solidified in graphic artwork establishing el pueblo as a cohesive and distinguishable "we" while actively mobilizing the process of cohering that "we" as an urgent, central aim of the uprising that could also remain fluid, flexible, and ongoing. Because of the inherent diversity of Oaxaca and of APPO's actual and aspirational membership across social, political, ethnic, gender, age, and class differences, unity in APPO had to be shaped and promoted as unity in diversity. This was first established through movement slogan variations including "*somos uno*" ("we are one"), "*somos pueblo*" ("we are the people"), and "*todos somos APPO*" ("we are all APPO") appearing in graphic art.

[Figures 2.21-2.22] An ASARO stencil used to create both street art and large-scale stencil prints features either a single or repeated image of the head and torso of a crouched monkey with a multitude of arms fanning out all around it and the phrase "todos somos uno" ("we are all one"). With many arms radiating from the monkey figure, an agile and dynamic animal, this image suggests productivity of "the one and the many" in collective action and signals the capacity to get more work done in cohesive solidarity as a unit. Sameness (of purpose and collective identity) and difference (of individual demographics/ identities) are coded here with an aesthetic of repetition and visual dynamism.




[Figure 2.21. *Todos somos uno*, ASARO, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, 2006. Photograph by Itandehui Franco Ortiz.]




[Figure 2.22. *Todos somos uno*, ASARO, 2006. Courtesy of the Center for Southwest Research, CSWR ASARO 0045. Photograph by the author.]




[Figure 2.23. *Somos pueblo*, ASARO, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, 2006. Photograph by Itandehui Franco Ortiz.]

[Figure 2.23] This woodblock print from ASARO, wheat-pasted on a city wall as street art, suggests unity among the different entities involved in the Oaxaca Commune in an alternate way – by bringing together APPO and the concept of el pueblo in a simplified cartographic representation of the urban space of Oaxaca City. The print features the dominant lettering "somos pueblo" floating above a matrix of gridded city streets. Lettering carved inside the lines of one the highways represented on the map urges, "do not forget – we are all APPO."

A closer look reveals that the print actually presents two superimposed maps. The foreground is a zoomed-in and crudely rendered cartography of the city center

where it meets the highways that connect the central city with the outer, more rural, more Indigenous regions of the state, and includes some of the salient features of the rural geography – lines marking hilly or mountainous terrain across the top of the print indicate flora and wavy lines suggest bodies of water in the bottom left. The background offers a zoomed-out map perspective:  in the central portion of the print, an ominous eye peeks out from behind the grid of city streets and a faint outline of Central and South America cut off approximately where Mexico meets the United States floats in the dark undefined spaces underneath the more concretely rendered edges of the city. The map-print is festooned with tiny dots, representing perhaps the people who inhabit these lands and spaces or some evidence of their presence there. Given that the Oaxaca Commune was an urban-based movement, this two-part scale of the map is a key suggestion that APPO's movement has reach beyond not only the state of Oaxaca but also beyond the borders of Mexico, stretching across Latin America to anywhere people identify as el pueblo. The wording in the phrase "don't forget – we are all APPO" renders a call for widespread communities to remember the symbolic unity and solidarity that they already possess as "the people," and to further tie that connection to allegiance with APPO.

The concept of el pueblo in Latin America has such a complex and layered history that it merits its own book-length study. However, untangling a few threads of this terms' significance in context will help to make clear the ways in which this concept functions in the graphic art of APPO-affiliated art collectives to signal the importance of collectivity in the movement. In Spanish, the term pueblo means both

"people" and "village/ town," both a social entity and its place of residence. Enrique Dussel explains that terms for pueblo were in use in various pre-Columbian societies: "the Aztec term *altepetl* and the Mayan term *Amaq'* refer to the 'community' or the *pueblo*."[149] Historian Paul Eiss traces three distinct genealogies for the term: the first with ancient roots in Indigenous societies, signifying community, territoriality, and sovereignty; the second from the time of Spanish colonization, to name the settlements of Indigenous peoples; and the third from the late eighteenth/ early nineteenth century, to describe collective political subjects operating in opposition to colonial rule.[150]

The fraught nature of this term becomes clear in Eiss' genealogy, which uncovers how el pueblo was mobilized at different historical moments both as a concept of Indigenous sovereignty and as part and parcel of colonial repression. In contemporary common parlance in Latin America, Eiss explains, the term el pueblo as an expression of "'the people' has come to be a predominant mode for organizing collectively and for imagining collectivity in such realms as labor, politics, religion, and cultural production."[151] In this sense, the term is similar to Western conceptions of collective political subjectivity upholding democratic principles as promised in, for example, the United States constitution's opening phrase: "We the people." However,

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[149] Enrique D. Dussel, *Twenty Theses on Politics*, Latin America in Translation/ En Traducción/ Em Tradução (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 74, emphasis in original.
[150] Paul K. Eiss, "El Pueblo Mestizo: Modernity, Tradition, and Statecraft in Yucatán, 1870-1907," *Ethnohistory* 55, no. 4 (Fall 2008): 526. doi:1215/00141801-2008-012.
[151] Paul K. Eiss, *In the Name of El Pueblo: Place, Community, and the Politics of History in Yucatán*, Latin America Otherwise: Languages, Empires, Nations (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 6.

any simple translation of el pueblo into "the people" would ignore the complexities of the term's entanglement in the Indigenous and colonial histories of Latin America, as Eiss has pointed out.

Iván Arenas' anthropological study of the Oaxaca Commune more specifically unpacks the term el pueblo in the context of the uprising, considering how spatial practices of social movement mobilization interpellated el pueblo as a collective political subject. "The community of *el pueblo*," Arenas argues, "is constituted primarily through the direct embodied relations and performative rituals of assemblies, marches, sit-in strikes, and barricades."[152] With visual cues related to assembling under common goals and connecting geographical proximities, ASARO's map-print suggests: the Oaxaca Commune's collective political subject of el pueblo crystalizes in the collaborative political work of building APPO; and that the imagined community of el pueblo has a much broader history and geopolitical cartography, preceding the Oaxaca Commune and stretching far beyond the borders of Oaxaca and of Mexico into other Latin American communities in struggle.

If Oaxaca Commune graphic art consolidates the political subjectivity of el pueblo in the collectivity of APPO as an imagined community with ancient roots and

[152] Arenas, 129. Arenas' analysis follows in the tradition of new social movement theorists stressing that one of the key modes of mobilization is the creation of collective political subjects or collective identities. See, for example, Alberto Melucci, *Nomads of the Present: Social Movements and Individual Needs in Contemporary Society*, eds. John Keane and Paul Mier (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1989); Alain Touraine, "An Introduction to the Study of Social Movements," *Social Movements*, Vol. 52, No. 4, (Winter 1985): 749-787; Francesca Polletta and James M. Jasper, "Collective Identity and Social Movements," *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 27 (August 2001): 283-305. Enrique Dussel, on the other hand, proposes "a *collective political actor* rather than being merely a substantial and fetishized 'historical subject.' The *people* appears in critical political conjunctures when it achieves explicit consciousness as the *analogical hegemon* of all demands, from which it defines strategy and tactics, thereby becoming an actor and constructing history on the basis of a new foundation" [Dussel, *Twenty Theses*, 7].

extensions well beyond the local, it also constructs this subject across other boundaries more specific to the region of Oaxaca through a visual focus on the intrinsic diversity of Oaxacan citizens. That the popular assembly would represent all the diverse peoples of Oaxaca was key to APPO's ethos from the start, and was made publically evident in one of the assembly's first collective decisions. When initially founded, APPO was named Asamblea Popular del Pueblo de Oaxaca (The Popular Assembly of the People of Oaxaca), but during one of the first assembly meetings, a consensus vote spurred by criticism from several Indigenous organizations involved in APPO changed the name to Asamblea Popular de los *Pueblos* de Oaxaca (The Popular Assembly of the *Peoples* of Oaxaca). This better reflected that Oaxaca is a region made up of different peoples and nations, each of which must be represented in the popular assembly.[153] This anecdote once again highlights the crucial difference between the terms "the people" and "el pueblo," as well as the political work done by the latter in the naming of APPO. With a better understanding of this term and how it designates both groups of people and the places in which they reside, the importance of pluralizing pueblo becomes clear as a way to acknowledge how the diversity of peoples arises from the communities they come from.

Diversity in APPO's membership had to also be constructed across gender, age, class, and ethno-linguistic boundaries. Thus APPO's graphic art also employed visual cues to highlight the diversity that was a crucial part of both APPO and the artist assemblies operating under it. In doing so, APPO graphic art imaged new forms of

[153] Testimony from Alberto González Rojas, Unión de Organizaciones de la Sierra Juárez de Oaxaca, in Jill Freidberg et al., *Un Poquito de Tanta Verdad*, Corrugated Films; Mal de Ojo TV, 2007.

participatory democratic work. [Figure 2.24] This woodblock print is one of the most reproduced images from the ASARO archive, and it presents diversity within APPO across gender and age differences. A crowd of people advance in a mega-march seen stretching far into the background. The foreground figures feature men, women, girls, and boys across a wide range of ages. A young girl holds one side of a banner that says Asamblea Popular de los Pueblos de Oaxaca, while a foreground figure holds an APPO flyer with the signature star. The text across the top of the print reads, *La Comuna de Oaxaca* (The Oaxaca Commune) 2006, in what was likely one of the first instances in which this nomenclature was used to describe Oaxaca's uprising. An older male figure in the foreground carries a torch, while far off in the distance behind him a banner reads "We Will Overcome!"




[Figure 2.24. *La comuna de Oaxaca*, ASARO, 2006.
Courtesy of ASARO. Photograph by the author.]

The naïve, unpolished style of figure 2.24 speaks to the range of technical skill in the artist assembly ASARO, which in turn posits Oaxacan artist collectives as spaces for diverse voices and visions in APPO coalition building. One of ASARO's core principles was a focus on the political expediency and activist possibilities of print media rather than overt concern for precision or aesthetic virtuosity. Therefore, seasoned graphic artists and novices worked together to create political graphics. This mixture of technical know-how and emergent talent in ASARO and other artist collectives prioritized the potency of the political message and the momentum necessary to get the work out of the workshop and into the city where the uprising was taking place.

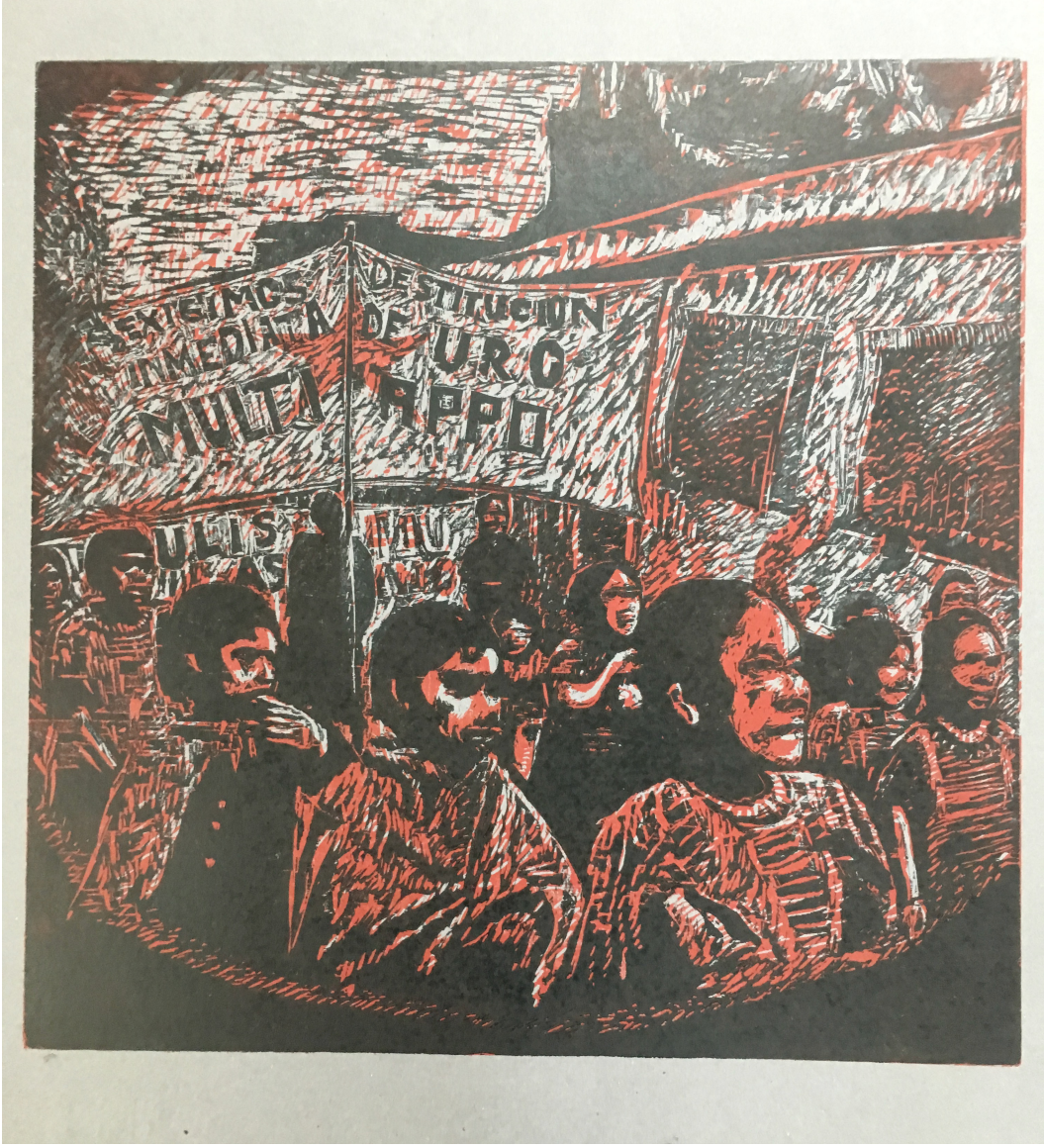
Naïve graphic art disseminated with collective attribution alongside more sophisticated artworks bespoke the inclusivity of artist assemblies that, far from being spaces of elite culture or exclusive training, instead brought together all the creative people who wanted to use art to express their demands, grievances, and goals as part of APPO's movement. The character of the graphic art as popular in style and diverse in aesthetics, while cohesive as the work of the collective, developed for the social movement a visual language that spoke to some of the key principles of the larger popular assembly, APPO:  horizontality, i.e. non-hierarchical organization, and heterogeneity, i.e. the diversity and inclusiveness of membership and participation. [Figure 2.25] For example, this installation of several prints by ASARO on the same public wall, displayed as wheat-pasted flyer reproductions with superimposed slogans and ASARO logos, created continuity across this broad selection of works with

different visual styles and ranges of technical proficiency, with equal attention to both seasoned and emergent styles.




[Figure 2.25. ASARO flyers, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, 2006. Photograph by Itandehui Franco Ortiz.]

It is crucial to note that while diversity in APPO membership was in some ways an intrinsic outcrop of the demographics of Oaxaca itself and the assembly's incorporation of many different sociopolitical groups, in other ways, it was in active construction and deliberation during the Oaxaca Commune. Two particular aspects of fierce critique and negotiation during the process were Indigenous inclusion and gender equity.




[Figure 2.26. *La marcha*, ASARO, 2006. Courtesy of the Center for the Study of Political Graphics, CSPG 28755. Photograph by the author.]

**Indigeneity and gender in APPO graphic art**

[Figure 2.26] In this woodblock print by ASARO, a small crowd of people, many of whom are clearly identified as Indigenous in their style of dress and hair, march with a sign bearing the red APPO star that reads: "We demand the immediate removal of URO! MULTI. APPO." As I covered in the previous chapter, the Independent Movement of Triqui Unification and Struggle (MULTI) is a regional organization of Triqui peoples, an Indigenous community from the Mixteca Baja southwestern region of Oaxaca. It was formed in 2006 in the wake of APPO's movement as an independent offshoot of the MULT, a primarily land-defense related organization which had been active in the Mixteca regions of Juxtlahuaca, Tlaxiaco, and Putla in Oaxaca since the 1980's. MULTI formed to agitate for Indigenous rights and autonomy for the Triqui municipalities. They participated in the APPO Mixteca, a regional APPO assembly representing several Indigenous communities, which took part in the larger APPO forums during the movement.[154] Many of the figures in this image bear markers of Triqui culture, especially the female figures, who wear the traditional hairstyle of two long braids and Triqui style *huipiles*, a loosely fitting tunic garment that is traditionally worn by women in Indigenous communities. The print attests to urban-rural collaboration and pan-ethnic Indigenous organizing within APPO, under the umbrella goal of Governor Ruiz Ortiz's removal. As I noted in the previous discussion of MULTI, the organization was instrumental in bringing Indigenous communities into partnership with APPO, and particularly in modeling

[154] Stephen, *We Are the Face*, 210–15.

Indigenous women's organizing in APPO.

Oaxaca Commune street art also crucially cut across boundaries of variously literate and multi-lingual populations. With sixteen different Indigenous languages, each with numerous autochthonous languages across the ethno-linguistic populations in Oaxaca, expedient messaging in the visual realm, accessible to those who spoke an Indigenous language and did not also speak Spanish was vital for securing Indigenous support of and participation in APPO. Indigeneity in Oaxaca is a pervasive, undeniable reality, in the sense that the majority of Oaxaqueñxs have Indigenous ancestry, including those who live and work in Oaxaca City. But it is also a complicated class issue, as rural, non-mestizo Indigenous peoples generally make up the peasant classes, surviving either through immersion in the communal practices of mutual aid and farming in the pueblos, remittances from family members who have migrated for work, or, in the case of communities closer to cities, hours-long travel by bus every day to the urban area to work as domestic staff or in the margins of the tourist trade, selling trinkets, artisanal crafts, food, or begging for money in the streets. Lighter-skinned mestizo Oaxacans generally live in the city and hold the wage-earning jobs.

The profession that cuts across these raced class lines is primary and secondary education, as teachers' union membership allows for instructors in Indigenous communities to remain in their pueblos, teach in rural schools, make a decent wage, and have the possibility for advancement. But part of the union's fight has been to hold on to these rural schools and teaching positions in the face of increasing

standardization of education and lack of fundamental resources to keep the schools going, a struggle which was also integrated into APPO's goals. Union teachers' presence in every Indigenous community across Oaxaca state supported APPO mobilization in rural areas. However, Indigenous communities' participation in APPO was complicated by the geographic isolation of the pueblos and lack of access to urban-based events, news, and assembly meetings. As the Oaxaca Commune continued, APPO constructed creative events and opportunities for rural Indigenous participation, such as the People's Guelaguetza, which I will cover in the next chapter.

Gender inequities in Oaxacan politics and reified in APPO also perpetuated the political imbalance of a minortized majority. Although women made up the largest demographic of the Oaxaca teachers' union Local, APPO's rotating leadership was initially male-dominated and assembly meetings overwhelmingly featured the voices of men until the women of APPO began to demand more active roles and to agitate for equal representation. The vital role of women in the Oaxaca Commune was officially cemented in August 2006 when a group of APPO women occupied the Oaxaca state radio and television station, CORTV, which I will analyze in Chapter 4. In the months leading up to this historic transformation of gender roles within APPO, graphic art participated in the debates about the entrenched gender stereotypes in Oaxacan society, the need for gender parity in the popular assembly, and the deliberations over how to achieve it.




[Figure 2.27. *Sexo debil?*, ASARO, 2006. Courtesy of the Center for the Study of Political Graphics, CSPG 26719. Photograph by the author.]



[Figure 2.28. Soldaderas in the Mexican Revolution. Photograph from *Biografia ilustrada del General Francisco Villa 1878-1966*, Mexico: Editorial Gustavo Casasola, 1969.]

[Figure 2.27] In this stencil print by ASARO, two female figures wearing long skirts, braided hair, bandanas over their faces, rifles on their backs, and ammunition crisscrossed over their chests are flanked by wording along the side edges of the print –"ASARO" on the right side and the provocative rhetorical question on the left side, "Sexo Debil?" ("The weak sex?"). ASARO's image, at its most basic level of messaging, targets critics or doubters of feminine political power and confronts them with the spurious nature of the assumption that women are not strong enough to be revolutionaries. The subtler messaging of the print operates through its quotation of the historical figures of female soldiers, or *soldaderas* from the Mexican Revolution, the country's first major peasant and working-class insurrection starting in 1910.

[Figure 2.28] The term "soldaderas" was given to the women who followed revolutionary soldier camps, taking care of the domestic tasks of the camp as a contribution to the struggle and assistance to their fighting lovers, husbands, and brothers. Soldaderas also frequently engaged in armed battles when all available militia were required at the frontlines. But as B. Christine Arce points out in her book *Mexico's Nobodies*, soldaderas "mark the limits of the rhetoric of the nation state and their very nomenclature debases the real worth of female participation in the war." [155] The representation of these women first in the photographic record and then across a wide range of popular culture, Arce says, highlights "the very paradoxical nature of

[155] B. Christine Arce, *Mexico's Nobodies: The Cultural Legacy of the Soldadera and Afro-Mexican Women* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2016), 41, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ucsc/detail.action?docID=4774210.

the soldaderas' historical invisibility and yet figural ubiquity."[156] In other words, despite the fact that women did fight alongside men in the revolution, their contributions were distilled into tropological caricatures such as the "adoring Adelita" waiting for "her Juan," i.e. the "idealized female companion of the Mexican revolutionary soldier," or as a *guerrillera* catch-all "symbol for women's participation in different struggles...far beyond the Mexican border."[157] Therefore, it is the soldaderas' appearance in the cultural-visual imaginary that renders her a "slippery signifier" and a "palimpsestic figuration" of a real historical phenomenon.[158] ASARO's stencil print takes part in this very same terrain of female revolutionary tropes in visual culture, trading on its legibility and familiarity to throw light on the actual issue of gender roles and stereotypes in the Oaxaca Commune, but also in a reflection, I would argue, of the artist assemblies' own shallow, perfunctory, and underdeveloped approach to gender inequity in the movement.

At the start of the Oaxaca Commune, men almost exclusively made up membership in collectives such as ASARO and Arte Jaguar even though the collectives were ostensibly open to female artists as well. Even now, Oaxacan artist collectives are notoriously dominated by young, politically left-leaning men, and can be, based on my own observations and reports by others in Oaxaca's art community, unsafe spaces for women – due to *machismo* or more infrequently, blatant

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[156] Arce, *Mexico's Nobodies,* 141.
[157] Tabea Alexa Linhard, *Fearless Women in the Mexican Revolution and the Spanish Civil War* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2005), 91, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ucsc/detail.action?docID=3570869.
[158] Linhard, *Fearless Women*, 91.

homophobia, misogyny, and sexual harassment or violence.[159] ASARO incorporated the growing dialogue about gender inequality in APPO and in Oaxacan politics more generally into their artwork in 2006, but what the images reveal is both the nascence of that dialogue and the need for a more radical feminist movement within APPO.

[Figure 2.29] This ASARO woodblock print appeared later in 2006, likely after the women's media takeover, though the exact date of its creation is unknown. In contrast to the earlier stencil print that asks the queries, "the weak sex?," this print makes a strong and definitive statement inspired by the women's movement within APPO: "When a woman advances, no man holds her back." The print itself is carved in an emergent, unrefined style, but its message is powerful. The central female figure leans forward with her back to the viewer, using her weight and strength to physically detain a gigantic black boot poised to squash her underneath it. Her powerful resistance is symbolized in the carved lines radiating out from her hands as they push against the sole of the boot; these extend into lines of light radiating all around her. The shadow she casts in this light does not double her figure; instead, it appears as an outstretched arm and raised fist of solidarity, suggesting that the figure does not act alone but as part of a collective of women.

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[159] Since their founding in 2006, some artist collectives have in fact developed reputations for being unsafe spaces for women and LGBTQIA+ individuals. Espacio Zapata, ASARO's workshop, has become the source of much criticism in the last few years after one of the founding artists of the collective was convicted of rape and spent a year in jail. The incident allegedly took place during a party in which several members of ASARO and other artist collectives were present. ASARO's founding "patriarch" Mario Guzman has since left ASARO (though it is unclear whether this move was related to the rape case) and opened a space called TAC (*Taller Artístico Comunitario* – Communal Artist Workshop). Mario holds workshops for women artists and activists and promotes feminist approaches to art activism through TAC and its affiliated collective, URTARTE. Talleres for women artists, such as the collective *Hoja Santa*, have also opened in recent years in an attempt to mitigate the conflation of graphic art and masculinity in Oaxaca.




[Figure 2.29. *Cuando una mujer avanza… no hay hombre que la detenga*, ASARO, 2006. Courtesy of the Center for Southwest Research, ZIM CSWR Pict Colls PICT 2010-005, Drawer 93, Folder 3. Photograph by the author.]

From the stencil in figure 2.27 early in the uprising to the print in figure 2.29 months later, the dialogue around gender inequity and women's leadership in APPO's movement had been transformed. ASARO's graphic art both reflected and disseminated these sociopolitical changes as achievements in APPO. ASARO took its place in shifting that dialogue by mobilizing street art and print media as broadcast tactics and strategies of public dialogue. However, in figure 2.29, the central figure's sheer dress and oddly over-defined buttocks beneath it create a strange incongruence.

The message of female strength is somewhat diluted when it is imaged via eroticized feminine embodiment. In this way, this print also reflected the need for better and more changes around gender norms in the Oaxaca Commune, and highlighting this was also a crucial contribution of ASARO's intervening graphic conversation, whether intentional or not.

**Assembling revolutionaries**

Soldaderas were not the only figures from the Mexican Revolution evoked in the graphic art of the Oaxaca Commune, as APPO-affiliated graphic artists drew from a range of revolutionary aesthetics, themes, symbols, and icons. APPO's graphic art conjured the revolutionary Mexican past as part of its visual grammar and assembled revolutionary leaders, personas, and spirits as lodestars of the political and ideological coordinates of APPO's movement and its popular assembly model.

The Revolution-era printmaker, journalist, and artist, José Guadalupe Posada, created the most popular style of graphic illustration in Mexico, and arguably in Latin America, becoming a revolutionary icon himself. During the decade of the Revolution, Posada was a prolific satirist and an outlet in the popular press for the voice of the people. Posada, referred to as "printmaker to the Mexican people," had been creating illustrations in the popular press since the 1880's, but it was during the Revolution that his work took on significance as a political project. Posada was broad and unforgiving in his satirical depictions, lampooning every sector of Mexican society. However, it was his keen characterizations of the Proferiato, the corrupt

government regime of President Proferio Díaz (1830-1915), which lent spirit and vigor to the people's struggle.




[Figure 2.30. *Las Bicicletas*, José Guadalupe Posada, ca. 1910. Courtesy of El Instituto de Artes Gráficas de Oaxaca, IAGO Acervo 170.233. Photograph by the author.]




[Figure 2.31. *Calavera de Artesanos*, José Guadalupe Posada, ca. 1910, detail. Courtesy of El Instituto de Artes Gráficas de Oaxaca, IAGO Acervo 170.233. Photograph by the author.]

Posada worked for many publications, including several penny-presses that created cheaply made and widely distributed newspapers for consumption by the general population. Posada's illustrations were crucial for such a circulation, giving illiterate or semi-literate Mexican citizens access to the news through visual depictions. Posada was also responsible for popularizing a particular style of satiric illustration, most notably with his characteristic use of the skeleton figure (*calavera*) as a persona broadly applicable to the various sectors of the population that he depicted.[160] Initially, Posada used the calavera to commemorate *Día de Los Muertos* (Day of the Dead), the Mexican "all-soul's-day" celebration marking the "return" of deceased family members and loved ones to commune with the living. Eventually, the calavera figure became an integral part of Posada's style of satire and a vehicle for creating visual commentary that graphically chronicled the daily life, important news, and social shifts of his time.[161]

While Posada's illustrations appear to highlight social hierarchies and show empathy for the peasant classes of which he was himself part, he in fact used the calavera figure to satirize and tell stories about nearly every type and class of people. [Figures 2.30-2.31] We can see how, for example, in these two Posada broadsides, the artist uses subtle details of props, dress, and background context to signal the classes and groups depicted. Because the calavera figure is utilized so broadly and cannot be distinguished without contextual visual information, these details are particularly

[160] See, for example, Luis Cardoza y Aragón, *José Guadalupe Posada*, Colección de arte 15 (México, D.F: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Dirección General de Publicaciones, 1963).
[161] Ilan Stavans, "José Guadalupe Posada, Lampooner," *The Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts* 16 (1990): 54–71, doi:10.2307/1504066.

important. Emphasis is placed on the form and style of hat to show different aspects of characterization. In figure 2.30, for instance, the central bicyclist figure with a long beard sports what looks like a hat at first but on further examination turns out to be an hourglass quickly running low on sand, further indicating his old age by way of suggesting that he is short on time. In figure 2.31, the actions and props of the figures indicate their trades, distinguishing the cobbler, carpenter, and the milliner, among others. These distinctions also represent commentary on class and social standing, which formed a significant part of Posada's satirical examinations of society.

ASARO prints drew inspiration from Posada's calavera iconography, likewise signaling the social groups and class types depicted with styles of dress, props, and contextual details. ASARO also weaved in messages about class inequities alongside promotion of APPO's popular assembly, suggesting the assembly as a new model of collective organizing, political participation, and pan-ethnic resistance in the urban setting. [Figure 2.32] This ASARO woodblock print features a group of wealthy calaveras, signaled by top hats, briefcase, purse, European clothing, and sack of money. The wealthy calaveras are chased off the matrix of the print by a group of pueblo calaveras, signaled by their campesino hats, modest clothing, and bicycles. One pueblo calavera rolls a shopping cart with another calavera inside, who wears an EZLN-style *pasamontaña* mask. The shopping cart refers to a grassroots resistance tactic utilized by APPO movement participants as barricades to slow or stop police invasion of the city or in standoffs with paramilitary units to carry rocks for self-defense. On the ground all around the calavera characters are skulls labeled with the

names of Mexican political parties – PRI, PAN, and PRD – and on another, a swastika. There is also a tombstone marked with "PFP" for the Mexican Federal Police. One of the pueblo calaveras holds a sign saying "the apocalypse of the rats has arrived," but a closer look reveals that the Spanish word *apocalipsis* is spelled with an extra "P" – "APPO-calipsis" – signaling APPO's efficacy in opposing government and corporate corruption (the "rats"). Above the scene, a calavera spider, itself reminiscent of Posada's "The Hungry Skeleton" [figure 2.33], spins a web, perhaps of new connections ushered in by a new political moment.



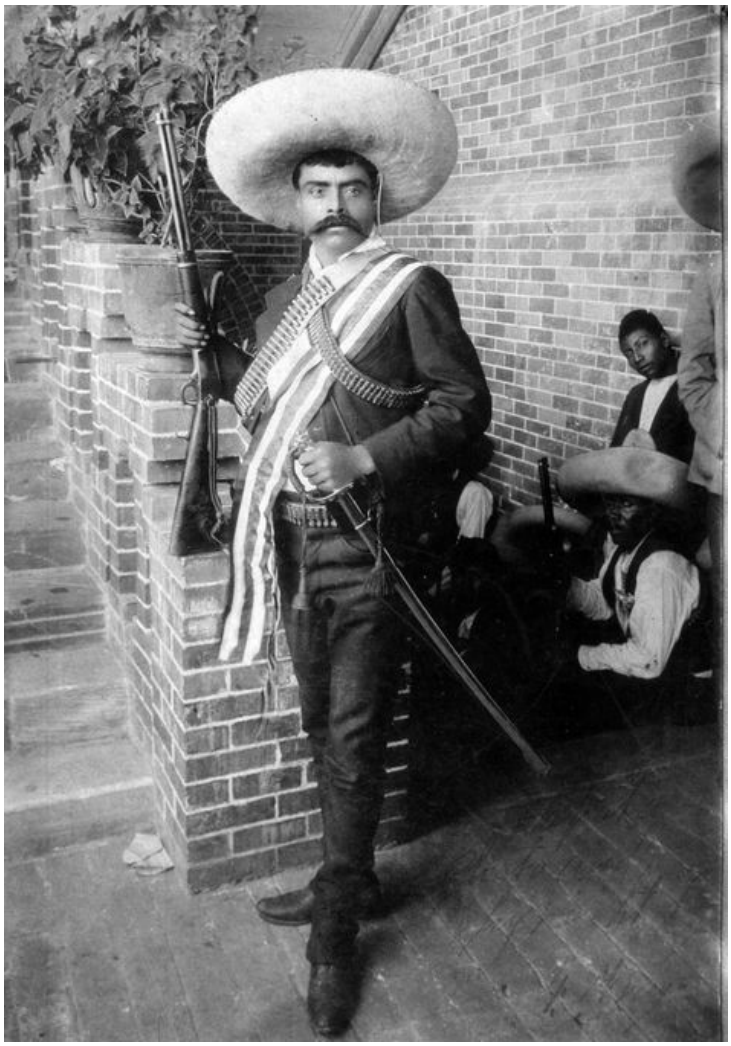

[Figure 2.32. *Ya llego la apocalipsis pa' los ratas*, ASARO, 2006.
Courtesy of the Center for Southwest Research, ZIM CSWR Pict Colls
PICT 2010-005 Drawer 93, Folder 3. Photograph by the author.]



[Figure 2.33. *La Hambrienta Calavera*, José Guadalupe Posada, ca. 1900-1910, Courtesy of El Instituto de Artes Gráficas de Oaxaca, IAGO Acervo 170.871. Photograph by the author.]

Posada also created some of the most well-known portraits of the revolutionary leaders who fought against the Profierato government in the Mexican Revolution, including Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata. Posada's portraits of these leaders were impactful in part because of their wide circulation, made possible by the print medium's facility and speed in creating multiples. [Figure 2.34] Posada's portrait of Zapata shows the campesino revolutionary in full regalia, with rifle, sash, and sword, reflecting the popular image of Zapata during the Revolution as a lead soldier fighting among his men. As historian John Mraz explains, this was an image that Zapata himself helped to create by posing for photographers like Hugo Brehme, to whom the

original photograph from which Posada's print was made is most often attributed.[162]



[Figure 2.34. Emiliano Zapata with rifle, sash, and saber, Cuernavaca, Mexico, June 1911. Courtesy of Fondo Casasola, SINAFO-Fototeca Nacional del INAH, Inv# 63464. Photograph by Hugo Brehme.]

[162] Other historians have challenged this attribution. The National Photographic Library of the National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH) recently published findings that this photograph bears a nearly unreadable inscription with the initials "F.M.," and most likely was taken by an American photographer named F. Moray or F. McKay. See Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, "Researcher Proves Zapata Portrait Not Being Captured by Hugo Brehme," November 19, 2009. https://www.inah.gob.mx/en/english/4350-researcher-proves-zapata-portrait-not-being-captured-by-hugo-brehme.

[Figure 2.35] The photograph was taken in Cuernavaca in 1911, although, interestingly, the portrait is better known from Posada's lithograph, which was created almost immediately after the photograph and circulated in the popular press in advance of the original, according to Mraz: "Before the photo was published in a periodical, the most famous of Mexican lithographers, José Guadalupe Posada, interpreted the image and apparently circulated it as a broadsheet."[163] This speaks to the journalistic nature of Posada's print work and to how prolific and expedient his practice was. The lithograph would have reached a larger and more diverse audience as a broadsheet than the photograph did in the popular press. In any case, the photograph was not published in the press until two years later. [164]



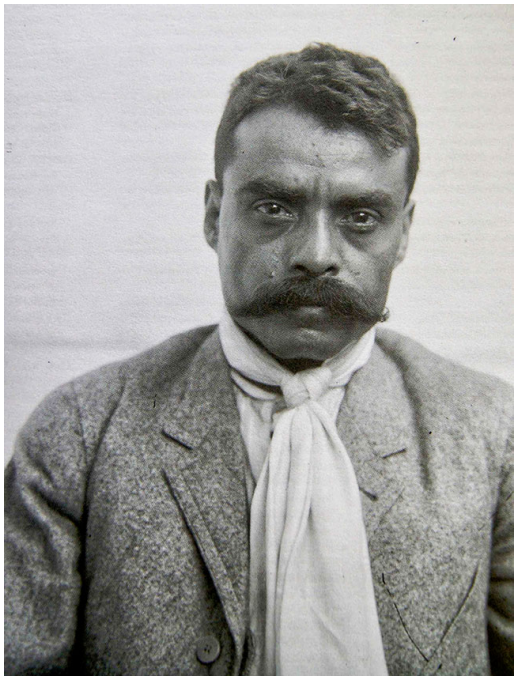
[Figure 2.35. *El entierro de Zapata*, José Guadalupe Posada, 1914. Reprint by the Taller de Gráfica Popular, Viva Zapata Series, 1979. Courtesy of the Center for Southwest Research, CSWR Viva Zapata No. 0012,1979. Photograph by the author.]

[163] John Mraz, *Photographing the Mexican Revolution: Commitments, Testimonies, Icons* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2012), 234.
[164] Mraz, *Photographing the Mexican Revolution*, 234.

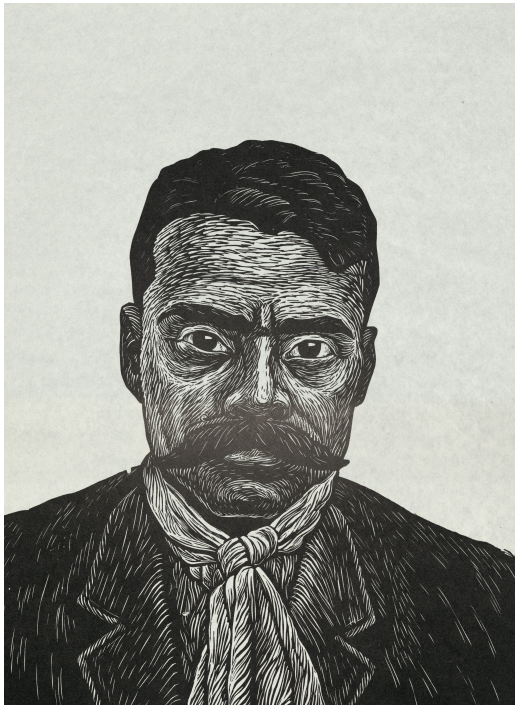
[Figure 2.36] One of the most well-known photographic portraits of Zapata, however, is part of a series of images taken in 1912 and attributed to Augustín Victor Casasola.[165] The portrait uses a more traditional head-and-shoulders composition. Zapata is pictured from the mid-chest up, posed so that he is directly confronting the camera with penetrating gaze and tufted mustache, in gentlemanly statesman attire – a blazer and dress shirt knotted at the neck. His dress shirt appears to be white silk or satin and of considerable quality, underneath a wool blazer. His eyes are intense – dark, wet, blood-shot, weary, and shadowed by cavernous dark circles underneath them; yet, his gaze is unwaveringly focused and resolute. The intensity of Zapata's gaze is by far the most impactful aspect of the portrait, and the element that, through visual tactics of repetition and accentuation, emanates as the most salient iconic characteristic of the Zapata icon. Through its repetition in the visual imaginary, it became a lodestar or beacon of a revolutionary call or a will-to-resistance. Iterations of Zapata's gaze from the Casasola portrait create a print media through-line from the post-Revolution era, to the EZLN movement, and finally to the Oaxaca Commune. Tracing this visual culture trajectory will allow us to observe Zapata-as-icon's gradual accretion of the weight and significance that makes its mobilization, in distilled form, widely legible as a symbol of peasant resistance, land sovereignty, and collective people power.

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[165] The photograph is held in the Casasola Archive, at the Fototeca Nacional del INAH in Hidalgo, Mexico, and while it is attributed to Casasola, Mraz throws doubt on this attribution based on what he refers to as the "myth of the Casasolas:" "In the past Agustín Víctor Casasola was considered "'*the* photographer of the revolution'; today he is a question mark because it has become increasingly difficult to determine which pictures he took. Nonetheless, he founded an archive that contains a half million images and is considered vital to national identity." Mraz, 49.



[Figure 2.36. *Emiliano Zapata*, 1912. Courtesy of Fondo Casasola, SINAFO-Fototeca Nacional del INAH. Photograph by Augustín Victor Casasola.]



[Figure 2.37. *El Caudillo del Sur*, Lorenzo Guerrero, 1979. Courtesy of the Center for Southwest Research, CSWR Viva Zapata No. 0016. Photograph by the author.]

[Figure 2.37] This lithograph is from the collection of the Mexico City-based *Taller de Gráfica Popular* (People's Graphic Workshop). The TGP was a highly significant predecessor to the print talleres and graphic artist collectives in Oaxaca, and its print production, especially during the period of 1937-1942, is considered one of the most important collections of revolutionary graphic art in Mexican print history. The workshop was founded in 1937 by a group of artists in the League of Revolutionary Artists and Writers (*Liga de Escritores y Artistas Revolucionarios*, LEAR), with the express purpose of creating political prints, or as they put it in their 1938 statutes, to benefit "the progressive and democratic interests of the Mexican people." TGP was dedicated to collaborative production, like many of the talleres active in the Oaxaca Commune, but their standards of print quality and artistic skill were far more advanced and the workshop was also a space of apprenticeship for learning print media alongside some of Mexico's "master printers." While I do not have space in this dissertation to elaborate on Oaxacan graphic art collectives' connections with TGP, the post-Revolution Mexico City-based TGP workshop and its extensive collection of prints, posters, and ephemera were a huge source of inspiration for collectives making artwork during the Oaxaca Commune, as was evident in many of the artworks. [166] This TGP print, created by artist Lorenzo Guerrero and titled *Caudillo del Sur* (Leader of the South) pictures Zapata closer in, from the shoulders up, with the same steady gaze. The lithographic lines of different lengths, widths, and textures create a rugged look for Zapata's face and a more

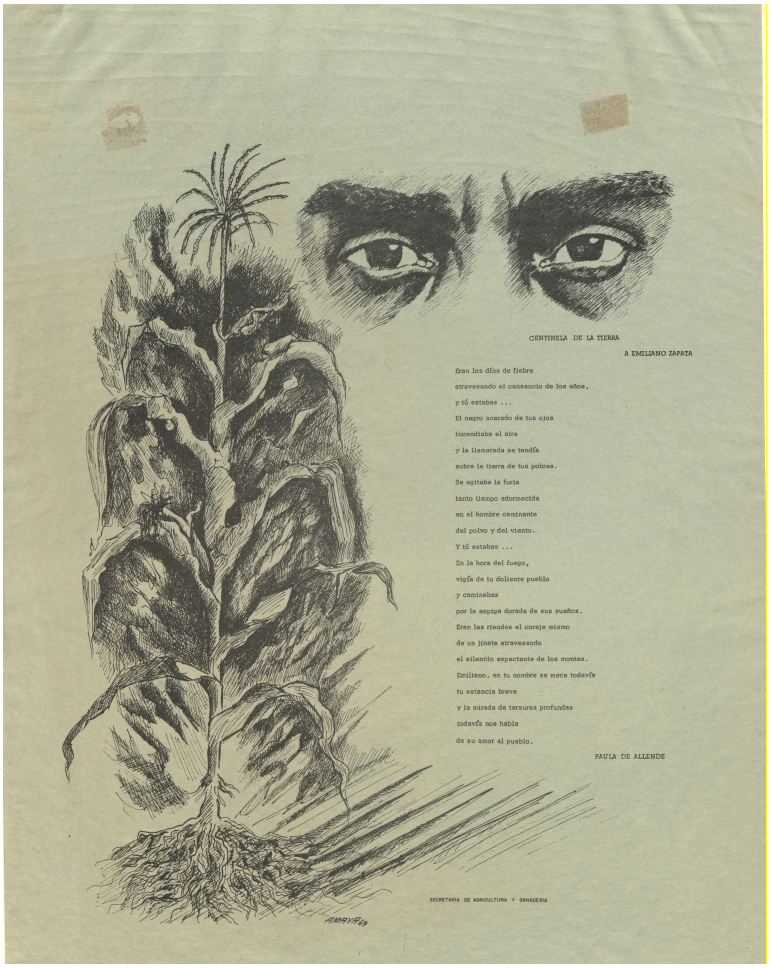
[166] For more on TGP, see Helga Prignitz-Poda, *El Taller de Gráfica Popular en México, 1937-1977*, (México, D.F.: Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes, 1992).

profoundly furrowed brow. On the other hand, while the intense stare remains, the look in Zapata's eyes is softened by the medium, giving it an equally determined but also tender quality.

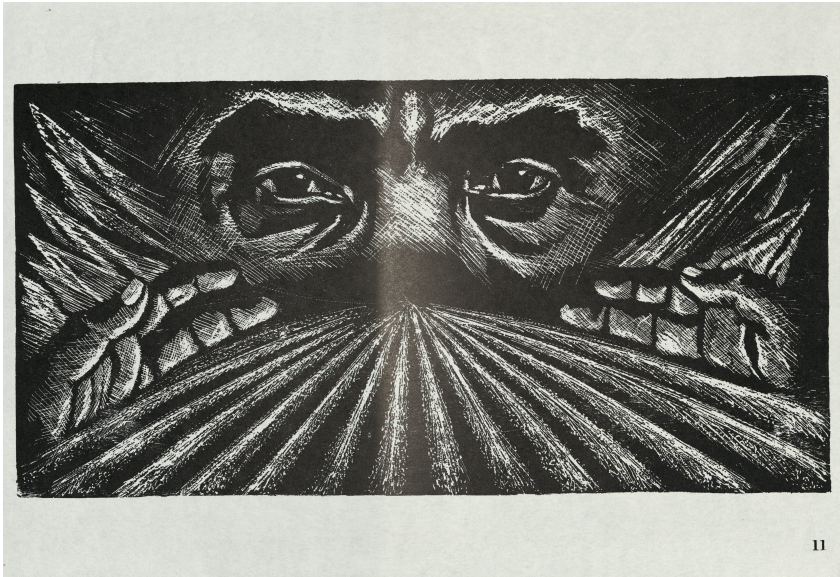
The mythic and iconic status of Zapata and the uptake of his image by various causes and in service of ideologies all over the political spectrum has been well documented by scholars like Samuel Brunk. Brunk explains that after the Revolution and Zapata's death, Zapata-as-icon was first used by the Mexican government as part of a sweeping cultural project to forge a new national identity. This policy's goal was to make Zapata's peasant and working-class followers a part of that identity and to thereby mitigate the threat that these populations posed to the new state authority. It was not until the EZLN uprising in 1994, Brunk asserts, that Zapata's image was definitively recuperated for an anti-state ideology.[167] Some of the most influential post-Revolution artists, including muralists like Diego Rivera and David Alfaro Siqueiros, who were sympathetic to communist or socialist ideologies, were nonetheless commissioned by the state to create nationalist images. Many of these images featured icons like Zapata and contributed to the packaging and selling of a falsely represented revolutionary national identity.[168] However, even though the Taller de Gráfica Popular contributed to the post-Revolution wave of political art, the workshop artists' abundant use of Zapata's image was instead linked to efforts to re-

[167] Samuel Brunk, *The Posthumous Career of Emiliano Zapata: Myth, Memory, and Mexico's Twentieth Century* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2008), 18–19.
[168] This history has been well documented. See Mary K. Coffey, *How a Revolutionary Art Became Official Culture: Murals, Museums, and the Mexican State* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012).

signify the icon and to re-align his legacy with leftist revolutionary and anti-authoritarian ideals. TGP's production was much more independent from what some considered the elitist purposes that the mural movement was ultimately put to, and overall TGP stayed much closer to an aim to create popular graphic art for the people.




[Figure 2.38. *Centinela de la Tierra*, Jesús Alvarez Ámaya, 1969. Courtesy of the Center for Southwest Research, Taller de Gráfica Popular Pictorial Collection, flyer 346. Photograph by the author.]




[Figure 2.39. *La Tierra*, Jesús Alvarez Ámaya, 1979. Courtesy of the Center for Southwest Research, Collection *¡Viva Zapata! 20 Grabados*, Taller de Gráfica Popular, No. 0011. Photograph by the author.]

[Figure 2.38-2.39] One TGP artist, Jesús Alvarez Ámaya, used the very same Casasola source photograph of Zapata to produce two prints re-connecting Zapata's image with campesino and agrarian revolutionary ideals. Interestingly, these prints trade on that most potent visual aspect of the portrait, Zapata's eyes. [figure 2.38] The first print appears on a 1969 flyer. Zapata's eyes float over a landscape featuring a stalk of corn with its entangled roots and a poem by Paula de Allende entitled "Guardian of the Land," which synthesizes elements of Zapata's legacy as steward of land, freedom, and poor people with the aesthetics of the gaze from the Casasola portrait into a dense metonymical emblem. The final lines of the poem read, "the steely black of your eyes caught fire the air and the flare spread over the land of your people... Emiliano, your presence still remains in your name, beyond your brief life,

and your gaze of profoundly tender lucidity tells us of your love for the people."[169]

In the second Álvarez Amaya print [figure 2.39], created a decade later in 1979, Zapata's eyes loom large and watchful over a verdant field guarded on either side by his attendant hands. Based on the excising of Zapata's eyes from the classic photographic portrait, we can make two important observations. First, it suggests that when an icon and the key visual representations attached to it achieve such visually potent status, they can be stripped down to this degree and become a shorthand or lodestar for a wealth of concepts. The concentration of the visual attention on Zapata's eyes makes the effect of his image more potent in the post-Revolutionary context, supported by his status as posthumous legend, so that, secondly, Zapata can be cast as patron saint/ guardian of a particular cause.

While it is unclear whether or not Álvarez Amaya or other TGP artists were first to create images of Zapata that concentrate on his eyes, this iconographic tradition continues from the post-Revolution moment and picks up increasing multivocality with each era. Tracing this trajectory allows us to recognize the effort to continuously reinvest the image of Zapata with evolving Mexican leftist ideologies in the face of ongoing authoritarianism, austerity, and counter-revolutionary measures at the government level.

[169] Paula de Allende, "*Centinela de la Tierra*," 1969, my translation.




[Figure 2.40. *Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata in the National Palace*, 6 December 1914. Courtesy of Fondo Casasola, SINAFO-Fototeca Nacional del INAH, Inv. #33556. Photograph by Antonio Garduño.]



[Figure 2.41. Poster for the 1994 neo-Zapatista Convention of Aguascalientes (Chiapas). Photograph from John Mraz, *Photographing the Mexican Revolution* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2012): 252.]

The same Casasola portrait shows up again with new significance during the time of the EZLN uprising in the mid-1990's. As I outlined in Chapter 1, EZLN's movement is deeply important for understanding the Oaxaca Commune. Therefore, tracking the use of Zapata's image from EZLN to APPO reveals much about specific ways in which graphic art factored into popularizing APPO's movement in the wake of the prior Indigenous movement out of neighboring Chiapas. Brunk explains why a neo-Zapatista uprising was so ripe in the political atmosphere of mid-90's Mexico:

> In the attempt to allow market forces freer play in the Mexican economy, in 1991 and 1992 Salinas had taken the controversial step of abandoning provisions in Article 27 of the Constitution of 1917 that called for the redistribution of land and protected communal landholdings. Although the politicians of the ruling party – the Institutional Revolutionary Party (*Partido Revolucionario Institucional*, PRI) – had claimed for decades that Zapata's demands were the inspiration for Article 27 of the constitution, the Salinas administration frequently employed the figure of Zapata, both visually and verbally in pushing its reforms.[170]

In other words, Zapata's iconographic status had once again been employed to push government mandates, but this time the government's plan directly reversed the agrarian reforms benefitting rural farmers that Zapata had fought to put in place.

Within this context, EZLN's reclamation of Zapata's image and ideology forever changed his iconographic status both for Mexican citizens as well as the international community. When EZLN held its first convention in Chiapas in 1994, the poster they created for the event made reference to another photograph taken by one of the most famous documentary photographers of the Revolution, Antonio Garduño, at the peak moment on December 6, 1914, when Pancho Villa and Emiliano

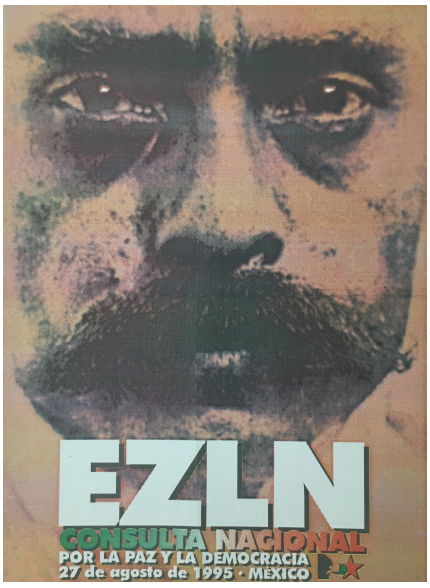
[170] Brunk, 2.

Zapata each led their army to Mexico City and declared victory. [Figure 2.40] In the photo, the revolutionary leaders sit next to each other with their cadres behind them at the National Palace. Villa sits in the presidential chair, in militia attire with buttoned jacket and knee-high leather boots, leaning back, his legs crossed, his hat on his knee, and his body askew in a rather jovial, relaxed, and open posture, sporting a cocky smile and looking toward an unknown distraction to the right off-camera. Zapata reprises his "caudillo del Sur" statesman-campesino leader outfit, with the knotted blouse, blazer, caballero boots, and wide-brimmed sombrero perched on his knee, and with a far more serious aspect than Villa, once again stares intensely into the camera.

[Figure 2.41] The EZLN poster replaces the figure of Villa with Mexican professional wrestler/ activist Superbarrio Gómez and the figure of Zapata with that of EZLN spokesman Subcommondante Marcos, in the signature black knitted *pasamontaña* mask of the Zapatistas.[171] This poster achieved three goals at once. First, it recuperated the icon of Zapata from its institutionalized status as puppet of the state. Secondly, it asserted EZLN as a neo-Zapatista movement bringing the revolutionary ideals of Emiliano Zapata back into the political sphere as an anti-state initiative to push back against NAFTA, the harmful effects of globalization, and to fight for land sovereignty for Indigenous peasant communities in Chiapas. Lastly, the poster equated Marcos with Zapata, suggesting by comparison the role of Marcos as

[171] Brunk, 4–5. Superbarrio Gomez is the moniker of an activist, satirist, and labor organizer whose persona was created by *Asamblea de Barrios*, a Mexico City collective responding to the devastating effects of the 1985 earthquake. The character was inspired by a real-life Mexican *luchador* wrestler and his characterization as a social justice hero in Mexican comics. Superbarrio Gomez ran for president in the 1988 Mexican elections. See Mauricio-José Schwarz, *Todos Somos Superbarrio* (México, D.F.: Grupo Editorial Planeta de México, 1994).

charismatic revolutionary leader struggling for Indigenous land sovereignty along with his compañeros and leading, as the Zapatistas assert, by obeying the will of the people.[172] [Figure 2.42] is a color poster for an EZLN general meeting the following year, in August 1995, with a tightly cropped portion of the Casasola portrait of Emiliano Zapata. By this time, knowledge of EZLN's struggle and its link to revolutionary Zapatismo had been solidified internationally. The image zooms in to Zapata's gaze, fixing on the viewer. The poster and the *Consulta Nacional* (National Consultation) that it announces connect with neo-Zapatista aims: "*por la paz y la democracia!*" ("for peace and democracy!").




[Figure 2.42. *Consulta Nacional*, EZLN, 1995. Courtesy of the Center for the Study of Political Graphics, Lot No. 1995-135, Bin J 22.3. Photograph by the author.]

[172] One of the Zapatistas' basic *caracoles* or tenants is "*mandar obedeciendo*" ("lead by obeying"). See, for instance: Pablo González Casanova, "The Zapatista 'Caracoles': Networks of Resistance and Autonomy," *Socialism and Democracy* 19, no. 3 (November 1, 2005): 79, doi:10.1080/08854300500257963. This was one of the crucial concepts adopted from autonomous Indigenous communities in Chiapas for the EZLN, a trend and concept we can also see in the Oaxaca Commune. The ideology of "mandar obedeciendo" became one of the seminal reasons for calling for governor Ruiz Ortiz's removal – he did not "rule by obeying;" i.e. his leadership did not respond to the needs of the people and instead operated on cronyism and repression of popular dissent.

[Figure 2.43] This 1995 print entitled *¡Zapatista Todos!* from Chicanx movement artist Malaquias Montoya takes the conflation of Zapata and Marcos one step further, while once again distilling the icon of Zapata down to his eyes as we saw in the Álvarez Amaya TGP prints. At the bottom center of Montoya's print is a reproduction of the Casasola photograph flanked by images of Zapatista soldiers. Floating above this are Zapata's eyes from the portrait – repeated twice – in the middle of the print, and again above, this time visible through the Zapatista pasamontaña knit mask. The masked face effectively refers to the Zapatistas in general and Subcommondante Marcos in particular, delivering the central message – *Zapatista ¡Todos!* (We are all Zapatistas!) – and securing Marcos as the neo-Zapata icon. While Montoya created this print from the United States, he was responding directly to visual culture coming out of Chiapas as part of EZLN's initiative, which was already creating these visual alliances that introduced the movement as forwarding a neo-Zapatista ideology and Subcommandante Marcos as Emiliano Zapata incarnate. Montoya's adoption of these messages and the genealogical totem created by his composition further cements the association between the Chicanx movement, Revolutionary Zapatismo, and EZLN's neo-Zapatismo. [173]

[173] As introduced by scholar Jennifer A. González, "the Chicano civil rights movement – *el movimiento* – of the late 1960's an early 1970's" was led by "those who worked to improve farm labor laws, public schooling and access to housing for an otherwise subaltern population ranging from recent Mexican immigrants to long-standing landowners dispossessed by the U.S.-Mexican War of 1848...This complex intersection of interests, to which individuals allied themselves to greater or lesser degrees, offered both the condition and the desire for a parallel creative artistic practice." Jennifer A. González, "Introduction," in *Chicano and Chicana Art: A Critical Anthology*, eds. Jennifer A. González et.al. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019), 1-2.




[Figure 2.43. *¡Zapatista Todos!*, Malaquias Montoya, 1995. Image from the artist's website, http://www. malaquiasmontoya.com.]

By the time of the Oaxaca Commune, the various ways in which EZLN recuperated Zapata's image for "the people's struggle" and integrated it into the

ideology of the Zapatistas had created a dense concentration of iconic signification and political connotations. [Figure 2.44] Further, the aforementioned images of Zapata, in various instantiations of the Casasola portrait concentrating on his gaze, constructed a pattern of legibility for this unattributed 2006 graffiti image in Oaxaca. Zapata's eyes, excised from the Casasola portrait, appear central, with stenciled lettering above saying "open your eyes" and below, the free-hand spray-painted message: "Oaxaca woke up." This street artwork connects Zapatista and neo-Zapatista ideology with APPO's call to action and highlights the importance of the visual in "waking up" or coming into consciousness. The image renders a call to Oaxacans to open their eyes to the injustices perpetrated by the state and the possibilities for collective action offered by APPO. At the same time, the piece celebrates that Oaxaca that is already awake. The message's apparent simplicity instead mobilizes the distillation and condensation of a century of graphic art celebrating Zapata-as-icon, through his initial appearance in Posada's broadsides, recuperation as a campesino revolutionary figure by TGP in the post-Revolution era, transnational solidarity as a hero of the people's struggle in the Chicanx movement, and his definitive re-connotation as a counter-state leader for Indigenous land sovereignty initiatives by EZLN through his incarnation in Subcommondante Marcos. In more than one sense, the image traverses different temporalities – drawing on tradition, calling for action, and celebrating changes that have already begun to take place.




[Figure 2.44. *Abre los Ojos*, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, 2006. Photograph by Itandehui Franco Ortiz.]




[Figure 2.45. *Proximamente*, ASARO, 2008. Courtesy of the Center for Southwest Research, ASARO Collection. Photograph by the author.]

Figure 2.44 set the stage for a number of Oaxaca Commune graphics incorporating the icon of Zapata that showed up later in the APPO movement. [Figure 2.45] For example, this 2008 poster announces the inauguration of ASARO's workshop, Espacio Zapata, by simply adding the word "soon" as a border on both sides of the graphic of the Casasola portrait of Zapata cropped in half, with one intense eye staring back. On his cheek, Zapata is marked with APPO's red star. With the founding of Espacio Zapata, ASARO carved out a permanent space for the creation of political street art, backed by Zapata's name and image. In doing so, they both highlighted how visual culture galvanized APPO's movement and situated Zapata as patron of the arts.

[Figure 2.46] This 2007 stencil by ASARO presents "Zapata Punk," an update to the famous portraits of the icon making him more appealing to a young, contemporary urban audience. Here, Zapata sports a mowhawk and a scar on this left cheek, reminiscent of Travis Bickle from Martin Scorsese's 1976 cult classic film *Taxi Driver*. This image has since become quite popular in Oaxaca and is used for t-shirts, mugs, and stickers created by Taller Siqueiros, the graphic collective across the street from Espacio Zapata, founded by ASARO artist Yescka. While the deployment of Zapata's image by Oaxaca Commune graphic art would have been legible among most sectors of Oaxacan society, the associated message appealed more to young, politically left citizens than it did to the older or more conservative demographics. However, the latter were just as crucial to the survival of APPO and the potential for its installation as a permanent governing body. Therefore, alternative means of

engagement through graphic art were required, involving images and messages that would motivate other sectors of society to build APPO. To this end, and in deference to the Indigenous spiritual and Catholic traditions that undergird Oaxacan society, graphic art collectives engaged religious traditions, transforming them into powerful imaginaries of political change.



[Figure 2.46. *Zapata Punk*, Yescka/
ASARO, 2007. Photograph by Yescka.]

**From revolutionary icons to religious iconography**

APPO unveiled two patron saints to support the movement in early 2007. One of these was the Niño Santo APPO, the effigy figure that I discussed in the introduction. [Figure 2.47] Around the same time, another patron saint was created from within Oaxaca's graphic art collectives – the "Virgin of the Barricades." The artist "Line" from ASARO was primarily responsible for the creation of the image, though the collective takes attribution. The Virgin of the Barricades is a modified

version of the Virgin of Guadalupe, the patron saint of Mexico [Figure 2.48]. Head bent forward and hands in prayer gesture, the APPO saint wears a gas mask on her face and a cloak decorated with burning tires, fastened by a length of barbed wire crossing over her neck. The visual depiction of "glow," radiating out from all sides of the virgin, resembles sharp spikes, suggesting protection from outside threats. The virgin is characterized as a saint capable of watching over APPO members at the barricades, dedicated to protecting the city and its citizens. At the bottom of the poster, the text reads: "Protect Us Holy Virgin of the Barricades."




[Figure 2.47. *Virgen de las Barrikadas*, ASARO, 2007. Photograph by Itandehui Franco Ortiz.]

During the Oaxaca Commune, over one thousand barricades blocking the interior roads of the city center went up every night for nearly six months. They were created using cement blocks, bricks, tires, wood, and other scavenged objects, lit with bonfires, and guarded by neighborhood residents supporting APPO. The barricades served many purposes during the movement – barriers preventing police or military vehicles from entering the city, watch points for citizens to alert one another of potential dangers, spaces of discussion and organization among movement participants, and social environments of conviviality for the various sectors of Oaxacan society participating in APPO.[174] Thus the patron saint imaged here serves as a protector for those who guard the barricades at night to considerable personal risk. However, much like we observed with several other ASARO prints, namely Figures 2.27 and 2.29, ASARO opted out in its quotation and adaptation of the Virgin of Guadalupe from the opportunity for anything that we might consider a feminist critique. As Serna comments:

> Such male-defined political iconography emphasizes anticapitalist, antiracist resistance, but does not always liberate La Virgen's icon from heteropatriarchal constraints. For instance, although the artists depict [the virgin] with the visual attributes of combatants (the bandana and gas mask), [she] keeps her hands posed in gendered supplication and prayer, thus representing a "revolutionary" female figure that functions within her socially prescribed role as a caretaker and desexualized mother. These activist iterations of La Virgen do not challenge the heteronormative gaze that dominates in male-defined social movement rhetoric or in the uneven division of gendered labor within social movement activism.[175]

[174] For more on the barricades during the Oaxaca Commune, and how they created what Iván Arenas calls a "barricade sociality" among movement participants, see Arenas, *Rearticulating the Social*.
[175] Cristina Serna, "Locating A Transborder Archive of Queer Chicana Feminist and Mexican Lesbian Feminist Art," *Feminist Formations* 29, no. 3 (December 14, 2017): 59, doi.o:10.1353/ff.2017.0030.



[Figure 2.48. *Virgin of Guadalupe*, digital copy of the 'original' image, possibly brought by an Aztec-Christian named Juan Diego to Mexico City in 1531. Image from "El Día de la Virgen de Guadalupe de México," NorfiPC, https://norfipc.com/fechas/diciembre-12-dia-virgen-guadalupe-mexico.php.]




[Figure 2.49. Virgen de las Barrikadas tapete, Yescka/ ASARO, 2011. Photograph by Yescka.]

[Figure 2.49] Despite its limitations in advancing critiques of gendered and heternormative imagery in religious iconography, ASARO's Virgin of the Barricades became an important icon of the movement and has appeared in various forms of visual culture in the years since its creation, including this 2011 tapete by ASARO artist Yescka. The deployment of tapetes in support of the movement, as commemorative graphics for those injured, killed, or disappeared during the Oaxaca Commune, and as strategies for resisting federal police occupation of the city, was another way in which APPO graphic art borrowed from and altered religious traditions – in this case Indigenous religious tradition.

Tapetes, originally part of Oaxacan Indigenous mortuary tradition and later extended to Day of the Dead celebrations, are "carpets" or tapestries made of sand, flowers, and sometimes sawdust. They incorporate candles and offerings of food and are displayed on the ground in temporary installations to honor the dead.[176] The practice of creating tapetes with sand or sawdust stems from pre-Columbian Zapotec religious mortuary practices in various regions of Oaxaca, with styles, materials, and specific practices differing according to exact locale. For instance, in the municipality of Santa Cruz Xoxocotlán, which is very close to the urban center of Oaxaca City, *tapetes de arena de levantada de cruz* or "sand tapestries of the raising of the cross," using sand colored with powdered paint, depicting religious themes, and decorated with candles and flowers, are created nine days after a family member's death and

[176] For the purposes of this dissertation, I analyze the tapete as a form of graphic street art, based on its mobilization from within the Oaxacan graphic arts community, creation from stencils, and presentation in the style of mostly two-dimensional graphics composed on flat surfaces in order to be viewed from above.

then brought with the body to the cemetery the following day for final burial. The "raising of the cross," including the creation of the tapete on the ninth day, is a ritual of final goodbye to the soul of the deceased, which is said to be on its way to the land of the dead.[177]

While historical analyses vary on the subject of Day of the Dead celebrations, this tradition appears by most accounts to be a synergistic mix of pre-Columbian Indigenous practices and Catholic influences from the sixteenth century period of Spanish colonization, resulting in the holiday on the first day of November, called either by the more commonly used Indigenous-rooted name "Dia de los Muertos" ("Day of the Dead"/ "All Souls' Day") or alternately the Catholic version "*Todosantos*" and ("All Saints' Day").[178] In either case, as previously mentioned, it is considered the day in which the dead come to visit their living relatives and are greeted with gifts, offerings, and a grand fiesta. Tapetes are one kind of offering, in commemoration of a life that has passed over into the realm of the dead.

On November 1 in Oaxaca City each year, the city hosts a competition for the best tapete and the entrants install their works along the pedestrian street of Alcalá in the historic city center. Therefore, by 2006, the Day of the Dead tradition in Oaxaca City had already been contemporized and transformed as an annual urban event/ performance and could easily be adapted by Oaxacan collectives as form of graphic street art in support of APPO. The incorporation of tapetes in Oaxaca Commune

[177] Kristin Norget, *Days of Death, Days of Life: Ritual in the Popular Culture of Oaxaca* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 127.
[178] Shawn D. Haley and Curt Fukuda, *Day of the Dead: When Two Worlds Meet in Oaxaca*, 1st ed. (Oxford; New York: Berghahn Books, 2014), 129–32.

graphic art was particularly prescient given that in early November 2006, after several months of barricades, marches, manifestations, and occupations had won APPO the position of the defacto governing body in Oaxaca, President Vicente Fox sent in the Federal Preventative Police (PFP) to shut down the movement. [Figures 2.50-2.51] A number of graphic art collectives installed tapetes directly in front of PFP police lines during the first days of the occupation, which overlapped with the Day of the Dead celebrations in the city center and therefore made a particularly timely statement. Figure 2.50 shows how members of various collectives (pictured here, Mario from ASARO and Aler from Arte Jaguar) collaborated in the creation of this tapete, placing stencils on the ground and pouring colored sand through the lines of the stencil to compose images. In the impactful scene captured in this photograph, PFP officers stand casually in front of the tapete-in-creation, their arms resting on their shields, watching the process, looking away, or taking the opportunity to smoke.




[Figure 2.50. Aler of Arte Jaguar and Mario of ASARO installing a tapete in front of Federal Preventative Police lines, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, November 2006. Photograph by Itandehui Franco Ortiz.]




[Figure 2.51. *Ni Perdon Ni Olvido*, collectively created tapete installed in front of PFP police lines, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, November 2006. Photograph by Itandehui Franco Ortiz.]

[Figure 2.51] The completed tapete demonstrates the combination of materials and methods of graphic communication utilized in its creation. The background is of white sand and the border is created with the blooms of brightly colored *cempalxóchitl* (African marigold) flowers, which are traditional decorations in Day of the Dead offerings. At the top of the tapete, lettering made from flower petals reads "*Ni Perdon Ni Olvido*" ("Neither forgive nor forget"). Three stenciled images are visible underneath this wording – in the center, the figure of the crouching young boy which was previously discussed as a repeating image in Oaxaca Commune graphic art (see Figure 2.15), and on either side, a black cross. Candles and offerings of bread, fruit, and nuts are dispersed throughout. With the line of federal police and their plastic shields ominously marking the uppermost border of this photograph, we can see how the tapete created by Oaxacan artist collectives operates as an alternate

barricade, creating a boundary to separate APPO movement participants from militarized state powers that threaten to repress them. In this way, a mortuary and Day of the Dead tradition that had originated in the Oaxacan Indigenous communities and survived centuries of colonization was mobilized as an intervention in public space that directly challenged the forces that attempted to block access to and to legislate on that space.

The PFP occupation of Oaxaca resulted in several dozen deaths, hundreds of disappearances and injuries, and effectively, the end of the Oaxaca Commune uprising, as I will elaborate in this dissertation's conclusion. APPO's movement continued, however, although with less mass participation and a more contained structure in assembly meetings, rather than in marches and public direct actions. Tapetes were used the years following the suppression of the movement to commemorate those who were killed or disappeared in APPO's standoff with PFP. [Figure 2.52] A collectively realized tapete installed on a city street outside Oaxaca's general hospital on October 29, 2007 commemorates one compañero, a nurse named Jorge Alberto Lopez Bernal who worked at the hospital and who had lost his life on that same day in 2006. In the center of the tapete is a portrait of a Christ figure with crown of thorns, flanked by Jorge's name and portraits of him, the phrase "All power to the people," and the red star reading "APPO." This tapete, like the one discussed above, was created in collaboration between several graphic art collectives and combines at least two forms of visual culture – graphic imagery "drawn" with natural materials and the visual "event" or performance operating through the labor (over a

number of hours) of installing the tapete in situ while groups of people observe.

Tapetes created by graphic artists within the context of APPO's movement visualized this traditional craft and religious tradition as a new site of popular struggle. Marshaling tapetes in this manner extended the process of creating the popular assembly model that APPO was proposing with efforts to ensure that it would incorporate rural and Indigenous actors. Because of their ephemeral nature, tapetes, unlike other forms of street art, acted on but did not alter the UNESCO-protected historic city center and thus offered modes of visual activism that could be mobilized during the day and directly in front of state authorities without risking arrest. Additionally, Oaxacans interested in building and supporting APPO through creative visual initiatives but unwilling to risk the legal repercussions of graffiti art had an alternative in tapete installation. Artist collectives under APPO therefore demonstrated with their mobilization of tapetes the range of creative endeavors that the assembly could employ in support of the movement and the ways in which street art could be adapted to accommodate the long-held traditions of the Indigenous communities and the widely understood religious rituals of the Day of the Dead.[179]

[179] While this chapter focuses on APPO's graphic art rather than sculptural forms, with the tapete as a boundary medium, it is worth mentioning that artist collectives participated in the 2006 "Noche de los Rabanos" or "Night of the Radishes." This event, held in Oaxaca City on December 23 each year since 1897, is a folk-art contest in which entrants complete for the best sculptural scene carved out of large radishes. The tradition is said to date to the 16th century under Spanish colonial rule, when Spaniards brought the radish to Mexico and a monk asked market vendors to carve their radishes into sculptures to encourage the Indigenous peoples to introduce radishes into their diets [Noticia Oaxaca, "La Noche de Rábanos, La Mayor Costumbre Navideña de Oaxaca," *Noticia Oaxaca* (blog), November 23, 2016, http://www.noticiaoaxaca.mx/la-noche-de-rabanos-costumbre-navidad-oaxaca/.] On December 23, 2006, the event featured entries representing the people's struggle and promoting APPO. [Figure 2.53] this scene depicts the November 2006 repression of the movement and is labeled "Confrontation between the people and the PFP provoked by ULISES the assassin of the APPO."




[Figure 2.52. Tapete for Jorge Alberto Lopez Bernal, created by APPO-affiliated graphic artist collectives, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, October 29, 2007. Photograph by Itandehui Franco Ortiz.]




[Figure 2.53. "Noche de los Rabanos" APPO entry, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, December 23, 2006. Photograph by Itandehui Franco Ortiz.]

**Conclusion: APPO as a public space for building new democratic options**

In closing, I return once again to Oaxaca City's zócalo, as the frontline in APPO's battle to contest the rights to and regulation of public spaces, to look at a set of temporary graphic installations by Arte Jaguar collective. These pieces move beyond the public space battle to frame key dialogues that were taking place within APPO around its development of a new form of democratic governance for state politics in the urban sphere. [Figures 2.54 and 2.55, detail] This 2006 stencil-based street artwork by Arte Jaguar features a depiction of Catholic priest Father Miguel Hidalgo's "grito" – the story of "the cry" for Mexico's independence from Spanish rule on September 16, 1810, in the town of Dolores, state of Guanajuato. The historical event is now celebrated annually as Mexico's Independence Day. In Arte Jaguar's rendition, Father Hidalgo stands on the balcony of the Dolores church ringing the church bell and addressing a large crowd of people (depicted as a sea of calavera faces) with the battle cry: "Death to the PRI!" In the background, banners read "Ulises Ruiz Out of Oaxaca!" and "Long Live the People's Struggle!"

Arte Jaguar installed this piece on an exterior wall of The Cathedral of Our Lady of the Assumption (built 1535). Often referred to as the Oaxaca Cathedral, it is the center of religious life in Oaxaca City and sits in the middle of Oaxaca City's zócalo, which is in turn the gathering place for most cultural, social, and political events in the city. In invoking the nineteenth century call for revolution against the Spanish, Arte Jaguar *re-sited* the historic struggle by superimposing it with the Oaxaca Commune's call to depose URO, and placing it on the exterior wall of the

Oaxaca Cathedral. The image suggests that the Oaxaca Commune emerged as another site in the long history of popular struggle against tyrannical ruling entities, and that the PRI (and URO), while internally constructed, operate with the oppressive tactics of an external colonial invader.




[Figure 2.54. "El grito," stencil-based street art by Arte Jaguar, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, 2006. Photograph by Itandehui Franco Ortiz.]




[Figure 2.54. "El grito," (detail), stencil-based street art by Arte Jaguar, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, 2006. Photograph by Itandehui Franco Ortiz.]




[Figure 2.55. "El toreador," stencil-based street art by Arte Jaguar, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, 2006. Photograph by Itandehui Franco Ortiz.]

[Figure 2.56] Another stencil piece by Arte Jaguar enlists humor and lightness through a satirical depiction of the struggle between the popular power of APPO and the repressive governmental power of URO and the state. In this elaborately detailed stencil street art piece, installed on an exterior wall on one of the main streets in downtown Oaxaca, Governor Ruiz Ortiz is imagined as an absurdly flamboyant and hubristic bullfighter. Dressed in the attire of a Spanish *toreador*, Ruiz Ortiz contorts his figure, with his body facing the bull and his enormous head turned toward the

viewer as if to show off his skill and virility, seemingly unaware that the bull is about to catapult him into oblivion with two fierce horns. In the background, large blue letters spell out "APPO." The bull, artist Aler of Arte Jaguar explained, represents the Oaxacan people.[180] Arte Jaguar's stencil piece suggests that APPO's movement is not just a theoretical struggle; it is a physical fight against oppressive powers in which Oaxaqueñxs must activate their bodies as one united body in order to have the strength to oust the governor and the *mal gobierno* (bad government) that he represents. Ruiz Ortiz, cast as toreador, is once again aligned with the oppressive colonial interests of Spanish invaders and fatally underestimates his enemy – the stubborn, strong bull, el pueblo de Oaxaca, synonymous with APPO.

A showdown between a bullfighter and a bull is in the first place a contest over territory. Arte Jaguar's piece appeared on what is generally considered the final official day of Oaxaca's uprising, November 25, 2006, culminating in an hours-long standoff between APPO and federal police. Governor Ortiz had "declared that he was initiating the operation of a plan which would obtain control of the city before the first of December," and it ended when federal police forces brutally suppressed the APPO with paramilitary tactics, resulting in "165 political prisoners, tens of disappeared, hundreds of wounded and injured, as well as several deaths."[181] As with the tapetes created in front of the federal police during this same November 2006 occupation, graphic artworks themselves directly, physically confronted repressive

[180] Interview with Aler of Arte Jaguar, July 14, 2016.
[181] From an APPO press bulletin disseminated on November 26, 2006, reprinted in Davies, *People Decide*, 190–93.

state authorities and called attention to their blockading of public spaces as inimical to political expression. Arte Jaguar's bullfighter image registers APPO's strength, even in the face of this repression, in struggling to reclaim Oaxaca City, its public spaces, and its governance as the domain of the people. It establishes this struggle as an embodied fight over the rights to territory – both physical (public space) and political (democratic space) – and above all, claiming the dignity of mattering in those spaces.

As we have seen in the various formations explored in this chapter, recuperating, reclaiming, and contesting rights to public space was a vital tactic of Oaxaca Commune graphic art. Installing stencil-based wall and street artworks on UNESCO-protected colonial architecture, disseminating prints and posters laying out the deliberations of the assembly, assembling revolutionary icons and historic struggles, and transforming religious rituals into modes of creative resistance, graphic artists worked in direct opposition to state regulations mobilized to tamp down freedom of speech. The foreclosure of public spaces in the various ways we have considered, including eviction of the teachers' plantón, paramilitary occupation of the city, and sanctions on public art, also reflected the obstruction of a more immaterial form of public space – a space of political participation for all citizens.

APPO's incentive to develop an inclusive and diverse political space that better represented the horizontal, consensus-based processes of asamblea in comunalidad was couched in the argument that Oaxacan state politics had not made space for diverse voices, participation from minoritized citizens, or opportunities for

democratic transformation during the time of the nation's "transition to democracy." In 2006, when the PRI was still in power in Oaxaca, this struggle was immediate, pressing, and had a tremendous amount at stake, given the state's ethnic diversity, desperate poverty, and Indigenous majority. When PRI governor URO came to power in Oaxaca by means that state citizens denounced as fraudulent, the extant frustration over the lack of access to a true democratic process was converted into all-out ire.

APPO's graphic art initiatives denounced the governor for his appropriation and misuse of public spaces and his inability to properly govern his people. Graphic art promoted the popular assembly and the movement to install it as reclamation of these threatened public spaces toward the creation of a new public space of participatory politics. This meant imaging APPO as a diversely composed movement and a proposal for a new form of politics capable of better serving the people, which in the context of Oaxaca meant in particular the inclusion of women and Indigenous peoples. Graphic assemblies like ASARO and Arte Jaguar, in operating under the umbrella of APPO's movement, channeled their critique of the state toward APPO's proposal for a different kind of governing at the level of grassroots. In broadcasting the political and ideological debates, dialogues, developments, and fault-lines of APPO's movement, graphic art sketched the conceptual space that APPO offered for renegotiating the operation of political power.

## Chapter Three.
## *Embodying Autonomy*

"Cultural resistance is not a totalizing affair, but one based on particular struggles and negotiations waged on turf that, in the grander scheme of things, may appear to be of little consequence. But this negotiation cannot be ignored. Producing a place in which one's collective identity is forged to a principle of solidarity affects, quite significantly, the social construction of reality. The purpose of such activity is to control one's world and oppose those who may have other plans." ~Richard Flores, *Los Pastores*[182]




[Figure 3.1. Guelaguetza "official" convite, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, 2017. Photograph by Emilio Morales, *Noticias: Voz e Imagen de Oaxaca*, July 2, 2017, http://www.nvinoticias.com/nota/63096/oaxaca-esta-de-fiesta-empieza-la-guelaguetza.]

The Guelaguetza Festival, heralded by the Oaxaca state government as the "maximum cultural festival of Oaxaca," is one of the most well-known and beloved

[182] I thank Elisa Diana Huerta for this excerpt from Richard R. Flores, *Los Pastores: History and Performance in the Mexican Shepherds' Play of South Texas* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995), which appears in her essay "Embodied Recuperation: Performance, Indigeneity, and Danza Azteca," in *Dancing across Borders: Danzas y Bailes Mexicanos*, eds. Olga Nájera-Ramírez, Norma E. Cantú, and Brenda M. Romero (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2009).

folklore celebrations in all of Latin America.[183] The festival is billed as a celebration of the ethnic and cultural diversity of Oaxaca, showcasing the music, dance, customs, and regional resources of each of Oaxaca's eight geographical regions.[184] For the annual Guelaguetza events, the state government of Oaxaca brings "delegations" from Indigenous communities in each of these regions to the capital city to act as cultural ambassadors and regional representatives. Oaxaca's Guelaguetza draws thousands of visitors from all over Mexico and internationally to take part in the festival activities, which span most of the month of July. Most of the events are street parties and parades that anyone can attend and take place in the historic city center along the tourist walkway and in nearby public squares and church plazas. The festival culminates with a ticketed performance showcase on two consecutive Mondays toward the end of July.

While the Guelaguetza has always been a celebration beloved by the Oaxacan people, criticism over its commercialism and elitism has been steadily growing over the last few decades, with complaints focused on the high cost of tickets, corporate sponsorship, and the "Disneyfication" of its presentation. Additionally, some have condemned the Guelaguetza for promoting racial and ethnic stereotypes and masking

[183] There are now a number of similar festivals in the U.S., including several Guelaguetzas in California (in Santa Cruz and Fresno, which each have significant Oaxacan communities), making it a transborder cultural phenomenon.

[184] The eight regions are Cañada, Costa, Istmo de Tehuantepec, Mixteca, Papaloapan, Sierra Norte, Sierra Sur, and Valles Centrales. Until recently, when the Sierra region was split into north and south, there were seven designated regions. I previously mentioned, but it bears repeating, there are more than 10,000 Oaxacan Indigenous communities spread among these regions (though not bounded by them) and sixteen officially recognized ethno-linguistic groups: Amuzgo, Chatino, Chinantec, Chocho, Chontal, Cuicatec, Huave, Ixcatec, Mazatec, Mixe, Mixtec, Nahuatl, Popoloca, Trique, Zapotec, and Zoque.

sociopolitical inequities. As anthropologist Deborah Poole explains, in Oaxaca, the Guelaguetza is one of the primary sites in which "anxieties about deception and authenticity haunt the visual practices and forms through which 'culture' is claimed as a form of collective and personal property in the public spaces of state-sponsored festivals."[185] For many Oaxacans, intimately aware of the realities of living in the second poorest state in Mexico, it is difficult to justify the charming image of Oaxacan indigeneity that the Guelaguetza presents while the Indigenous pueblos that the festival supposedly celebrates continue to suffer from poverty, lack of resources, and extractive projects that threaten their land.



[Figure 3.2. state Guelaguetza "official" Lunes del Cerro performance showcase, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, 2016. Photograph by the author.]

[185] Deborah Poole, "Mestizaje, Distinction, and Cultural Presence: The View from Oaxaca," in *Histories of Race and Racism: The Andes and Mesoamerica from Colonial Times to the Present*, ed. Laura Gotkowitz, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 182.

The Oaxaca Commune provided an opportunity for the Oaxacan people to turn their critiques into action. The Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca (APPO) mounted a campaign to "take the Guelaguetza back" from the state, resulting in the cancellation of the state Guelaguetza and the inauguration of the People's Guelaguetza in July of 2006. However, APPO's logic of cultural reclamation in part leaned on the very same fallacious history that, as we will see, had allowed the state to invent the Guelaguetza and then market it as "Indigenous tradition." Additionally, since it was the faction of APPO made up of the National Union of Education Workers (SNTE) Local Section 22 teachers that produced the People's Guelaguetza, the event was steeped in the union's highly contentious decades-long struggle with the government and driven in part by their need for a new public image.[186] While APPO critiqued the racialized and gendered aspects of the "official" Guelaguetza's indigenismo aesthetics, their planning and presentation of the alternative Guelaguetza over just a few frenetic weeks in the first month of the uprising was not primarily focused on rectifying these issues. Instead, APPO created a version of the Guelaguetza in which Indigenous peoples publically claimed the dignity to present their own cultures, customs, and dances, free of the demands of the ruling and tourist classes. APPO's cardinal goal in giving the Oaxacan people their own Guelaguetza was to wield the alternative festival as an "arma de lucha" (weapon of struggle) in

[186] As I covered in Chapter 1, the dissident faction of SNTE – CNTE – and Oaxaca's Local Section 22 have a significant public image issue that often hampers their ability to make progress with their political aims.

support of the burgeoning social movement.[187] It is necessary to unpack the visual politics of the two Guelaguetzas to understand what was at stake in each instantiation and how Indigenous culture was put to each purpose.

*  *  *

To this end, this chapter surveys the genealogy and history of the state Guelaguetza and continues with a visual analysis of both the state version and the alternative People's Guelaguetza. A close reading of the two Guelaguetzas reveals that in each case, Indigenous performance serves a political agenda. The "official" Guelaguetza used Indigenous performance to fold an outwardly imposed indigenismo into the projects of building the nation-state and then consolidating its favorable place in the global economy. The People's Guelaguetza, on the other hand, created a space where Indigenous peoples could chose to actively take part in building and consolidating APPO by infusing cultural performance and embodiment with political expression and testimony. I analyze APPO's strategy to transform the Guelaguetza into an "arma de lucha," contending that it operated through two multifaceted prongs – first to denounce a threat imposed from above and then to promote an alternative innovated from below. I argue that for each prong of this strategy, APPO "occupied" the state's visual logic, both critiquing and repurposing it for the movement. APPO's Guelaguetza Popular offered a hybrid cultural-political forum presenting, with a renewed spirit of communal fiesta, visual and embodied modes of Indigenous self-

[187] Interview with Professor Fernando Soberanes Bojórquez, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, July 16, 2016.

representation and prefiguring APPO's decolonial democratic model. In turn, the People's Guelaugetza began to sketch the vicissitudes of Indigenous self-determination and autonomy in the context of APPO's movement.

**The state Guelaguetza**

"Guelaguetza month" is Oaxaca state's most important tourist season of the year. Every July, Oaxaca City becomes a morass of tourists huddled in the streets of the historic city center to observe festival events, which consist of three main components: the *convite* (invitation), the *calenda* (parade), and the *Lunes del Cerro* ("Mondays on the hill") performance showcase, the highlight of the festival. The convite is the opening ceremony, an invitation to the public to join the fiesta, and a preview of the festivities to come. Typically, the convite takes place in the *andador touristico* (tourist walkway) in the historic city center and features a few Indigenous delegations dressed in their regional garb (*traje*) performing dances to an accompanying marching band. Fireworks are lit overhead and the Guelaguetza is announced as officially underway. The calenda is similar to the convite, with marching band music, dancing, and fireworks, but it unfolds more as a formal parade starting at the top of the andador touristico and making its way to the zócalo. All of the invited delegations are present for the calenda, wearing the traje associated with the regions they are representing, dancing the regional dances, and demonstrating their regional resources such as woven baskets, coffee, mezcal, and textiles.

[Figure 3.1] Some of the unmistakable visual elements of the convites and calendas are the *gigantes* (huge puppets made of paper mache and steel armature animated from inside by someone peering out of the figure's navel), *marmotas* (large white balloons made of cloth, decorated with colorful tassels and attached to a wooden pole, wielded by someone wearing a leather harness around their waist to support the balloon at its base), and *faroles* (colorful paper lanterns in the shapes of stars, hearts, and other simple shapes, made of transparent cellophane and suspended by a wooden stick). The band plays the classic fiesta tunes that accompany almost every street parade in Oaxaca.

[Figure 3.2] The Lunes del Cerro performance showcase takes place on the two Mondays after July 16th in the 11,400-seat Guelaguetza Auditorium at the top of *Cerro Fortín* (Fortín Hill), which is just outside the centro historico and overlooks Oaxaca City and the surrounding valley. The stadium is so massive and at such high elevation that you can see it from anywhere in the city center. Looking up at the stadium from below, it looks like a set of gigantic poles and arches spanning the hilltop with a white canvas blanket thrown over them. The auditorium has been continuously updated since it was built in the early 1970's and the recently added canvas top offers the benefit of shaded seating. The performance stage is in the round at the base of the auditorium, with a small section behind it for the band, which allows the audience to look down the hill at the dancers and musicians performing while simultaneously enjoying the city panorama situated behind them. The seating fans out in a semicircle from the stage, radiating up the hill, with sections closest to

the stage on either side reserved for the performers. There are also small reserved sections for city and state officials and special guests. All of the other seats in the areas nearest to the stage are reserved for audience members holding tickets, now purchased through Ticketmaster and typically sold-out well in advance. The two sections at the top of the hill and furthest from the stage are held for no-charge seating, which are distributed on the day of the event on a first-come-first-serve basis. In recent years, getting one of these seats has required lining up between 3 and 4 AM for the event beginning at 10 AM.[188]

The Lunes del Cerro showcase lasts about three hours and has a tightly packed program starting with the presentation of the "*Diosa Centéotl*" ("Corn Goddess"), who parades across the stage holding her corn stalk scepter, smiling, and waving to the crowd. Then each of the delegations performs on stage for about fifteen minutes, presenting a set of dances, ceremonies, and rituals. Much attention is placed on distinguishing and affirming the cultural character of the regions each group represents. [Figure 3.3] At the beginning of each group presentation, two individuals (typically a male and a female representative) come to the onstage microphone to introduce their delegation, giving a brief description of the regional character of the people, often broken down into gender specifics, as well as the geographic, mercantile, and gastronomic points of regional pride. Many of these monologues

[188] The local press indicates that the Oaxacan Tourist Board has started to sell some of the free seats due to increasing ticket demands and quick sell-outs in the last few years. However, I was unable to officially confirm this.

begin with a welcome to the visitors from near and far and end with a plug inviting or promoting tourism in their town.



[Figure 3.3. Delegation introduction, state Guelaguetza Lunes del Cerro, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, 2014. Photograph by "Shannon," "Guelaguetza, el año pasado 3," *View From Casita Colibrí*, July 13, 2015, https://casita-colibri.blog/2015/07/13/guelaguetza-el-ano-pasado-3/.]



[Figure 3.4. Dance representing courting rituals of the Istmo region, state Guelaguetza Lunes del Cerro, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, 2011. Photograph from travelbymexico.com, https://www.travelbymexico.com/blog/12245-programa-de-la-guelaguetza-y-lunes-de-cerro-2012-en-oaxaca/.]



[Figure 3.5. Regional gifts thrown to crowd, state Guelaguetza Lunes del Cerro, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, 2014. Photograph from *Organización Radiofónica de Oaxaca*, June 25, 2014, http://www.ororadio.com.mx/2014/07/reportan-venta-de-96-de-boletos-para-octava-de-la-guelaguetza/.]

[Figure 3.4] The majority of the delegations feature dances with male-female couples that express the courting or marriage rituals of the community. Other presentations are focused on ceremonies related to funerary practices, baptisms and religious rituals, or the creation and cultivation of natural resources, crafts, and products from the area. Goertzen observes that the general framework of the dances and music usually involves "gender-specific or gender-alternating lines dissolving frequently into twirling couples. Initial short sections of dance performed to music sounding like polkas or waltzes eventually wields to quicker ones, with more foot-stomping in prescribed patterns as the music shifts to *sones* and *jarabes* (in a brisk 6/8 or in the superimposing of 6/8 and 3/4 called sesquialtera)."[189] Beyond this, each presentation offers a variation on certain general patterns and norms:

> Some groups content themselves with modified line dances, while others incorporate contrasting visual or procedural special features. Stylized attempts to steal kisses are quite common, as are mock bullfights. In other cases, one dancer carries a turkey (hobbled and alive), or a papier-mâché swordfish, or garlands of greens, or a bottle (in one fairly common dance in which a man pretends to be drunk). Further contrasts concern musical features. A troupe may bring its own band or rely on the Oaxaca state band...Several troupes always perform a famous waltz song associated with their respective homes, and one features salty exchanges of quips between men and women of courting age and bent. And the particular mix of sections of music metered and paced like marches, polkas, waltzes, and *sones* is also idiosyncratic.[190]

[Figure 3.5] After each delegation's performance, a few of the performers walk to the edge of the stage or out into the rows of the auditorium to toss small gifts of regional

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[189] Chris Goertzen, *Made in Mexico: Tradition, Tourism, and Political Ferment in Oaxaca* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2010), 68–69, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ucsc/detail.action?docID=680051, emphasis in original.
[190] Goertzen, *Made in Mexico*, 69.

products into the crowd, such as a tiny bag of coffee, a straw hat, or a piece of bread wrapped in plastic. Special offerings are given directly from delegation representatives to the governor and the other politicians, city administrators, Tourist Board members, and special guests seated with him.

In its contemporary form, the "official" state Guelaguetza is generally understood by the Oaxacan public (with plenty of variations on opinions about its value) as a spectacle performed for tourists that generates an incredible amount of revenue for Oaxaca state. The cost of tickets to the Lunes del Cerro events in the Guelaguetza Auditorium (approximately $60 USD per person, more than thirteen times the daily wage for the average Oaxacan worker) assures a self-selected audience of elite Mexicans and foreign visitors. Revenue from the Guelaguetza brings the state over 18.6 million USD per year.[191] With such high stakes for the local economy, the delicate balance that allows the Guelaguetza to continue, explains Goertzen, depends on all the social players assuming certain roles and receiving certain benefits: "Tourists satisfy a general nostalgia by considering the Guelaguetza an authentic representation of valuable aspects of an equally generalized past, the powerful of Oaxaca reassert their comfortable position at the state's socioeconomic pinnacle, and the dancers and musicians welcome both the opportunity to see their

[191] Figures from the 2017 Guelaguetza, provided by the National Platform for Transparency, https://www.plataformadetransparencia.org.mx. The Guelaguetza Festival now includes a number of satellite events that help to diversify sources of revenue, including a Mezcal Fair, several smaller dance performances in hotels, and theatrical events related to the "history" of the Guelaguetza, such as the *Bani Stui Gulal* (Repetition from Antiquity).

indigenous identity celebrated publicly and a free trip to the big city."[192] However, as this statement implies, only a minimal amount of funding for transportation and accommodation is provided to the performers, many of whom have traveled from far-flung and isolated rural areas of the state. They are not compensated for their traje (which often has to be newly made or bought to meet the standards of the Guelaguetza organizers), the months of rehearsing, or the organization and preparation for making the journey to the capital to perform. All of this involves a tremendous amount of ancillary labor and funding from the invited Indigenous communities. The main performers from each group are generally very young – between 16 and 30 years old – so, alongside community leaders and organizations, parents and other extended family members often provide the necessary support to bring the participants to the Guelaguetza.

While the commercialism and elitism of the festival are often cited in critiques of the contemporary Guelaguetza, far less acknowledged are the ways in which its visual presentation is laced with classed, raced, and gendered hierarchies, which have been proffered and reified throughout its history by Oaxacan governors and other state officials. While there is no one definitive history of the Guelaguetza, the story widely accepted in Oaxaca and reiterated in marketing materials, informal publications, and local oral culture alike is that the festival originated as a pre-Hispanic Indigenous "pagan" tradition expressed in an annual offering to an Aztec maize deity made at what is now the site of the Guelaguetza Auditorium on Fortín

[192] Goertzen, 66.

Hill. But Oaxacan scholars who have researched the festival's genealogy insist that there is no convincing evidence linking the contemporary Guelaguetza with a pre-Hispanic festival.[193] Instead, they say, this purported link is the central falsehood suturing an entirely "invented tradition."[194] At each turn, this invention was motivated by agendas of the elite and powerful classes and manifested through the subjugation of Indigenous populations: a Spanish colonialist interest in Christianizing and civilizing the "indios," a post-Revolutionary nationalist agenda to assimilate Indigenous diversity into a unified national identity, and finally a capitalist motive to market Indigenous culture for economic gain.

The specious link between the Guelaguetza and pre-Hispanic Oaxacan ritual rests on the basis of an Indigenous celebration that may have taken place at the height of the rainy season in the second half of July each year (from c.1498), which would have been a celebration of and offering to Aztec earth deities with the aim of ensuring a good harvest.[195] One such deity important for the rainy season was the deity of "tender corn," called *Centeocihuatl* or *Xilonen*, believed to ensure the first sprouts of the corn crops, which were life-sustaining for Indigenous peoples in Oaxaca. Studies

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[193] Biblioteca de Investigación Juan de Córdova and Fundación Alfredo Harp Helú Oaxaca, eds., "Breve Historia de La Fiesta Llamada Guelaguetza: XVIII-XXI" (Oaxaca: Fundación Alfredo Harp Helú Oaxaca; Museo Textil de Oaxaca; Biblioteca Juan de Córdova, 2015).

[194] A process whereby a relatively recent tradition is made to appear ancient or linked to an "immemorial past." The term is from E. J Hobsbawm and T. O Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983). On the Guelaguetza as an "invented tradition," see Jesús Lizama Quijano, *La Guelaguetza En Oaxaca: Fiesta, Relaciones Interétnicas y Procesos de Construcción Simbólica En El Contexto Urbano*, 1. edición (México, D.F: CIESAS, 2006) and Jayne Howell, "Beauty, Beasts, and Burlas: Imagery of Resistance in Southern Mexico," *Latin American Perspectives* 39, no. 3 (May 1, 2012): 27–50, doi:10.1177/0094582X11434304.

[195] Gabriela del Carmen Perches, Castro Mantecón, and Zárate Aquivier, *Las fiestas de los lunes en "Tani Lao Nayaalaoni": lunes del cerro* (Oaxaca, México: Sociedad Folklórica Oaxaca, n.d.), 6.

by the Oaxaca Folkloric Society indicate that Zapotec or Mixtec peoples living in and around Oaxaca City at this time may have climbed to the top of Cerro Fortín to make offerings to Centeocihuatl on the day in the Aztec calendar that corresponds to July 16.[196] While their research indicates that the God took both male and female forms, in the Guelaguetza story the deity is now referred to as Diosa Centéotl or "Corn Goddess." In theatrical interpretations of the "history" of the Guelaguetza, called *Bani Stui Gulal*, which are presented during the Guelaguetza Festival events, this part of the story about the Aztec ritual also involves sacrifice of a virginal Indigenous woman to Diosa Centéotl.[197] Just like many other elements in the accepted story of the Guelaguetza, this detail about virgin sacrifice lacks scholarly evidence to corroborate it. Nonetheless, its inclusion does very important work for the invention and perpetuation of the Guelaguetza as a modified/ modernized "tradition" and for the symbolism of the festival as a whole. In the first place, it centralizes the female body, as both the incarnation of the divine and the offering made to the divine, setting up a hierarchical structure between female figures that is repeated in various forms in the modern and contemporary versions of the festival. Secondly, the narration of savage and barbarous ritual human sacrifice legitimizes the civilizing mission of the Spaniards in the next phase of the festival's development.

After the Spanish invasion in 1521, missionaries seeking to dissuade so-called "pagan" rituals replaced Indigenous harvest celebrations with a Catholic holiday – the festival of the *Virgen del Carmen* – traditionally held in Spain around the same time

[196] Perches et.al., 6–7.
[197] Lizama Quijano, *La Guelaguetza*, 178.

in mid-July. To honor the Virgen del Carmen, two different temples were built in Oaxaca City - the *Templo de Carmen Bajo*, built in 1544, and the *Templo de Carmen Alto,* built in 1698. The two temples helped establish important hierarchies during the festival, which took place over eight days beginning on the first Sunday after July 16. The celebrations held in *Carmen Alto*, located at higher elevation, were to be attended by the Spaniards and the "indios and mestizos" were to gather in Carmen Bajo located below. [198] The missionaries who had likely taken note of Indigenous gatherings on Cerro Fortín added the custom of pilgrimages to the top of the hill on the two Mondays of the Virgen del Carmen festival in processions in which people would animate gigantes and marmotas in the streets of Oaxaca City, culminating in a picnic on the scenic hillside.[199] The custom of celebrating the Virgen del Carmen festival with pilgrimages to the top of Fortín Hill, once popularized, was called known colloquially as "Lunes del Cerro" ("Mondays on the Hill").[200] By the early twentieth century, the "Mondays on the Hill" had become somewhat secularized. They were attended by diverse sectors of the city population and may have included dancing and contests held for the performance of regional songs or the presentation of regional clothing.[201]

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[198] Lizama Quijano, 51.

[199] María de la Luz Maldonado Ramírez, "La Guelaguetza En La Ciudad de Oaxaca" (M.A. thesis, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2016), 13. See also Alvaro González, ed., *Oaxaca, tierra de la pluralidad: la guelaguetza breve semblanza* (Oaxaca: Instituto Oaxaqueño de las Culturas, 1993), 24. The tradition of celebrating a festival over eight days, including two Mondays, is called the "*octava*" ("eighth") and can be observed in a number of religious festivals in Oaxaca.

[200] Maldonado Ramírez, "La Guelaguetza," 13.

[201] Lizama Quijano, 126.



[Figure 3.6. Homenaje Racial, delegation from Istmo de Tehuantepec in front of "Miss Oaxaca" throne, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, 1932. Courtesy of Fundación Cultural Bustamante Vasconcelos. Photograph by Juan Arriaga.]




[Figure 3.7. Homenaje Racial, delegation from the Central Valleys region, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, 1932. Courtesy of Fundación Cultural Bustamante Vasconcelos. Photograph by Juan Arriaga.]

The invention of the Guelaguetza was thus tangentially connected to the sixteenth century colonial imposition of the Spanish Catholic Virgen del Carmen festival and the early twentieth- century urban custom of gathering atop Cerro Fortín on the two Mondays associated with it. However, the most direct antecedent to the Guelaguetza Festival is the *Homenaje Racial* (Racial Homage), introduced during Oaxaca City's 400th anniversary celebration in April 1932. This celebration on the anniversary of Oaxaca's founding as a city took place in a year that was also significant for at least two other reasons. The state was recovering from the devastating 1931 earthquake, which had brought death and suffering to the state's inhabitants, caused great damage to urban dwellings, and decimated regional crops and resources. State authorities were motivated to boost morale and encourage resource sharing in a time of scarcity among Oaxaca's biodiverse but geographically divided regions. At the same time, the urban area of Oaxaca was experiencing an increase in interest and visits from outsiders because of unprecedented archaeological discoveries at *Monte Albán*, a significant Mesoamerican site attributed to the Zapotecs, which is situated in the hills above Oaxaca City. While these two events were transforming Oaxaca's immediate circumstances, state officials were eager to secure Oaxaca's position in the nation's future, via the wave of post-Revolution nationalist political consolidation taking place under the direction of the new Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) government.

In Oaxaca, state powers wishing to bring Oaxaca into the nationalist fold faced the significant challenge of the state's Indigenous diversity, geographical

divisions, and political differences. As Poole explains, intellectuals and urban elites led by Oaxaca governor Genaro V. Vázquez developed cultural "Oaxacanization" programs "for the specific purpose of championing racial and cultural assimilation as the route to revolutionary nation-building...[and] to solve the problem of unity...by naturalizing the divisive political factions within the state as cultural and 'racial' territories or regions."[202] The state was divided into sevens, determined for the most part by the stark geographical divisions created by Oaxaca's biodiversity, falling along the lines of mountain ranges, coastal areas, and valleys, rather than by the locations of the pueblos corresponding with the sixteen officially recognized Indigenous ethno-linguistic groups.

The cultural branch of Mexico's nationalist project was at the time underwritten by Oaxacan intellectual Jose Vasconcelos, Minister of Public Education for the post-Revolution government, and his interlinking concepts of mestizaje and the "cosmic race." As we briefly discussed in Chapter 1, these concepts championed the racial intermingling of post-invasion Latin America as redemptive for humanity and a source of pride and superiority. They promoted a rhetoric that, when trained on Mexico, aimed to bring together a nation disjointed by hundreds of years of colonialism, followed by a devastating 35-year dictatorship by Porfirio Díaz, and finally the wounds of factionalism opened up by the Mexican Revolution. According to Vasconcelos, a pan-mestizo "fifth race," a "cosmic race" combining the blood of all the other races, was the key to an undivided, harmonious future civilization.

[202] Poole, "Affective Distinctions," 210.

Vasconcelos shaped a national literacy and cultural policy based on these philosophies, which dovetailed with an official nationalist program of indigenismo. Lomnitz describes indigenismo as the "task of forging Mexican citizenship both by 'indigenizing' modernity and modernizing the Indians, thus uniting all Mexicans in one mestizo community."[203] Policies based on these philosophies were often carried out in assimilative, integrationist programs meant to forcefully impose the "harmonious" intermingling they imagined, without the input of Indigenous peoples. "Postrevolutionary *indigenismo*," according to Knight, "was another white/ mestizo construct...[that] involved the imposition of ideas, categories, and policies from the outside. The Indians themselves were the objects, not the authors, of *indigenismo*."[204]

Cultural policies in Oaxaca rooted in both the concepts of mestizaje and indigenismo, allowed for the valorization of the mestizo, qualified by a nostalgic appreciation of diversity as expressed through regional cultural distinction coded in racialized terms. Governor Vásquez and his "Oaxacanization" program "encouraged the use of regional iconographic styles and sponsored competitions in which the songwriters, artists, poets, and painters who won were routinely those who were judged to best represent *both* the specific spirit of their region *and* the general 'soul' of all Oaxacan people...[such that] the nationalist racial rhetoric of *mestizaje* was joined with a regionalist discourse in which the language of *diversity* would become

[203] Claudio Lomnitz-Adler, *Deep Mexico, Silent Mexico: An Anthropology of Nationalism*, Public Worlds; v. 9 (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 231.
[204] Alan Knight, "Racism, Revolution, and *Indigenismo*: Mexico, 1910-1940," in *The Idea of Race in Latin America, 1870-1940*, ed. Richard Graham (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1990), 77.

the means for inventing the new Oaxacan citizen."[205] Vázquez's "Oaxacanization" project culminated with the Homenaje Racial event held on Cerro Fortín, which featured, by the organizers' description, Indigenous groups from each of Oaxaca state regions dressed in traditional "costumes," paying tribute to the capital city with products produced in their regions and performing "traditional dances" to folk music "typical" to their areas of the state.[206] Oaxacan scholars explain that the overt symbolism of the Homenaje Racial revealed the event as "a celebration of the submission of the Indigenous regions to the central powers of the state."[207] [Figure 3.6] A "Miss Oaxaca" was designated to represent Oaxaca City "as a mestiza—and hence 'national'—subject" and to accept the offerings from each region's female "racial ambassadresses" and her accompanying "entourages of *charros* and *chinas*" (peasant types) to create what the organizing committee called "an agreeable impression of the whole."[208]

[Figure 3.7] A photograph from the Homenaje Racial shows the delegation from Oaxaca's Central Valleys region in one of the staging areas encircling the central performance arena atop Fortín Hill. The women designated "racial ambassadresses" are enthroned at the top, some, as Poole points out, with faces powdered white, flanked by darker-skinned "indios" seated below.[209] Here we begin

[205] Poole, "Affective Distinctions" 210.
[206] Biblioteca de Investigación et.al., "Breve Historia."
[207] Biblioteca de Investigación et.al.
[208] Poole, "Affective Distinctions," 211–12.
[209] Deborah Poole, "An Image of 'Our Indian': Type Photographs and Racial Sentiments in Oaxaca, 1920-1940," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 84, no. 1 (February 1, 2004): 77, doi:10.1215/00182168-84-1-37.

to see how the raced and classed visual politics of the Homenaje Racial, at once both taxonomizing and unifying through nationalist logic, were also definitively gendered and negotiated principally through women's bodies and clothing.[210] Feminine personas and women's regional garb became the visual and material lodestars for the formulation of a Oaxacan identity operating through a notion of indigenismo capable of making simultaneous claims to ancient cultural heritage and modern cultural distinction, "a calculus of belonging in which claims to distinction could be defended only through the constant invocation of the Indian as both present and past."[211]

Some form of the Homenaje Racial was presented again at least twice between 1933-1951. One of these events was held for the first time during the popular "Mondays on the Hill" gatherings, as the organizers likely realized that holding it then would ensure a substantial audience.[212] In 1951, Oaxaca state government and municipal officials met with representatives from national companies and the commercial sector of Oaxaca City to brainstorm strategies for transforming Oaxaca into a tourist destination and bringing it more fully into economic modernity.[213] The committee developed the idea for what would become the Guelaguetza Festival, formalizing the extemporaneous urban tradition of "Mondays on the Hill" with a basic structure and concept borrowed from the Homenaje Racial, and inaugurated it in July 1951 as the festival "*Lunes del Cerro*." The name Guelaguetza was officially adopted later in this period, but the term had first been associated with the Homenaje

[210] See Poole, "Image of 'Our Indian'" and "Affective Distinctions."
[211] Poole, "Mestizaje," 191.
[212] Maldonado Ramírez, 75–76.
[213] Lizama Quijano, 134.

Racial when one of the organizers, Alberto Vargas, wrote about the event in a 1935 Oaxaca state government publication entitled "Guelaguetza, Oaxacan Racial Custom."[214] In the pamphlet, Vargas attempted to draw a link between the offerings made by the regional "racial ambassadresses" to the capital city and the Indigenous practice of guelaguetza.

The term guelaguetza connotes an offering, a gift, or fulfillment of obligation, and has origins in the Zapotec communities of Oaxaca's Sierra Norte region.[215] It is a concept with a constellation of meanings grounded in practices associated with Zapotec communal life and cosmovisión. Linguistically, it is a conglomeration of three Zapotec words: *guela*, the equivalent of the Spanish word *milpa*, meaning a farm's cropping field, usually for *maize* (corn); *guet,* meaning *tortilla*; and *zaa*, meaning clouds, a reference to the Zapotec as the "people of the clouds" based in ancestral beliefs that they are descended from supernatural beings living among the clouds and will return to the clouds after death.[216] Put together, guelaguetza directly translates to "tortilla from the Zapotec farm," an offering made from a family's resources, which demonstrates the term's basis in the specific communal subsistence practices in Zapotec villages.

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[214] Alberto Vargas, *Guelaguetza; costumbre racial oaxaqueña.* (Oaxaca, México: Imprenta del Gobierno del Estado, 1935).

[215] The Zapotecs are one of the sixteen different Indigenous language groups of Oaxaca, and can be found in the pueblos of Sierra Norte as well as Valles Centrales, Istmo de Tehuantepec, and Sierra Norte regions. Sierra Norte is one of the regions closest to Oaxaca City.

[216] Interview with Zeferino Mendoza, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, September 27, 2108. See also Lizama Quijano, 210. Guelaguetza is also said to be rooted in the Zapotec words *guendalezaa* or *xɛlgez.*

Guelaguetza thus refers to a structure of kinship operating through mutual support and reciprocity in the context of major life events and fiestas in Indigenous pueblos.[217] This structure operates through a detailed system. For example, when a community member contributes food, money, labor, or other resources for the wedding of a neighbor's daughter, they will later benefit from reciprocal support when their own child is married. In some villages, the exchange will be noted in a guelaguetza record book which keeps track the transactions in great detail, down to the weight of a turkey gifted to a family member or the number of tortillas brought to an event, such that the giver may expect to receive a gift of equal value when they are in need of it.[218] In this way, guelaguetza is a sort of internal savings and loans system, a dynamic of giving and receiving and way to share resources to support community members for the benefit of everyone in the pueblo. Engaging in guelaguetza also implies responsibility and obligation to consistent and continued participation in the communal practices connected to a particular pueblo and community. Anthropologists have recorded evidence of similar practices in many other Indigenous communities of Oaxaca, labeled differently and with slightly different meanings, but essentially referring to reciprocal exchange for mutual aid in the communal lifeways of the pueblos and intimately connected with communal fiesta.[219]

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[217] Lynn Stephen, *Zapotec Women: Gender, Class, and Ethnicity in Globalized Oaxaca*, Second edition. (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2005), 50, doi: 10.1215/9780822387510.

[218] Stephen, *Zapotec Women*, 50.

[219] For a study of similar practices in pueblos across Oaxaca and their associated terms, see Saúl Millán and Julieta Valle, *La comunidad sin límites: estructura social y organización comunitaria en las regiones indígenas de México* (México, D.F.: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 2003).

Vargas' appropriation of the Zaptoec term to describe the offerings of dances, songs, and regional products made by "racial ambassadresses" from the Indigenous communities in deference to "Miss Oaxaca" and the capital city in the Homenaje Racial leaned heavily on the implication of obligation. In this case, Indigenous peoples were obliged to participate in the process of building and consolidating the nation-state. The official uptake of the term guelaguetza as a name for the festival, which occurred during the period of its commercialization in the mid-twentieth century, distilled a revised concept of "unity through diversity." Urban government and elites constructed an event that traded on the quaint and exotic multicultural cachet of indigenismo while neatly packaging Indigenous diversity into a unified, consumable (and lucrative) spectacle with an aura of authenticity. Guelaguetza connoted a homey notion of gift-giving and reciprocity, symbolized by regional goods offered to state officials, dignitaries, and elites and then tossed into the crowd after each group's performance. Leaving the benefit to Indigenous communities entirely ambiguous, choreographed deference to the state was coded as reciprocal exchange.

In 1969, Guelaguetza organizers replaced "Miss Oaxaca" with the Diosa Centéotl, a persona who is now a centerpiece of the festival. The presence of Diosa Centéotl in the festival, as a reference to the aforementioned Aztec maize "goddess of tender corn" Centeocihuatl/ Xilonen, became part of the campaign to authenticate the modern urban festival by tying it to pre-Hispanic Indigenous roots. It also served to continue typifying indigenismo through female Indigenous figures and imagine an

abiding narrative thread from Aztec virgin sacrifice to Virgen del Carmen to the pious and elegant mestiza "Miss Oaxaca" and finally to the virginal goddess pageantry of Diosa Centéotl.



[Figure 3.8. Diosa Centéotl contest, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, 2017. Photograph from Antonio Juárez, "Eligen a representante de Diosa Centéotl para la Guelaguetza 2017," *Agencia Quadratín*, July 15, 2017, https://oaxaca.quadratin.com.mx/eligen-representante-diosa-centeotl-la-guelaguetza/.]

[Figure 3.8] Diosa Centéotl is elected each year as winner of a contest between female regional representatives able to prove to urban festival organizers exemplary knowledge of their own languages, cultures, and traditions. The pageant is held publicly in the weeks before the Guelaguetza. Each contestant delivers a

monologue about her region and pueblo, including a detailed description of her regional traje and its significance. Once again, women's bodies and clothing become cultural capital enabling the contestants to win the distinction of presiding over Guelaguetza show as the feminine Indigenous figure par excellence and in turn sanctioning the Guelaguetza's claim to authenticity. A number of other ancillary Guelaguetza events include equally highly stylized versions of Indigenous female figures, such as the "legendary" Zapotec princess "*La Princessa Donají*," whose Romeo and Juliet-type story is told in a different ticketed onstage event during Guelaguetza month.

Tickets to the Guelaguetza Lunes del Cerro performance showcase were sold starting in the early 1970's after the Guelaguetza Auditorium was built by the Oaxaca state government. The more elite the festival became, the more motivation to professionalize grew. Indigenous delegations were invited back yearly only if they proved to be most popular among the audience. Performance spots were at times given to celebrities or family members of government officials in place of Indigenous community members, including several instances in which various governors' daughters were given their choice of a role performing with one of the regional delegations.[220]

[220] Lizama Quijano, 165.



[Figure 3.9. Traje of the Flor de Piña, state Guelaguetza Lunes del Cerro, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, 2016. Photograph by Nael Ramírez, July 25, 2016, https://www.flickr.com/photos/naelrd/34726738635.]



[Figure 3.10. Flor de Piña dance, state Guelaguetza Lunes del Cerro. Photograph from turimexico.com, https://www.turimexico.com/festival-la-guelaguetza-lunes-del-cerro-en-oaxaca/#prettyPhoto.]

Since 1980, Oaxaca's Secretary of Tourism has organized the Guelaguetza Festival, adding an "Authenticity Committee" to reside over festival programming. The committee is composed of twelve urban folklore specialists who travel to the different regions and communities of Oaxaca to hold "auditions" for potential Indigenous groups.[221] Just as intellectuals and cultural specialists organized the Homenaje Racial as an assertion of state authority over Oaxaca's "racial regions," the contemporary committee renders strict control over the festival's vaguely defined and yet jealously guarded claim to authenticity. According to Poole, who conducted interviews with committee members between 1998 and 2004: "Through such passive policing of the distinction between general 'ways of being' and the extremely concrete details of costume, choreography, and appearance that constitute evidence of 'authentic cultural expression,' the committee establishes certain limits for the ways in which claims to cultural distinction can be made."[222] Yet while many of the dances and rituals that currently appear annually in the Guelaguetza "*Lunes del Cerro*" showcase could be described as stylized versions of certain customary traditions in Indigenous communities, some dances have been composed and choreographed in recent decades specifically for presentation at the Guelaguetza. The Authenticity Committee also tightly controls regional traje for the Guelaguetza stage, resulting in

[221] Poole, "Affective Distinctions," 215.
[222] Ibid.

Guelaguetza "costumes" very different from the clothing that may actually be seen in use in a given Indigenous community.[223]

The popular *Flor de Piña* ("Pineapple Blossom") dance offers a good example of cultural hybridization that gets coded as "tradition" to serve the visual politics of the Guelaguetza and explicates how the Guelaguetza's aesthetic was informed by lessons from the Homenaje Racial. In the 1932 Homenaje Racial, the group from the municipality of San Juan Bautista Tuxtepec (region Papaloapan) was heavily criticized for its presentation. They were accused of dancing in "work clothes" and referred to with the degrading term "*jarochos*," meaning "brownish-grey mulattos," or an ethnic mixture of Afro-Mexicans and "indios."[224] In 1957, municipal authorities in Tuxtepec, headed by the governor, created a campaign to win back Tuxtepec's place in the regional folklore festival, now called Guelaguetza, and the following year the Flor de Piña was created. Composer Samuel Mondragón was recruited to write the music and Professor Paulina Sofía Ocampo to create the choreography for the Flor de Piña.[225] [Figure 3.9] The traje for the dance was conceived as a hybrid of the distinctive communities in the region, with a mix of huipil styles from Ojitlán, Jalapa

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[223] On Guelaguetza costuming and its contrasts with Indigenous customary dress, see Biblioteca de Investigación Juan de Córdova, *Panel:* "*Guelaguetza La Construcción de Una Tradición: Indumentarmúsica y Danza*," YouTube video, 1:39:30, from a talk recorded July 2014, posted January 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XKKo5anzVCg.

[224] María de la Luz Maldonado Ramírez, "La Guelaguetza y Los Procesos de Simbolización de La Ritualidad Festiva En Las Comunidades de Oaxaca," *Cuadernos Del Sur* 38–39 (January 2015): 80. https://cuadernosdelsur.com/wp content/uploads/2016/10/MariadelaLuz-Maldonado-Ramirez.pdf. This racial slur was likely directed at the Tuxtepec delegation as a result of their proximity to the coastal areas of Veracruz, where one may find Afro-Mexican communities, descendants of African slaves brought by the Spanish. Now the term "jarocho" is often used to label a person from Veracruz.

[225] Xochitl Consuelo Chavez, "Migrating Performative Traditions: The Guelaguetza Festival In Oaxacalifornia" (PhD. diss., University of California, Santa Cruz, 2013), 136, http://escholarship.org /uc/item/029764fs.

de Díaz, Valle Nacional, Ixcatlán, and Usila to create "costumes" suitable for the dance.[226] The poet Felipe Matías Velasco wrote the poem "*Flor de Piña*" for recitation during the Guelaguetza presentations, which consists of nine verses in metered rhyme that describe the beauty and distinction of the women of Papaloapan and point out details of their traje.[227]

The music and choreography were specifically designed for presentation on the Guelaguetza Auditorium stage in the round, with the goal of securing that the Tuxtepec delegation would be invited to perform in the Lunes del Cerro year after year.[228] The dance is unique because it is one of the only regional dances that is gender-divided, performed by all women.[229] [Figure 3.10] The women dance with pineapples, the principal product of the Papaloapan region, on their shoulders. The dance unfolds with the women in various formations, dancing shoulder to shoulder and kicking their legs, much like the American Rockettes, dancing around the pineapples, with the music building to a crescendo of quick footwork – a true crowd-pleaser. Flor de Piña presents the women of Tuxtepec as modern, independent, beautiful, and fertile. It epitomizes how the overt indigenismo of the Homenaje Racial was re-coded for the contemporary spectacle, in keeping with custom of presenting women and their clothing as symbols of fertility, regional distinction, and mestizaje.

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[226] Malonado Ramírez, "La Guelaguetza En," 108. As aforementioned, a huipil is a Mexican Indigenous women's garment, an embroidered blouse or tunic traditionally made by hand in Indigenous pueblos and bearing a design with social, familial, communal, and symbolic significance.
[227] Malonado Ramírez, "La Guelaguetza En," 81.
[228] Lizama Quijano, 271–72.
[229] Some historians have noted that the dancers chosen to present the Flor de Piña in the annual Lunes del Cerro tend to be mestiza women from the city of Tuxtepec rather than Indigenous women from the surrounding rural pueblos. See Lizama Quijano and Malonado Ramírez, "La Guelaguetza En."

The Tuxtepec campaign to invent a regional dance for the Guelaguetza showcase was a success – the dance is now seen every year without fail in the Lunes del Cerro.[230]

Other groups have not been able to win this distinction. In the 2000 Lunes del Cerro performance, the Authenticity Committee invited a delegation from one of the Afro-mestizo communities of the Oaxacan coast for the first time. These communities have typically been ignored by official government programs, cultural events, and even the ethno-linguistic registry of the National Institute for Indigenous Affairs (INI). Similar to the racialized critique that Tuxtepec received at the Homenaje Racial, the Afro-Mexican group were roundly criticized in 2000 and have never been invited back. An excerpt from Poole's interview with the head of the Authenticity Committee reveals how raced and classed notions of value drive the committee's evaluation of the delegation's visual presentation: "The public did not like them because they lacked the attraction of regional costumes. They wore some ratty, old pants...It is not that we are racists but they have no attractive qualities to present in a spectacle...It is not that we disdain them, we want them to continue preserving [their customs], but they should conserve them in their own context, in their place of origin."[231]

These and other moves by the Secretary of Tourism to standardize and market the festival inspired a slow build of public resentment while the Guelaguetza staked its claim as the greatest Indigenous show in Mexico. As Chris Goertzen observes, the contrast between the Guelaguetza's image of Indigenous peoples and the realities of

[230] Goertzen, 73.
[231] Poole, "Mestizaje," 192.

minoritized communities is visually manifest in two public spaces in Oaxaca – the zócalo, where Indigenous activists camp out every summer under tarps to call attention to the social injustices they bear at the hands of the state, and the Guelaguetza Auditorium, which "brings native, local mestizo, and national and international tourist populations together in a way that implicitly declares that the Indigenous people are happy, healthy, and exotic in a benign way: they decorate the state. The tight control that visiting dance troupes endure during the Guelaguetza suggests that the populations they represent, populations that we are intended to accept as standing for all of Indigenous Oaxaca, could not possibly be unruly or in any way unhappy."[232] Thus the festival was ripe for "retaking" in 2006, when state citizens were coming together around their contempt for governor URO, racialized and gendered structural inequities, and their visions for a new popular government.

**Whose Guelaguetza?**

Amid increasing public concerns about the Guelaguetza Festival and growing disdain for Ulises Ruiz Ortiz, the governor made two adjustments to the Guelaguetza Lunes del Cerro dance performance schedule that further fueled Oaxacan citizens' anger. First, during his first year in office (2005), he decided to add an additional Lunes del Cerro performance on each Monday of the Guelaguetza Festival so that there would be both a morning and afternoon show, which the general public understood as a blatantly capitalist move to make more money from ticket sales.

[232] Goertzen, 85–86.

Second, the following year in 2006, the governor scheduled the first performance on July 17th, the day before the anniversary of the former Mexican president and fellow Oaxaqueño Benito Juarez's death. Until then, the policy had been that if one of the last Mondays in July coincided with the anniversary of the president's death, the performance would be postponed until the following Monday in respect for Juarez's legacy. URO's break with this policy was seen as a lack of deference to a well-loved Oaxacan leader and promoter of peace.

In the weeks leading up to the Guelaguetza in July of 2006, the Oaxaca Commune was gathering considerable strength. Oaxaca City was in a state of widespread unrest and APPO was demanding URO's removal from office. URO had fled Oaxaca City and moved most of his government offices to suburban areas outside of the capital. Appearing behind the safety screen of corporate television stations, URO insisted that the Guelaguetza would continue as scheduled. Meanwhile, APPO was planning to erect its own People's Guelaguetza. Professor Soberanes, Section 22 teacher and administrator of statewide Indigenous education programs, explains that the same group of people who had proposed the creation of the APPO, including a sizeable base of Section 22 leadership, was also responsible for the conception of the Guelaguetza Popular as an "arma de lucha" in support of APPO's movement.[233] This amounted to a multifaceted strategy with what I characterize as two prongs that each operated primarily through visual culture, with the aim –

[233] Interview with Professor Fernando Soberanes Bojórquez, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, July 16, 2016.

recalling Dinerstein – of denouncing the status quo and then to promote an alternative.




[Figure 3.11. "Boicot a la Guelaguetza Comercial!" APPO boycott poster, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, 2006. Photograph by Itandehui Franco Ortiz.]

**Boycott the commercial Guelaguetza!**

In the first place, the People's Guelaguetza was a denunciation strategy: a protest of the official state-sponsored Guelaguetza and an indictment of URO's administration. So the first move in the inauguration of the People's Guelaguetza was a boycott campaign. A boycott of the state Guelaguetza would disrupt the finely tuned annual tourist envelopment of the city and would be economically damaging to the

state. Added to the movement-occupied government buildings, APPO barricades all over the city, and graffiti created by graphic art collectives, this would support the campaign to force the removal of URO according to the people's legal right to call for the governor's deposal amid a state of "ungovernability," as I outlined in the last chapter.

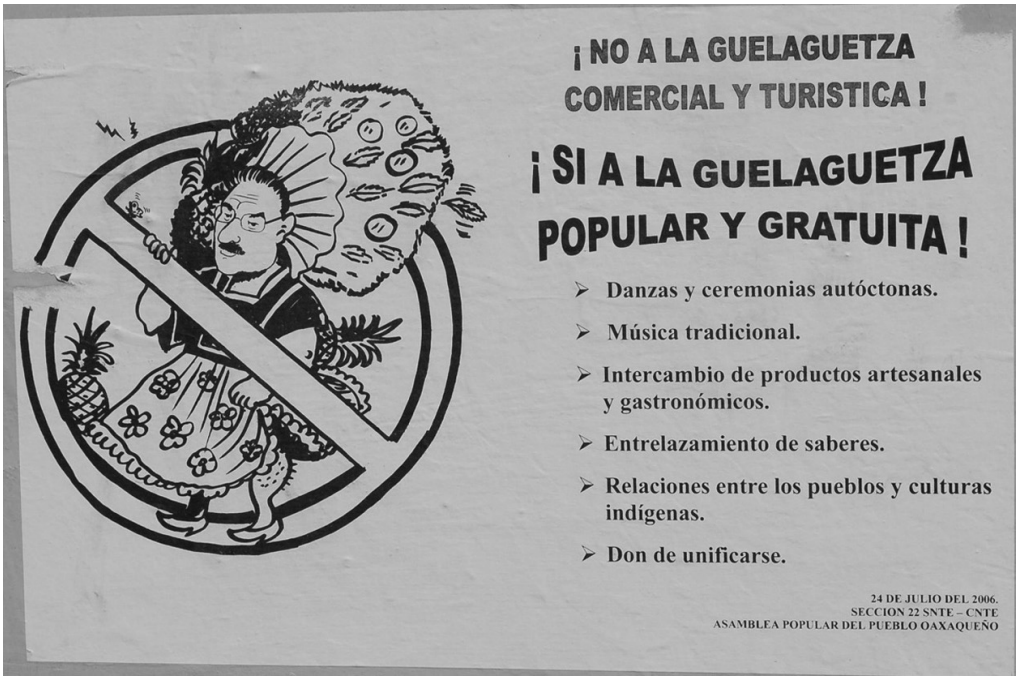
Thus one can begin to unravel the complex visual politics of the 2006 People's Guelaguetza in its boycott propaganda. [Figure 3.11] This poster, which was wheat-pasted to a wall in the city center in 2006, reveals the Guelaguetza in its commercialized excess and domination by government interests and corporate capitalism. A satirized figure of URO with oversized nose and donkey ears appears in the full regalia of the one of the most popular and iconic Guelaguetza dances, *Danza de la Pluma* (Feather Dance), from the Central Valleys region. His feather headdress spells out P-R-I, his tunic reads "In the face of impunity," suggesting the criminality and corruption of URO's PRI administration. In a jab at the authenticity claims made for the Guelageutza, a "Made in Taiwan" tag shows on the sleeve of the figure's traje. He holds a gun in one hand and in the other, the traditional *sonaja* (gourd rattle) used in the Danza de la Pluma, but here inscribed with multi-national brands like "Coca-Cola." Behind him, a smaller skulking figure, also in costume, hugs a bag of cash, his headdress emblazoned with a list of Guelaguetza beneficiaries: "Hotel owners, transnational [corporations], tourist agencies, restaurant owners..." In bold lettering above the figures' heads, the central message reads: "Boycott the commercial Guelaguetza! Cultural Loot! Corruption of Tradition!" This poster's image implicates

a wide range of hegemonic forces at work behind the state Guelaguetza and yet manages to distil them in the sardonic representation of URO, the central buffoon in a spectacle-turned-circus of greed.

Through APPO-Section 22 agitprop visuals like this poster, long-held complaints about the state Guelaguetza were directly connected to growing public disdain for URO. This poster also operates from an understanding of the Guelaguetza as an Indigenous tradition that had been stolen by the state and transformed into a spectacle for profit. But as we have seen, the Guelaguetza had never been an Indigenous "tradition" going back to pre-Hispanic times but rather was an "invented tradition" designed to support the various political and economic needs of the state. APPO took the deceptive Guelaguetza origin story and re-installed it as the basis of both their critique of the state's festival and their reasoning for "reclaiming" the event. In order to critique the falseness of the state Guelaguetza, APPO "occupied" its visual logic and associated rhetoric.

[Figure 3.12] Another poster created by APPO and Section 22 situates the two Guelaguetzas as oppositional and uses the gendered dimensions of the festival to critique URO and his commercial Guelaguetza. On the left side, a caricature of the governor appears in a mix of traje and props related to some of the most popular Guelaguetza delegations and dances, his right hand holding onto the slash of the "no symbol" or "prohibition sign" as if he is imprisoned behind it. He wears the iconic embroidered dress of the *Tehuanas* from the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, made famous through artist Frida Kahlo's adoption of the traje as her signature style. Howell calls

the Tehuana dress "a fixture of popular culture...featured in plays, paintings, television shows, and cartoons reflecting the construction of Tehuana women as representing cosmopolitanism and tradition, femininity and strength, obesity and beauty, and modernity and tradition."[234] The ceremonial lace Tehuana headdress that URO wears transforms into turkey feathers at its outer edges, both ridiculing the governor and invoking the live turkey that appears in several of the Guelaguetza performances (an important staple of fiestas in Indigenous pueblos). On his shoulder, backside, and at the left edge of the image are pineapples, the iconic prop of the Flor de Piña dance from Tuxtepec.




[Figure 3.12. "No a la Guelaguetza Comercial y Touristica!" APPO boycott poster, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, 2006. Photograph by Itandehui Franco Ortiz.]

[234] Howell, "Beauty, Beasts," 41.



[Figure 3.13. Governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz on Channel 9, Oaxaca, 2006.
Video still, *Un poquito de la tanta verdad*, Jill Freidberg, 2007.]

While in some ways the poster's image lampoons the marketing of the Guelaguetza in the use of recognizable elements of the cultural showcase, the symbolism of URO dressed as a Tehuana is specific to in his personal connection to the Isthmus region, where he grew up.[235] It is also important to note that the image of URO in Tehuana dress and heels (a footwear that bespeaks hyper-femininity more than traditional traje, since Tehuana women generally wear sandals), trades on homophobic and heteronormative stereotypes to ridicule URO, a problematic tactic that we will see was also employed in the various elements of the People's Guelaguetza.

On the right-hand side of the poster, the text reads: "No to the commercial and touristic Guelaguetza! Yes to the popular and free Guelaguetza!" and promises "autochthonous dances and ceremonies, traditional music, exchange of folk art and

[235] Howell, 40.

food products, interlacing of knowledges, relationships between pueblos and Indigenous cultures" and "the gift of unifying." The message is that the Guelaguetza Popular offers genuine intercultural exchange and solidarity between Indigenous pueblos and Oaxaca City residents while the "official" Guelaguetza appropriates and prostitutes Indigenous culture for the interests of the ruling class, even when those in power can make claims to the cultural heritage in question.

APPO combined the "occupation" of Guelaguetza visual politics in their boycott poster campaign with their oft-used tactic of physical occupation through blockades (*bloqueos*). During the weekend before the Monday of the first scheduled 2006 Lunes del Cerro state Guelaguetza dance performance, approximately 10,000 members of APPO occupied the Guelaguetza Auditorium. They blocked the roads leading to Fortín Hill, passing out flyers indicating that the state's Guelaguetza Festival was not welcome and that the people would be celebrating with the Guelaguetza Popular.[236] [Figure 3.13] That weekend, governor Ruiz Ortiz appeared coifed and combed in a black suit and tie, sitting in front of an image of Benito Juárez, on the state public television Channel 9 (the channel that would later be taken by APPO women). In what many considered his first public concession that he did not have control of the growing uprising in the capital city, he said that the Guelaguetza would be postponed, citing worries for the safety of tourists in light of the "violent" tactics of the unionized teachers and their supporters. But the

[236] Denham and C.A.S.A, 111. Some reports in local newspapers indicated that APPO members were responsible for extensive damage to the auditorium during their occupation, including graffiti, physical damage to the structure of the auditorium, and a partially burned stage. APPO members claim that the damage was done by police infiltrators and blamed on them.

Guelaguetza was not just postponed; for the first time in 31 years, it did not happen at all that year.[237]

***"Por el pueblo y para el pueblo"***

With URO's Guelaguetza successfully derailed, APPO offered its version, a festival that was free and open to all, created "by and for the people." This phrase, "por el pueblo y para el pueblo" appeared in informal announcements for the People's Guelaguetza, but it was also APPO's tagline for the popular democracy it was building. This rhetorical connection brings us to the second prong of the Guelaguetza Popular as an "arma de lucha" – promoting alternatives innovated from below. In presenting the alternative Guelaguetza, APPO was also endorsing its proposed decolonial democratic model of government via a prefigurative praxis linking cultural performance and political engagement.

As we recall from the Introduction, Maeckelbergh defines prefiguration as "an enactment of the ultimate values of an ideal society within the very means of struggle for that society."[238] Prefigurative politics are recognized as a prevalent practice in contemporary social movements and most recently in alter-globalization and counter-neoliberal movements.[239] In the context of Indigenous autonomy

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[237] La Redacción, "Realizan Maestros La Primera 'Guelaguetza Popular Alternativa,'" *Proceso*, July 25, 2006, https://www.proceso.com.mx/219660/realizan-maestros-la-primera-guelaguetza-popular-alternativa.

[238] Maeckelbergh, "Road to Democracy," 302.

[239] David Graeber, "The New Anarchists," *New Left Review* 13, no. January-February (2002), https://newleftreview.org/II/13/david-graeber-the-new-anarchists and Luke Yates, "Rethinking Prefiguration: Alternatives, Micropolitics and Goals in Social Movements," *Social Movement Studies* 14, no. 1 (2014): 1–21, doi:10.1080/14742837.2013.870883.

movements in Latin America, we must also go back to A.C. Dinerstein's insistence that we think prefiguration as part of autonomy initiatives expressed in "a complex collective action that includes the negation of the given; the creation of the alternative; the struggle with, against and beyond the state; the law and capital."[240] The People's Guelaguetza, resisting the logic of capital in the "official" Guelaguetza, was at the same time the promotion of an alternative government and a form of struggling "with, against, and beyond the state" to build an inclusive and just form of political participation for the state's minoritized communities.

While APPO's model was based in familiar practices of Indigenous governance, it was also conversant with the much longer-term struggle for Indigenous dignity and autonomy in southern Mexico. Indigenous movements of the late 1970's – early 1990's focused on securing autonomy in municipal-level politics, such as the COCEI and MULT movements covered in Chapter 1. To refresh our understanding, the Coalition of Workers, Peasants, and Students of the Isthmus, or COCEI movement, organized an alliance with the Mexican Communist Party to get onto the municipal elections ballot in 1980 and 1981 in the small city of Juchitán near the coast of Oaxaca.[241] In 1980, COCEI won the municipal elections, becoming the very first left-leaning and Indigenous organized "official" municipal government in Mexican history.[242] At the very same time, the CNTE was founded in southern Mexico as the dissident faction of the National Teacher's Union.

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[240] Dinerstein, 18.
[241] Rubin, "COCEI in Juchitán," 123.
[242] Ibid.

Further, as previously stated, the 1994 Zapatista National Liberation Army uprising in Oaxaca's neighboring state of Chiapas changed the course of Indigenous autonomy movements in Mexico altogether, identifying the struggle for autonomy and self-determination with alter-globalization and counter-neoliberalism initiatives. In negotiations with the Mexican government, the Zapatistas drew up the San Andres Accords Regarding the Rights and Culture of the Indigenous, which were meant to secure autonomy for the Indigenous peoples of Mexico. Autonomy was defined in the Accords as "the concrete expression of the exercise of the right to self-determination, within the framework of membership in the National State. The Indigenous peoples shall be able, consequently, to decide their own form of internal government as well as decide their way of organizing themselves politically, socially, economically and culturally."[243] Since the San Andres Accords eventually unraveled when the Mexican government failed to implement many of its provisions, the Zapatistas abandoned negotiations with government and state powers and have operated from a more separatist model of autonomy ever since.

As was briefly outlined in Chapter 1, the EZLN uprising had inspired worries among state officials about similar uprisings erupting in Oaxaca, prompting the state to quickly pass the 1995/ 1998 Law of Indigenous Rights. This document secured legal rights in three-quarters of Oaxaca's municipalities to participate in usos y costumbres through popular assemblies for affairs of local governance, free of political parties and ballot voting. The law had also formalized Indigenous

[243] Struggle Archive,"English Translation of the San Andres Accords between the EZLN and Mexican Government," trans. Rosalva Bermudez-Ballin, http://struggle.ws/mexico/ezln/san_andres.html.

communities' relationship to state and to centralize electoral practices, ensuring that they could participate through first generating consensus in local popular assemblies. This highly localized form of Indigenous autonomy allowed Oaxaca's pueblos originarios to live as they chose and to determine their own local affairs, but in many ways limited their agency in state political matters. It also increased the pueblos' vulnerability to fraud and corruption through vote trading and caciquism in translations between local decisions and state elections, ultimately supporting the continuation of the decades-long PRI regime. The Oaxaca Commune was yet another change in the ongoing struggle for autonomy, since the new consciousness about indigeneity and autonomy inspired by the Zapatistas fostered initiatives for creating and supporting educational initiatives for rural Indigenous populations and union structures based in Indigenous communal lifeways.

In the early days of the Oaxaca Commune, Professor Soberanes reports, APPO had composed twenty principles to guide the assembly and structure the movement. Around the time that the People's Guelaguetza was conceived, they added four more, including a provision indicating that APPO would bring the practices of Indigenous communal life and governance, comunalidad, into the popular assembly "as a form of resistance against neoliberal politics."[244] The uptake of comunalidad as a guiding principle for the Oaxaca Commune is the crux bringing together the various initiatives and movements that were constellated in APPO the "assembly of assembly" and "movement of movements": Indigenous autonomy movements; the

[244] Interview with Fernando Soberanes Bojórquez, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, July 16, 2016.

CNTE, the Democratic Teacher's Movement, and Section 22; and Oaxacan civil society organizations coming together to oust governor URO and to build a space for more inclusive and just political participation.

We recall Jaime Martínez Luna's taxonomy of comunalidad as practiced in four elements or pillars – communal land (territorio), communal governance (asamblea), communal labor (tequio), and communal celebration (fiesta). The People's Guelaguetza re-invigorated the festival with the fourth principle – fiesta – the celebration of communal life, the reproduction of the culture of the Indigenous pueblos, and the reaffirmation of communal identity. One key aspect of fiesta in the Indigenous communities, according to Martínez Luna, is *compartencia*, or being together and sharing, which expresses the value of communal living over individualism as the opposite of *competencia* (competition).[245] Guelaguetza, the practice of mutual support and reciprocal exchange of gifts, goods, and labor, is the backbone of compartencia*,* the condition of possibility for communal celebrations. This connotation of guelaguetza had been entirely lost in the predatory usurpation of the term as a name for the state's festival, but was featured in the Guelaguetza Popular, a celebration manifested through collective participation, by and for Oaxaqueños, Indigenous peoples, and their communities.

**The People's Guelaguetza**

A video produced by the APPO-aligned Indigenous video collective Ojo de Agua Comunicación documenting the 2006 Guelaguetza Popular opens with an essay

[245] See Martínez Luna, *Eso que llaman*.

that scrolls across the screen. It explains the rationale behind the creation of the People's Guelaguetza. The polemic repeats once again the story of the Guelaguetza as originating in a pre-Hispanic fiesta celebrating and giving thanks to "*madre tierra*" (Mother Earth) through offerings to the "corn goddess." It goes on to explain that guelaguetza, together with tequio, are the maximum expressions of mutual aid and fraternity in the Indigenous pueblos. The state Guelaguetza, the text insists, has "nothing to do with" the Zapotec term or its significance; therefore, the Democratic Teachers' Movement and the social organizations of Oaxaca decided to recuperate the meaning of the fiesta for the people of Oaxaca and to demonstrate the authentic richness of their own communities. In the face of the state government prostituting the term guelaguetza for imperialist intentions, so minimizing Indigenous culture, the video essay states: "It is the moment to recuperate our ancestral values and not exhibit ourselves as a spectacle that degenerates our identities. It is the moment to show who we are, not who they want us to be."[246]

The video's opening salvo clarifies the alternative Guelaguetza as an action of recuperating tradition and a dedication to self-representation and self-determination, but it also traffics in the same creation myths that the state Guelaguetza has been repeating for so many years that most Oaxacans can recite them by heart. Just as the state needed the Indigenous "pagan" history to make sense of their civilized, modernized festival of today, APPO needed the ancient Indigenous roots of the fiesta to push forward a conversation about Indigenous autonomy and dignity as

[246] Ojo de Agua Comunicación, *2006 Guelaguetza Popular*, DVD (Oaxaca de Juárez, Oaxaca: Ojo de Agua Comunicación, 2006).

foundational to their proposal for a decolonial democracy at the state level. For the most part, the Guelaguetza Popular has maintained the format of the state's Guelaguetza. This simply made it possible for APPO to give Oaxacans a Guelaguetza with all of the elements of the festival that, quite separate from the criticism, they still held an abiding love and appreciation for but could not afford to attend. In doing this community service, APPO won significant support from Oaxacan citizens. Some, such as elderly folks and young children, had been unwilling or unable to attend the megamarches and other political manifestations. The People's Guelaguetza was an event that everyone could take part in, but it also created an extraordinary opportunity – for the teachers' union to win favor with the public via a protest tactic more palatable to the average Oaxacaqueñx, and for APPO to demonstrate its political proposal and to recruit participants to implement it.

The Guelaguetza Popular gathered Oaxaqueñxs in compartencia and guelaguetza, built around cultural pride and dignity. Bringing these communities together under the mantle of APPO provided a space for Indigenous peoples to begin taking control over the presentation of their own cultural heritage. Cultural self-representation was linked to political self-representation (via direct democracy and self-governance) in APPO, as an expression of APPO's commitment to building its model of political engagement based in Indigenous comunalidad and fostering political participation among the Indigenous pueblos of Oaxaca. The Guelaguetza Popular shifted the conversation on the role of Indigenous autonomy in APPO's movement and allowed Indigenous peoples to "take the stage" in urban state politics.

One of the main sources of contention around the state Guelaguetza had always been the issue of authenticity and the state's claim that the tourism board's Authenticity Committee could rightly judge the cultural authenticity of the dance, customs, and dress of the Indigenous groups based on ethnographic expertise. The People's Guelaguetza iterated a very different claim to authenticity than the state's festival, one that rested on a notion of self-representation where culture and politics converge. Liberated from the demands of a government catering to elite and tourist audiences, APPO's festival offered an opportunity for Indigenous peoples (including, importantly, Indigenous teachers) to represent themselves through cultural and political expression, and to engage in horizontal exchanges with their peers akin to those created in communal popular assemblies. In "occupying" the Guelaguetza Festival and revitalizing it with a spirit of gathering, sharing, reciprocity, exchange, and mutual aid, the People's Guelaguetza prefigured APPO's new model of government by offering a visual, embodied demonstration of the popular assembly principles, based in comunalidad. As a hybrid of an Indigenous fiesta and a political forum, the Guelaugetza Popular created a new political imaginary. The festival imagined political self-representation extending from cultural self-representation, situating indigeneity as central to APPO's proposal for a new government model via visual and embodied expressions reflecting a constitutive Indigenous diversity (rather than anemic "diversity and inclusion" politics), the rights to speak and to be heard, and temporal liberty (freedom from being presented as inertly stuck in an immemorial pastness).




[Figure 3.14. Convite Popular, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, 2006. Video still, *2006 Guelaguetza Popular*, Mal de Ojo TV, 2006.]



[Figure 3.15. Convite Popular, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, 2006. Video still, *2006 Guelaguetza Popular*, Mal de Ojo TV, 2006.]

*Convite Popular*

[Figure 3.14] APPO triumphantly inaugurated the People's Guelaguetza on July 22, 2006. The festival unfolded in the traditional way over three consecutive

days, starting with the convite. Ojo de Agua's video shows a convite bringing several thousand Oaxaca City residents together with groups of thirty to fifty members of Indigenous communities from all over the state for a street party. Gigantes puppets animated by the people walking around inside their cardboard and wire shells and huge marmotas with colorful tassels shining in the warm afternoon sun head up a procession on a cobblestoned downtown street in Oaxaca City. Children standing on the sidewalk holding miniature marmotas try to mimic the dynamic spinning motion achieved by the young men wielding the large balloons supported by harnesses around their waists. Young girls in braids with colorful ribbons and matching brightly-colored skirts and young boys in white pants and tops wearing huarache sandals stand next to their parents, observing similarly dressed women and men in Indigenous groups dance in the street, accompanied by a marching band. As the representative groups pass by with banners identifying their communities, they offer mezcal, tamarind candies, or other regional treats to the people on the sidewalk who wave, clap, cheer, sing along to the folk songs, and repeat the dance steps. A large group of teachers in matching t-shirts march behind a banner announcing Section 22, chanting: "The people united will never be defeated!" When the teachers raise their fists, the crowd does too, in a demonstration of empowered unity and the first of many indications that the dynamic of the Convite Popular volleys fluidly between a folklore celebration and a political march.

Walking through the neighborhoods, the fiesta stops in front of churches and in small plazas, where participants dance with *toritos* ("little bulls" made out of paper

mache, wire, and spinning wheels of fireworks) on their heads, spraying cascades of pyrotechnics everywhere. A woman dressed in market vendors' attire, a simple dress with a floral apron over top, dances with her purse slung across her chest opposite a younger woman wearing a traditional Indigenous woven huipil tunic dress from the region Cañada, while others make a circle around them and follow the dance steps with children in their arms. [Figure 3.15] A group of adolescents in casual street attire, jeans and t-shirts, carry tall, verdant corn stalks tied with colorful ribbons and balloons, bobbing them up and down in the air in time to the music of the marching band. The band plays brass instruments and drums in simple, upbeat tempos, the sones of the various regions and pueblos. The party ends in the zócalo, in a sea of umbrellas and rain ponchos, with everyone singing, dancing, and laughing together in the rain. The Convite Popular introduced the spirit of compartencia, sharing among communities and coming together in mutual support to create a fiesta by and for the people.

*Calenda Popular*

[Figure 3.16] The following day, APPO continued the celebration with the Calenda Popular. Looking at Ojo de Agua's video, we see a massive march that fills the streets of Oaxaca City with a sea of people – the Indigenous community delegations indistinguishable at a distance from the rest of the population marching alongside them. There is no tidy separation between performers and observers like in the state's official calenda. A big truck with a float on the back leads the march,

carrying representatives from the various regions. A commentator from the Section 22 radio station, Radio Plantón, speaks into a microphone as people pass by, smiling and raising their fists in the air to show solidarity: "This is a historic moment for the state of Oaxaca...and doesn't just imply a political demand, nor a salary demand, but a social demand, and also an expression of culture."[247]




[Figure 3.16. Calenda Popular, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, 2006. Video still, *2006 Guelaguetza Popular*, Mal de Ojo TV, 2006.]

[247] Ojo de Agua, *2006 Guelaguetza Popular*.




[Figure 3.17. "Culises," Calenda Popular, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, 2006. Video still, *Un poquito de la tanta verdad*, Jill Freidberg, 2007.]



[Figure 3.18. URO in helicopter "torito," Calenda Popular, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, 2006. Video still, *2006 Guelaguetza Popular*, Mal de Ojo TV, 2006.]

The street and sidewalk are packed with people shoulder to shoulder, carrying homemade marmotas, faroles, posters, corn stalks, mezcal, street food, or props related to the Indigenous communities' trademark *artesanias* (artisan crafts). Instead of staying within the tourist walkway, the parade passes through all of the oldest neighborhoods of the city, with their cobblestoned streets, worn buildings, and humble homes. It is a celebration of *ciudadanos* (city residents), shared by regular folks, families, and neighbors and not dominated by the presence of foreigners and tourists. People actively participate in the dances instead of observing from the sidewalk, introducing through compartencia a link between sharing in communal *fiesta* and participating in APPO. Groups representing APPO marched with banners promoting the popular assembly and denouncing state oppression. They call out chants that were quickly becoming familiar in APPO's movement and the marching band added music modified to accompany the words, including a prefigurative slogan in which the projected goal of the uprising has already come to pass: "*Ulises ya cayó! Ya cayó! Ya cayó!"* ("Ulises already fell! Already fell! Already fell!")

[Figure 3.17] Elements typical to the Guelaguetza parade and other types of calendas are infused with elements typical to political manifestations and marches in the Calenda Popular. Among the larger-than-life gigantes puppets is a satiric representation of governor URO in prison attire with a placard on his chest featuring an incarceration number and the clever play on words, "Culises."[248] One woman has a poster pinned to her shirt that says "*No Al Pinche Fraude!*" ("No Fucking Fraud!")

[248] A play on Governor URO's name (Ulises) and the word "*culo*," meaning "ass."

with a crossed-out image of President Vicente Fox. Someone else carries a farol lantern with a homemade sign saying "Fuera Ulises!" [Figure 3.18] Other faroles and toritos are modified to memorialize various moments of the Oaxaca Commune, including the attempted eviction of the teachers' plantón that started the uprising. This modified torito shows URO inside a police helicopter, spraying tear gas on the people below. [Figure 3.19] In a clip of the Calenda Popular from another documentary, this one by Jill Freidberg, the victorious joy of the people's fiesta is clearly expressed by an older woman walking in the parade wearing a floral dress and head wrap in the style of the Mixe Indigenous communities. Waving a triumphant fist in the air, she shouts boisterously: "Up with Oaxaca! This is the Guelaguetza! Here no one will go hungry! They're not going to charge us anything! It's all free! This is real fiesta and we haven't done it this way for so long!"[249]

The parade ends at the zócalo, with a series of speeches and festivities as the sun goes down. Section 22 leader Enrique Rueda Pachecho takes the microphone to speak to the participants:

> For the first time in more than two decades, the people of Oaxaca have recuperated this historical, cultural, and social tradition that is the reciprocal exchange and organization as we have done historically in each one of the Indigenous pueblos of Oaxaca....And we have decided that it won't only happen for this occasion, but that the people of Oaxaca will retake, as a practice, year after year, this festival, so that from now on, the Guelaguetza will be organized by the people.[250]

[249] Freidberg et. al., *Un Poquito*.
[250] Ojo de Agua, *2006 Guelaguetza Popular*.




[Figure 3.19. "Up with Oaxaca!" Calenda Popular, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, 2006.
Video still, *Un poquito de la tanta verdad*, Jill Freidberg, 2007.]



[Figure 3.20. People's Guelaguetza, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, 2006.
Video still, *2006 Guelaguetza Popular*, Mal de Ojo TV, 2006.]

**The alternative Lunes del Cerro**

[Figure 3.20] The Lunes del Cerro performance culminating the first People's Guelaguetza took place in the soccer stadium of the Oaxaca Technological Institute, about fifteen minutes outside the city center by car. Over 20,000 people arrived in taxis, buses, and in carpools. They were ordinary Oaxaqueñxs of all ages and socioeconomic backgrounds. When the stadium seats had completely filled up, eight thousand extra chairs where added to accommodate the growing crowd. People found seating where they could, with some standing in the areas around the stage on the soccer field, perched on fences, or watching from the hills surrounding the stadium. The video documentation shot by Ojo de Agua reveals a lively, unruly, and joyful scene. Unlike the quietly seated and attentive audiences in the Guelaguetza Auditorium, those attending the People's Guelaguetza come and go, mingle with the performers, talk, laugh, cheer, clap along to the music, and call out encouraging and affirmative accolades to the performers. It is an animated, rowdy fiesta rather than a formal showcase.[251]

The Lunes del Cerro show put on by the state tightly controls the distribution of Indigenous community "delegations" for each of the eight regions of Oaxaca with auditions and formal invitations. The People's Guelaguetza brought double the number of Indigenous groups to participate, including some that had never been invited to perform in the state's show. It was the first time that many of the communities had been together in the same place. The participants' customary attire

[251] Ojo de Agua, *2006 Guelaguetza Popular*.

did not have the uniform, polished, and standardized "costume" appearance attending the dances that take place in the Guelaguetza Auditorium, nor were the women and girls wearing "show" makeup. Instead, many performers wore their own clothing and their movements displayed the organic variations and inconsistencies that one might see in community fiestas.[252]



[Figure 3.21. "Dance of the Chilolos," People's Guelaguetza, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, 2006. Video still, *2006 Guelaguetza Popular*, Mal de Ojo TV, 2006.]

[Figure 3.21] One group performing in the Guelaguetza Popular that had never been seen in the state Guelaguetza was from the Mixteca community of San Juan Yolotepec in the region Sierra Norte. They presented the "*Danza de Chilolos*"

[252] See testimonials included in Denham and C.A.S.A.

(Dance of the Chilolos, a masked, jester-type character). This presentation was significant because the Dance of the Chilolos is one of the dances of the Yolotepeco carnival, taking place annually in March since at least 1911, when the event was first registered in the municipality.[253] It is an expression of the survival of Indigenous *fiesta*, ritual, and cosmology in the face of colonial invasion – a story of Indigenous rebellion and resistance. In the Danza de los Chilolos, there are two personas dancing on stage to a rhythmic tune created by a flute, mouth organ, and drum – the "*chilolos viejos*" and the "*chilolos jovenes*" (old and young chilolos). The young chilolos wear wooden animal masks, multicolored silken shorts, colorful knee-length socks, sandals with bells, and tall, cone-shaped hats decorated with colored ribbons, small round mirrors, and lined around the head with bandanas. The old chilolos wear "viejito" masks of wrinkly-faced grandpas, dark pants, and blazers. Both personas carry a cane stick almost as tall as them. The cane stick is as an important Mesoamerican weapon, and it is used in the final stage of the chilolos dance. This part is called the "*Muerte de los Chilolos*" ("Death of the Chilolos"), unfolding in a stick fight whereby the viejos and the jovenes face off and try to knock one another's sticks away. The purpose is to determine who will be the *mayordomia* (lead organizer) of the next year's carnival.[254] The state Guelaguetza rarely includes carnivalesque presentations like this one, giving preference instead to more formal ceremonial customs and

[253] Vive Oaxaca, "Carnaval de San Juan Yolotepec 2013," accessed February 21, 2019. https://www.viveoaxaca.org/2013/02/carnaval-de-san-juan-yolotepec-2013.html. For more on the Yolotepeco carnival, see Mixzq, *Carnaval de San Juan Yolotepec (Documental) Parte 1*, YouTube video, 9:46, posted August 5, 2010, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v36B2Q_kQTo.
[254] Vive Oaxaca, "Carnaval."

tightly choreographed dances, which tend to make the most sense to a crowd unfamiliar with some of the more irreverent aspects of the carnivals in coastal Oaxacan towns.



[Figure 3.22. APPO and Section 22 leaders, People's Guelaguetza, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, 2006. Video still, *2006 Guelaguetza Popular*, Mal de Ojo TV, 2006.]

APPO took care to allow room for groups to make choices about how they wanted to be seen, reflecting respect for the diversity of Oaxaca's peoples that was directly contrary to the static and monolithic presentation of indigeneity in the state's program. Most crucially, because the majority of the performers in the Guelaguetza Popular were Section 22 teachers and their students from the pueblos, this directly connected the teachers' own indigeneity to their political activism. The union local's

cultural consciousness, which had been steadily developing since the mid-1990's and was given new purchase in APPO, reached its ultimate visual expression in the People's Guelaguetza, where the well-known figure of the teacher-activist was newly embodied as the Indigenous-teacher-activist.

Political rhetoric, visually contextualized and concretized through performative on-stage manifestations, punctuated the People's Guelaguetza programming. Commentaries and narration were provided live by radio personalities from the teachers' Radio Plantón and the local university UABJO's *Radio Universidad* (University Radio), which had been occupied by APPO members. [Figure 3.22] As visible in this clip from 2006, organizers from APPO and Section 22 teachers take the stage together at various moments during the program, some wearing Indigenous customary dress and others in shirts bearing the CNTE logo. They state unequivocally: "We are demonstrating the ability to organize politically, to organize cultural events, to recover our rich history. In the same way, the people have the capacity to [make] their own government."[255] Thus the political agency of Indigenous communities was continually tied to their cultural presentations on stage, which in turn served as a metonym for political self-representation in APPO, an expanded, urbanized version of the familiar practice of communal asamblea.

Some of the most searing commentary rendered on stage came from young Indigenous girls, transforming the focus on Indigenous femininity in the state Guelaguetza into feminist indigeneity in the Guelaguetza Popular. [Figure 3.23] In

[255] Ojo de Agua, *2006 Guelaguetza Popular*.

this clip from Freidberg's film, a tiny Zapotec girl from Villa Hidalgo Yalálag, a town in the Sierra Norte region, stands on stage dressed in the same customary attire as the rest of her group – white floral tunic decorated across the chest with colorful ribbons, beige skirt, sandals, and elaborately undulating black head wrap – and opens her community's dance performance by issuing this reminder: "It is very important that we are reclaiming the Guelaguetza, this celebration of the Indigenous peoples' traditions, a celebration that has been held hostage for decades by those who oppress the Oaxacan people."[256]



[Figure 3.23 Yalalag girl, People's Guelaguetza, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, 2006. Video still, *Un poquito de la tanta verdad*, Jill Freidberg, 2007.]

[256] Freidberg et. al., *Un Poquito.*



[Figure 3.24 “Soy Zapoteco,” People’s Guelaguetza, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, 2006.
Video still, *2006 Guelaguetza Popular*, Mal de Ojo TV, 2006.]

[Figure 3.24] At another moment in the program, a girl of about twelve from a different Zapotec pueblo recites, with a strikingly commanding voice, a long poem called "*Soy Zapoteco*" ("I am Zapotec"). She has clearly prepared extensively for the moment. A small group of about six or seven Section 22 leaders, teachers, and perhaps the girl's parents, stand nearby on the stage in a row, their faces lit with pride. She introduces herself as Wendy Michelle Porras Marcial from the region Sierra Juarez (Sierra Norte). While she recites the poem, her words are slowly and carefully articulated and she extends her hand toward the crowd. An older man kneels to hold the microphone. They both turn rather awkwardly in quarter-turns during the performance in order to face different sections of the audience. Wendy continually readjusts the rebozo shawl that is slung over her shoulder and takes big, deep breaths between phrases. But it is the mixture of defiant anger and pride in the girl's face that most clearly expresses the sentiments of the culpatory lines she delivers, directed at colonizers and neo-colonizers but recited here in solidarity with the Indigenous pueblos in attendance:

> I am Zapotec!
> You wanted to negate my existence,
> but I do not negate yours.
> I exist!...
> You made my ancestors slaves
> and robbed their land.
> You murdered them!
> And now you want to increase your wealth.
> I cultivate the land.
> You harvest it!
> I construct the house.
> You live in it!
> We build our education.
> You destroy it!

> If you don't reflect on everything I have said now,
> and continue to persecute me,
> it is because you are afraid of me.
> It is because you are afraid of me!...[257]

Audience members nod their heads in recognition and cheer in appreciation for her words, some wiping tears from their faces. This clip clearly shows how Indigenous resistance and agency were impactfully performed in the People's Guelaguetza as political testimony, drawing a parallel with testimonials delivered in the horizontal forums of communal popular assemblies.

As Poole and Stephen have pointed out, the Oaxaca Commune provided an opportunity for Oaxacan civil society to claim the rights to speak and to be heard.[258] Stephen identifies the importance of oral testimony in APPO's movement, which brought the practice of testimonials in the community assemblies into new forums for asserting the rights to speak for oneself. Poole makes clear that the form of political representation that APPO proposed was wholly other than that which is purportedly guaranteed by "representative" or electoral democracy: "APPO does not restrict its struggle to questions of 'identity' or demands for state recognition of group and individual rights. Rather, the APPO seems to articulate a sort of collective desire to find a new language of political engagement through which people can claim a right that is not – and in fact probably cannot be – guaranteed in any constitution: the right

[257] These lines have been excerpted from the recitation, as documented in Ojo de Agua, *2006 Guelaguetza Popular*.
[258] See Deborah Poole, "The Right To Be Heard," *Socialism and Democracy* 21, no. 2 (July 1, 2007): 113–16, doi:10.1080/08854300701388161 and Stephen, *We Are the Face.*

to be heard."[259] This often operated, Poole contends, in spaces "in which it is possible to *imagine*" a form of political participation that could be "reflective in the sense that it must be made open to a more patient modality of listening and hearing."[260] This is exactly the kind of prefigurative space that the Guelaguetza Popular provided.

In delivering their own words and making decisions about how to present themselves in performative expressions, Indigenous community members in the People's Guelaguetza also claimed a temporal liberty that worked against decades of state Guelaguetza programming rendering them at once timelessly contemporary, as part of Oaxacan mestizo urbanity, and inertly antiquated, as relics of the "traditional" past. Participating groups shared living customs of communal fiesta rather than tightly choreographed shows. Further, groups found creative ways to intersperse their songs and dances with commentary about the political issues that mattered most in their regions and pueblos and to pledge solidarity with APPO. Visual symbolism of this solidarity and unity under APPO was subtly worked into the costuming and programming. The red APPO star could be seen in among the paper lanterns that were twirled across the stage in the opening segment and amidst the colorful feathers on the headdresses of the athletic Danza de la Pluma performers. Banners and signs featuring APPO iconography and slogans populated the stadium, reading: "*Fuera URO*!" ("URO out!") and "*Viva APPO*" ("APPO lives!"). APPO was the emblem that gathered together diverse groups, each with their own modes of asserting their social and political concerns, and offered a multiplicity of images of indigeneity as coequal,

[259] Poole, "Right To Be Heard," 113.
[260] Ibid., 116.

lived realities, rather than empty tokens of "racial identities." Indigenous peoples of Oaxaca represented themselves in the People's Guelaguetza with the pride of their continued existence but also with the pathos of their ongoing marginalization, as political actors in the present and stewards of a proposed future.

While Indigenous women's self-representation as political actors in the Guelaguetza Popular flipped some of the gendered hierarchies of the state's version and the Diosa Centéotl was removed entirely from the program, some felt that the overall critique of gendered and heteronormative optics did not go far enough. This was a sign of what was still to come in the Oaxaca Commune. As the next chapter will examine, inconsistencies in the gender dynamics of the movement would receive their send-up starting in early August when the women of APPO occupied the state television and radio station, positioning themselves as movement leaders and demanding that APPO make good on its ethos of gender equity.

**Conclusion**

The history of Guelaguetza makes it clear that in Oaxaca, indigeneity is politically charged and contested, and has historically been mobilized for a host of state political agendas. In occupying the state Guelaguetza and its visual logic, APPO was not divesting the festival of its political power but rather re-directing that power to assist the social movement and its project of building a popular government from below. The state's appropriation of the Zapotec concept of guelaguetza has been used as a quaint pretext obscuring the nefarious implication that Indigenous communities

offering the richness of their cultural diversity fulfill an obligation to help maintain Oaxaca's place in the globalized market. APPO's Guelaguetza Popular revitalized the connection between the name of the festival and the daily, lived practice of guelaguetza in Indigenous communities: sharing in fiesta and engaging in mutually supportive collective labor, in this case for a desired future society.

Reflections generated from the first People's Guelageutza were also used to continue shaping APPO's decolonial democratic model over the course of the Oaxaca Commune. Going back to the text cited in Chapter 1 from the opening statement at the National Forum for "Building Democracy and Governability in Oaxaca," which took place just a few weeks after the first People's Guelaguetza, it is clear that APPO was fine-tuning its thinking about indigeneity and autonomy as well as using these ideas to shape its political model. In it, APPO stated that the political transition it was mobilizing would recognize "the *legal pluralism and autonomy of indigenous pueblos, as well as respect for their forms of social and political coexistence as the basis of a new political constitution for the state of Oaxaca*."[261] Directly addressing dialogues opened up around the Guelaguetza Popular, the document insists that APPO's proposed alternative government would ensure: "Respect for the autonomy of the indigenous pueblos and their cultural strategies," because "the culture is alive, we are not museum pieces, nor are we an ecological reserve."[262]

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[261] Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación, Coordinadora Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación, and Section XXII, "Construyendo La Democracia y La Gobernabilidad En Oaxaca," in *Foro Nacional* "*Construyendo La Democracia y La Gobernabilidad En Oaxaca*" (Oaxaca de Juárez, Oaxaca, 2006).
[262] Ibid.

## Chapter Four.
## Televising the Revolution[263]




[Figure 4.1. First occupied Channel 9 broadcast, August 1, 2006. Video still courtesy of Jill Freidberg.]

[Figure 4.1] On the evening of August 1, 2006, six weeks into the Oaxaca Commune, statewide residents tuned into their public television station and encountered a radically different scene via live broadcast from Oaxaca City. A group of approximately fifty women of varying ages crowd into the set and spill outside the

[263] The title of this chapter inverts the title of Gil Scott Heron's infamous 1970 song "The Revolution Will Not Be Televised." However, Heron's message that revolution takes place live and on the ground is not contradicted by the activism detailed in this chapter, but extended and updated – thanks to the women of the CORTV takeover, the Oaxaca Commune was both live *and* televised.

edges of the frame, sitting in chairs or standing behind with banners, one of which reads "When a woman advances, no man is left behind." They salute the camera with raised fists, index and middle fingers forming victory signs, or waving saucepans, singing the popular revolutionary hymn "Venceremos." The women celebrate a historic triumph – they have succeeded in peacefully occupying Oaxaca state radio and television station headquarters (CORTV) and reclaiming public television Canal 9 (Channel 9) on behalf of the Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca.[264]




[Figure 4.2 First occupied Channel 9 broadcast, 1 August 2006. Video still courtesy of Jill Friedberg.]

[264] CORTV public broadcasting corporation operates the 680 AM/ 96.9 FM radio station as well as Channel 9 TV in Oaxaca state.

[Figure 4.2] The chaotic, perambulatory spontaneity of the first occupied CORTV broadcast signaled a landmark moment that unfolded on live television in real time. Women come and go, walking across the studio set, speaking to one another in asides, sharing glances and smiles. The set's backdrop moves – shifting, folding in on itself, shuffling across the on-screen space, an array of women's hands and feet visibly animating it. When the celebratory opening gives way to an on-screen political forum, the women pass a microphone around, each providing some commentary on their reasoning for the occupation. One woman addresses the station's long history of partisanship: "The slogan that says Channel 9 is the 'Channel of the Oaxacan People' is a lie. And why is it a lie? Because the voice and truth of the people have never been heard on this channel."[265] Her fierce gaze distils the rectifying promise of the media takeover – to disseminate the "voice and truth of the people" from those most immediately involved in the Oaxaca Commune to those most directly affected.

[Figure 4.3 - 4.4] The CORTV takeover was the spontaneous precipitate of a women's march earlier that day in support of APPO wherein as many as five thousand demographically diverse women paraded through the streets of Oaxaca banging kitchenware in the tradition of Latin American pots and pans marches or *cacerolazos*.[266] Transforming the tools of domestic labor into "disobedient objects,"

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[265] Clip from Freidberg et. al., *Un poquito*.

[266] A *cacerolazo* refers to collective noisemaking with pots and pans in public manifestations. This strategy was first employed in the 1970s by right-wing, middle-class Chilean women banging empty pots in protest of Salvador Allende's socialist government, which they believed was responsible for food shortages. Since then, cacerolazos have been mobilized throughout Latin America and globally in

they heralded their defiance of Ulises Ruiz Ortiz's repressive government and the network of gendered, raced, and classed social norms that had silenced them within state political discourse, their own communities, and APPO's movement itself.[267] When the march reached its planned end-point at the zócalo that afternoon, some of the women suggested that they continue to CORTV to request a few minutes of airtime in order to voice their political concerns. Roughly three hundred women in this breakout group took buses and taxis to arrive at the station just outside the city center. Perhaps it was no surprise that the CORTV director refused the women airtime, as CORTV's programming was known to serve the interests of the PRI-controlled state. When refused the right to speak, the women of APPO peacefully occupied the station. As told by one of the takeover participants, Catalina Ruiz: "We said 'This media is ours. It is paid for by money from our taxes. We pay for it every time we buy something. It is supposed to be public, to be ours. So now since it is ours, we are going to keep it and run it.'"[268] The APPO women then told station employees that they would be allowed to leave once they had assisted in putting the group on the air.[269] By 7 PM that night, the women were live.

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leftist insurrections to clamor for change in the face of corrupt and dictatorial regimes. For more on the history of the cacerolazo and its uptake in the Mexican context, see Louise E. Walker, *Waking from the Dream: Mexico's Middle Classes after 1968* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013).

[267] I borrow the term "disobedient objects" from the 2014 exhibition of the same name co-curated by Catherine Flood and Gavin Grindon at the Victoria & Albert Museum in London, which surveyed the material culture of global activism and social movements. In the catalogue, disobedient objects is defined as "most commonly everyday objects appropriated and turned to a new purpose...[such as] in the noisemaking pots and pans first used in Chile's *cacerolazos* in the 1970s, in which the archetypal objects of domestic design sounded a counter public sphere," Catherine Flood and Gavin Grindon, *Disobedient Objects* (London: V&A Publishing, 2014), 14.

[268] Catalina Ruiz qtd. in Stephen, *We Are the Face*, 149.

[269] Stephen, *We Are the Face*, 149.




[Figure 4.3. Cacerolazo women's march, August 1, 2006. Video still, *Un poquito de la tanta verdad*, Jill Friedberg, 2007.]



[Figure 4.4. Cacerolazo women's march, August 1, 2006. Video still, *Un poquito de la tanta verdad*, Jill Freidberg, 2007.]

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The occupation of CORTV by Oaxacan women from APPO, which would last for twenty-one consecutive days in August 2006, resulted in approximately one hundred hours of self-produced television programming on Oaxaca state television Channel 9, which they renamed APPO TV. Created ad hoc by women who had not previously operated television equipment, in the frenzied tumult of an occupation always under threat of suppression, the APPO-occupied CORTV broadcasts present an ineluctable political commitment via an open, unapologetic amateurism. The transmissions mark the contours of the women's audacious but precarious fight for political presence, striking a tenuous balance between a solid integrity of purpose and unstable, uncertain conditions. They are raw, impromptu and unfinished, marked by a vibrant lawlessness and haunted with false starts and disordered, overcrowded *mises en scène*. These are fugitive images created by fugitive subjects, seeking freedom and finding refuge from gendered, raced, and classed subjugation. In risking this endeavor and taking advantage of every fleeting moment, the women's broadcasts refuse to deliver a polished image, escaping easy consumption yet forcefully persisting in the slippages between visual encounter, perception, and contemplation. So it is not in spite of, but by way of their visual flaws that the broadcasts operate an *insurgent remediation* – in the sense of abating and correcting the state channel's inflammatory misinformation, but also in the sense of radically reinventing a medium that by 2006 was rapidly being replaced by digital technologies, as a forum for building democracy

from below.[270]

Taking as its starting point the amateurism and fugitivity, or transitory, outlaw spirit of the women's self-produced media, this chapter examines the ways in which the Channel 9 television broadcasts produced during the three weeks of the CORTV occupation assisted in the creation of APPO as a model of decolonial democracy. I argue that in staging their takeover of state television as an occupation of public space, the CORTV women creatively *ab-used* the instruments of state power to develop a forum for political deliberation and debate that re-articulated and reframed issues of gender, class, and indigeneity in APPO's social movement.[271] They prefigured APPO's proposed democratic model by initiating a decolonial feminist restructuring of APPO on public TV, visualizing the popular assembly as a dynamic work-in-progress, and inviting broad participation and support to realize APPO's democracy "to come."[272]

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[270] In the summer of 2006, YouTube was less than a year old and Facebook had not yet begun to allow public users, which would happen toward the end of that year. The analogue set was just beginning to make way for the new wave of Internet and social media driven political projects and social movements. Indeed, TIME Magazine's 2006 "Person of the Year" was "You": "Yes – You...for seizing the reins of the global media, for founding and framing the new digital democracy, for working for nothing and beating the pros at their own game." Lev Grossman, "You — Yes, You — Are TIME's Person of the Year," *Time* (December 25, 2006) http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1570810,00.html. If the "digital democracy" was on the Internet, a different form of DIY democracy was brewing on the ground in Oaxaca, at the grassroots.

[271] I adapt the term ab-used from Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, to indicate "using from below," mobilizing productive missteps and failures to make use of what we have learned or inherited while also working to "mine under" the inequities embedded therein. See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).

[272] In the phrasing of Jacques Derrida, whose conception of democracy as always deferred and open to the future is useful for considering the fugitive character of democratic practice itself and the prefigurative initiative of the CORTV broadcasts in mobility toward an imaginable but never fully knowable future politics. See Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (London: Routledge, 1994).

My reading of fugitivity in the amateur aesthetics of the CORTV broadcasts is informed by a robust constellation of ideas in the scholarly "undercommons," Fred Moten and Stephano Harney's conception of modes of sociality among marginalized communities geared toward "fugitive planning" as "the right to refuse what has been refused to you."[273] I engage Tina Campt's "black feminist fugitivity" and Jarrett Martineau's "fugitive indigeneity," each of which investigate minoritized subjects' modes of refusal and resistance to the dominant order as operated through visual texts. As Moten and Harney signal in their proposal for "fugitive planning," the notion of fugitivity in the Black Radical Tradition is that of both a forced condition of existence and a flight against that subjection. Moten writes that fugitivity "is a desire for and a spirit of escape and transgression of the proper and the proposed."[274] Campt brings this to visual culture when she proposes the transmodal praxis of listening to images that slip from visibility due to the illegibility of their Black diasporic subjects in visual canons. She explores fugitivity in these images and on the part of their subjects as "creative *practices of refusal*, nimble and strategic practices that undermine the category of the dominant."[275] Martineau (writing with Eric Ritskes) theorizes "fugitive indigeneity" in Indigenous visual practices as choosing "refusal and flight as modes of freedom" and "a shared movement away from the enclosures

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[273] Fred Moten and Stefano Harney, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study (*New York and Port Watson: Wivenhoe/ Minor Compositions, 2013), 8.
[274] Fred Moten, *Stolen Life*, *consent not to be a single being* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018), 131.
[275] Tina Campt, *Listening to Images* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), 32.

of colonial modernity and into resurgent Indigenous visions of decolonial futures."[276]

Oaxacan women, taking up transient residence on screen, mobilized "a shared movement away" from their confinements, but I assert that they had to operate in prismatic, sometimes disparate ways, using, pace Audre Lorde, the "master's tools" to construct bridges of diplomacy between APPO and its not-yet incorporated publics.[277] In the context of Indigenous struggles in Latin America, the notion of fugitivity offers flexibility for describing in these movements the uneasy yet necessary confluence of creating new political options while negating existing forms of oppression and of struggling for autonomy in Indigenous communal governance as well as increased presence in state politics. I return to A.C. Dinerstein, who poses this challenge – the need to respond dynamically to hegemony in the struggle toward decolonial options – in her description of Latin American autonomous Indigenous politics as "a complex collective action that includes the negation of the given; the creation of the alternative; the struggle with, against and beyond the state; the law and capital."[278] Dinerstein seeks to "problematise, expand and contextualise the notion of prefiguration by proposing a more complex understanding of the dynamics that intervene in the anticipation of a better world in the present."[279] She asserts that prefiguration in Indigenous autonomy movements, by definition a decolonizing process, cannot operate entirely separate from the state. Thus Indigenous movements

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[276] Jarrett Martineau and Eric Ritskes, "Fugitive Indigeneity: Reclaiming the Terrain of Decolonial Struggle through Indigenous Art," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 3, no 1 (May 20, 2014): IV and III, http://www.decolonization.org/index.php/des/article/download/21320.
[277] Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays And Speeches*. Trumansburg, NY: Crossing Press, 1984.
[278] Dinerstein, 18.
[279] Ibid.

for social justice and their participants must juke and weave in and out of state territories and logics in an "embodied practice of flight."[280] The women of APPO waged "a complex collective action,"[281] disseminating fugitive "visions of decolonial futures" [282] on CORTV that were fledgling, piecemeal, and in need of extended participation for their realization.

I have invoked Derrida's notion of "democracy to come" in keeping with the larger goal of this dissertation to explore the social movement visual culture of the Oaxaca Commune as prefigurative of a decolonial democracy, as trafficking in the radical futurity of transformative political potentiality. Whereas Derrida speaks of the future anterior, Campt discusses the "future real conditional:" "the grammar of black feminist futurity is a performance of a future that hasn't happened but must."[283] Martineau and Ritskes posit that "freedom realized through flight and refusal is the freedom to imagine and create an elsewhere in the here; a present future beyond the imaginative and territorial bounds of colonialism. It is a performance of other worlds."[284] When minoritized subjects engage practices of refusal and flight, leaving behind "rights talk" and the ultimately limiting "struggle for better or more inclusion"[285] to prefigure imagined emancipatory political possibilities, they in essence build something new that opens up "the unsettling presence and

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[280] Martineau and Ritskes, "Fugitive Indigeneity," IV.
[281] Dinerstein, 18.
[282] Martineau and Ritskes, III.
[283] Campt, *Listening to Images*, 17.
[284] Martineau and Ritskes, IV.
[285] Glen S. Coulthard, "Subjects of Empire: Indigenous Peoples and the 'Politics of Recognition' in Canada," *Contemporary Political Theory* 6 (2007): 437-460, cited in Martineau and Ritskes, IV.

acknowledgement of strangeness...not at all captured by a liberal politics of recognition."[286]

What these various scholars make clear is that the strangeness of seeing and hearing those who have been relegated to the margins, on their own terms and within central contexts such as popular forms of visual media, exists in radical alterity. However, as Campt explores with her reading of fugitive subjectivity in vernacular and historical photographic documents, and as Martineau uncovers in readings of fugitive indigeneity in Indigenous art practice, the radical alterity of minoritarian subjects intervening in mainstream visual contexts may act as a cloak of invisibility, allowing for tactical transformative acts. By virtue of the unexpected nature of minoritarian subjects' agency within the very contexts and formations of their systematic minoritization, fugitive acts might escape notice or comprehension by the dominant order. Martineau suggests that fugitive indigeneity is "Indigenous being in a fugitive movement of decolonial becoming...that resists colonial entrapment...trace[ing] a strategic arc in flight from legibility to the settler gaze, state surveillance, and captivation."[287] As will become clear in what follows, the women of APPO TV were in some ways aided by their status as ignored, overlooked, or invisible figures in Oaxacan politics in the sense that it took twenty-one days for state authorities to recognize them as enough of a threat to power to warrant paramilitary attack. Left alone to produce twenty-one days of programming at CORTV, the

[286] Poole, "Right To Be Heard," 116.
[287] Jarrett Martineau, "Creative Combat: Indigenous Art, Resurgence, and Decolonization" (PhD diss., University of Victoria, Canada, 2015), 8.

women transformed APPO's social movement.

My research methodology in analyzing the televisual broadcasts from occupied CORTV also necessarily engages with fugitivity. The fragmented and incomplete nature of the archive serves to highlight how visibility, especially of the understudied and under-archived visual expressions of minoritarian subjects, is always menaced by invisibility, threat of erasure, and disappearance. [288] Working from oral histories and fragments of footage, I examine media culture that escapes from easy consumption and analytical capture. Interrogating amateurism and fugitivity in these visual artifacts and their archives suggests that the ways in which the broadcasts appear in academic and institutional contexts *not to matter* in fact mark the very reasons why they played such a crucial part in APPO's nascent social movement. The critical image, Judith Butler contends, "must not only fail to capture its referent, but *show* this failing." [289] The Channel 9 broadcasts from 2006 both deliver an image of APPO's work-in-progress model of popular democracy and declare the inability to capture it completely, testifying to the need for the wider community to join in the process of its creation and inviting them to do so. Thus these broadcasts and their producers, by engaging in a dynamic, fly-by-night dance with amateurism and fugitivity, accomplish crucial shifts in the shapes and subjectivities of APPO's Oaxaca Commune.

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[288] My archive is a collection of the very few live transmissions from Channel 9 that were captured on VHS tape in 2006 and then digitized. This research would not be possible without filmmaker Jill Freidberg, who supplied about a hundred clips of raw material filmed and archived for her documentary, some never shown before.

[289] Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (New York: Verso, 2004), 149.

**Mass media in Oaxaca**

An International Civil Rights Commission for Human Rights Observation report on the Oaxaca Commune contextualizes the importance of alternative media for the uprising by explaining how Oaxaca's media has historically operated as a site of hegemony:

> The use of the media as an instrument of social control has a deep-rooted history in Mexico in general and in Oaxaca in particular. A great part of the local media – press, radio, and television – accept official funds and the ones that refuse to, suffer many hardships as a consequence. That is the case of the newspaper *Noticias de Oaxaca* that has had its telephones intercepted for more than ten years and is the target of all kinds of harassment and aggressions for the...crime of maintaining independence.[290]

*Noticias* newspaper has remained independent despite severe repression including employee kidnappings, attacks on newspaper offices, and continuous threats from government loyalists. During the Oaxaca Commune, it was the only independent newspaper reporting and thus reached the largest circulation in local press history at 45,000 copies daily.[291] Journalists reporting on the Oaxaca Commune confirmed that in vast majority of cases "they did not see reflected in the media what they observed in the field. The decisions on whether or not to publish some images obeyed, according to them, the objective of presenting the events from a viewpoint that was sensationalist and even openly hostile towards the protagonists of the movement."[292]

Oaxaca had no independent television station when the Oaxaca Commune began, as the public television station Channel 9 had long since become a tool of the

[290] Webb-Pullman et. al., "Report Concerning the Events of Oaxaca."
[291] Ibid.
[292] Ibid.

PRI government. Roberto Olivares, who was a producer for public television before he took part in founding Indigenous video collective Ojo de Agua Communication, explains in an interview that state media had not always been a mouthpiece for the government.[293] According to Olivares, Oaxaca state radio and television was consolidated in the 1990's under the direction of Virgilio Caballero, a journalist and proponent of public media. During this period, Oaxaca's public media were participatory spaces in which the programming reflected the cultural richness among the Indigenous communities of the state. Olivares describes one very popular program of this time period that he was involved in producing, called "Living Roots," which showcased the celebrations, rituals, and ceremonies of Oaxaca's pueblos. He recounts that the production team had so many invitations from various pueblos to come film their community events that they did not have to scout for material. With programming such as this, Oaxacans were accustomed to public media as a space of free expression that reflected Oaxaca's pluricultural and ethnolinguistic diversity. While there were laws in place to ensure that public media incorporated the views and participation of Oaxacan citizens, Olivares says, the system changed again by the turn of the twenty-first century, rendering Oaxaca's public media much like media in the rest of Mexico, "political tools used at the whim of governors."[294] Stephen writes, "by 2006 COR-TV and radio functioned primarily to applaud the actions of the governor

[293] "Roberto Olivares, filmmaker with Ojo de Agua Communication on the history of the media in Oaxaca," Media, Gender, and Indigenous Radio – Videos, *We are the Face of Oaxaca* website: https://faceofoaxaca.uoregon.edu/media/video-testimonials/. doi:10.7264/N3N877QK.
[294] Ibid.

and to prepare the public for upcoming governmental campaigns."[295]

Under Oaxacan governor Ruiz Ortiz (URO), according to popular consensus, mass media operated as the "fourth branch of government." As part of his election campaign, URO had "clearly threatened the independent press" and once he was a governor "the threats and attempts to quiet all critical voices intensified" with attacks, kidnappings, and occupations of media offices.[296] URO installed party loyalists in newspaper, radio, and television positions and continued repressive tactics against any dissenting journalism. In this time period, Channel 9 discontinued the multilingual and multicultural programming that had characterized the channel as produced by Caballero in the 1990's. Instead, it featured light-skinned mestizo television personalities pushing social and political perspectives that supported the governor and the PRI.

**Indigenous media in Oaxaca**

While self-produced social movement programming for state television in Oaxaca was unprecedented, community and Indigenous media had been central to the Oaxaca Commune from its start. The previously mentioned Indigenous video collective, Ojo de Agua Communication, created an offshoot media collective *Mal de Ojo TV* (Evil Eye TV) at the beginning of the 2006 uprising. Mal de Ojo filmed Oaxaca Commune marches and mobilizations, documented APPO forums and assemblies, and created a video archive of the uprising. Indigenous and independent

[295] Stephen, *We Are the Face*, 148.
[296] Webb-Pullman et. al., 47.

radio, including pirate radio stations, formed a crucial source for communication among participants of the Oaxaca Commune. Radio Plantón, the teachers' union radio station, had been a long-standing base of information for Section 22, but it was destroyed in the June 14 plantón eviction. Following this, students and APPO members from the Benito Juarez Autonomous University of Oaxaca (UABJO) took over the campus radio station and inaugurated Radio Universidad as the main source of Oaxaca Commune news, warnings, and updates. Radio Universidad was in turn broadcast in the state's rural areas through Oaxaca's vast network of Indigenous community radio stations, the legacy of an early 1980's Indigenous media pilot project initiated by the National Indigenous Institute (*Instituto Nacional Indígenista*, INI).[297]

The women at CORTV produced radio programming in addition to television broadcasts during their twenty-one day media takeover, renaming the radio station "*Radio Cacerola*" after the cacerolazo.[298] Patricia Jiménez Alvarado, one of the CORTV occupiers and co-producer of the APPO TV broadcasts, commented that because Indigenous and movement-run radio were familiar forms, at first the women of APPO produced television programming in a way that mimicked radio

[297] The INI pilot project in Oaxaca to develop Mexican Indigenous media started in 1979 and resulted in hundreds of Indigenous radio stations across the more than 500 municipalities. Since 2003, the National Commission for the Development of the Indigenous Peoples of Mexico (CDI) has coordinated the stations that INI helped to establish. See Erica Cusi Wortham, *Indigenous Media in Mexico: Culture, Community, and the State*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013). For a list of INI radio stations, see Stephen, *We are the Face*, table 5.1, 130-131.

[298] A few excellent studies have analyzed movement-run radio in the Oaxaca Commune, including contributions from Radio Cacerola at occupied CORTV. See Stephen, *We Are the Face* and Freidberg et. al., *Un poquito*. For the purposes of this chapter, I concentrate on the visual impacts of APPO-occupied television broadcasts, which remain understudied.

programming, with oral testimonies and denunciations of the government. However, she explains that they quickly apprenticed to the unique possibilities of televisual media: "We realized that the television should have a greater impact, that it shouldn't be used like the radio just to denounce. We had to work with images to have an impact on the people...[and] work with the content that had not been covered by the state run TV station."[299] Patricia and her compañeras quickly put together a programming schedule to accommodate a diverse range of broadcast material: "In the mornings, we aired documentaries, at 3 PM the APPO news program, and at 5 PM there was space for neighborhoods and communities to air their concerns;"[300] "[We had] "a program about women's rights and another one on health care with participants from the heath care unions. At night, discussions were broadcast on education, on the political situation of the state wherein various specialists and movement leaders participated."[301] With loaned material from Ojo de Agua and other local media organizations, the APPO women aired videos for comparative reflection about social movements and political struggles in other places. Itandehui Santiago Galacia, another one of the CORTV occupiers, remembers receiving a surprising amount of positive feedback from those tuning into documentaries aired on occupied Channel 9: "People would call and tell us they were seeing these films that they had

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[299] Patricia Jiménez Alvarado in Roberto Olivares, *Morena*, DVD (Oaxaca: Mal de Ojo TV, 2007), translation in subtitles.
[300] Patricia Jiménez Alvarado in Olivares, *Morena*.
[301] Patricia Jiménez Alvarado qtd. in Martin Espinoza, "México: Reportaje a Patricia Jiménez," *Prensa Indígena/ Rompiendo El Cerco Del Silencio Largo*, Accessed September 1, 2019. https://www.prensaindigena.org/web/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=19551:mexico-reportaje-a-patricia-jimenez&catid=86:noticias.

never seen before and that this opened their eyes. Documentaries about other social movements in Latin America – Guatemala, Chile. About Zapatismo too."[302]

This planned programming was supplemented with more impromptu broadcasts to inform the public about what was happening in the uprising, such as when there were police attacks or APPO members were detained: "When the movement was attacked, [we] brought in the detainees and presented them on screen to show the people who the provocateurs were."[303] The APPO TV producers also provided live reporting wherein some of the women talked to people in street-level manifestations. For example, Patricia's co-producer, who is also a local teacher, Nancy Mota Figeroa, brought some of her students to help get commentaries from people in the streets of Oaxaca during marches and protests.[304] At times, scheduled programming was interrupted with moment-by-moment updates on the uprising as events unfolded. All of this information was delivered into the homes of those who otherwise had no access to it and to the populations the movement was urgently seeking participation from – other women and Indigenous communities. One independent journalist recounted returning home to his small village in Sierra Juarez, two hours outside Oaxaca City, to find the women of the community gathered around the television, tuned in to watch the women on Channel 9.[305] Therefore, the APPO women had rare access to an audience of Indigenous women all over Oaxaca and a

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[302] Interview with Itandehui Santiago Galacia, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, July 5, 2016.
[303] Patricia Jiménez Alvarado qtd. in Espinoza, "México: Reportaje"
[304] Interview with Patricia Jiménez Alvarado, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, July 3, 2016.
[305] "Kaido" qtd. in "redemma," '"Looking Back on the Oaxaca Rebellion," *libcom.org*, October 11, 2009, http://libcom.org/history/looking-back-oaxaca-rebellion.

unique opportunity to speak to them directly.[306]

**Public and political space for "our voices"**

One of the CORTV occupiers explained: "If we decided to take Channel 9, it is precisely because we have not found a space [for our voices] in any media outlet."[307] While Oaxaca's citywide revolt in the summer of 2006 was steadily growing into an organized social movement, Channel 9 had distorted current events with a media blackout on APPO and the uprising, as journalist Nancy Davies reported on July 15, 2006: "A news blackout, which is very evident when one turns on Channel 9, the television channel of the state government, creates a split in perception – as if we live on different planets – some on the ground affected by what is happening, some in front of the screen oblivious until they come upon a road blockade."[308] The blackout went hand-in-hand with an ongoing smear campaign against the teachers' movement and Section 22, visible on Oaxaca's Channel 9 as well as the national corporate TV stations Televisa and TV Azteca, characterizing the teachers as militant and destructive delinquents. The simultaneous lack of APPO coverage and misrepresentation of the teachers' union connected in what minimal reporting Channel 9 provided about the 2006 manifestations, as the channel presented

[306] Patricia and others said that the signal repeaters for Channel 9 located outside the CORTV station were damaged by police or others not in agreement with APPO within the first week of the takeover, limiting the scope of the Channel 9 broadcasts to Oaxaca City and the communities within a small radius of the capital. However, APPO members continued to bring video recordings of the broadcasts to more far-flung communities.
[307] Unnamed CORTV occupier, from footage filmed by Jill Freidberg, 2006.
[308] Davies, 51.

the Oaxaca Commune as an extension of the teachers' movement rather than as a popular struggle. Therefore, the CORTV occupiers claimed that the public television station was their own, paid for with their tax dollars but stolen by the state government and used to smear APPO and the teachers. The APPO TV broadcasts were thus crucial for visualizing both the existing and the desired demographics of movement participants, since APPO was struggling to establish its base and to differentiate the popular assembly from the teachers' movement.

The broadcasts were also key in APPO's battle for the rights to public space in order to forge a new political space. As illustrated in relation to the various APPO initiatives, claims to public space – who it belongs to, who can use it, and how – marked a major flashpoint of the Oaxaca Commune. The first battleground had been drawn with governor URO's wildly unpopular "modernizing" renovations of Oaxaca's zócalo during his first year in office in 2005. These renovations were seen by many as a thinly disguised campaign to suppress the teachers' plantón and other protest encampments situated in front of government offices in the central square, by relocating the offices to suburban areas and transforming the zócalo into a tourist center.[309] The battle intensified with the eviction of the teachers from the zócalo, which was also understood as a violent defense of URO's desired control over a public space that had historically extended beyond commerce, tourism, and leisure to a space of political protest. Since disputes over public space claims encircled the political dynamics of Oaxaca City and formed a significant factor of the social

[309] See Poole, "Affective Distinctions."

movement, breaking down barriers to the use of public spaces meant opening up options for civic political engagement.

The women of APPO brought this fight into one of the most elusive realms of public space – state television – disseminating their on-the-ground perspectives on the Oaxaca Commune and directly redressing CORTV's policies of towing the PRI party line. Davies reported on August 2, 2006: "This morning on public television Channel 9, the people are showing all the videos of the June 14 attack with armed police, interviews with the teachers in the hospital, the marches, the rallies, and the meetings. All this material was taped as it happened but never shown on any station. It's fantastic to watch it now for the first time."[310]

[Figure 4.5] In this broadcast, three women sit rather awkwardly on tree-trunk stools inside one of CORTV's sets. A red and grey area rug with a geometric pattern covers part of the beige parquet floor in front of the seated women. Behind them, individual three-dimensional lowercase red letters spell out "appo" on the wall. The scene is shot at medium distance, dwarfing the protagonists and revealing off-set areas and equipment, including a lighting or camera fixture that protrudes into the upper right of the frame. The postures of all three women suggest the physical discomforts of the impromptu television set. One of them wears a backpack on her shoulders and hunches forward to balance, seemingly balancing the weight. The woman with the backpack and the compañera next to her have their hands in their laps, while the woman speaking holds a microphone close to her mouth, obstructing

[310] Davies, 71.

the view of her face. She is introducing video documentation of the desalojo, which they are about to air for the first time on Channel 9: "We want to say, on mass media, that since the 14th of June, the teachers have taken the path of popular struggle once again. And for this reason, [we] want to correct the lies that the media spreads, saying that [what happened on] the 14th of June was a non-violent eviction. Right now, you will see the reality of this eviction."[311] The women appearing in this broadcast project rectitude and gravity for the importance of the information they are transmitting, even while their underdeveloped production skills and lack of professional polish on screen threatens to distract viewers. A plant hanging on left side of the set behind the woman who introduces the documentary footage spins rapidly while she speaks. The woman sitting on the far right side with the backpack turns to face the speaking woman about halfway through her introduction, gesturing by making circles with her two hands in a forward-spinning motion for the speaker to speed up. Recognizing the signal, the speaker begins talking both quicker and louder before she gets cut off by the transition to the documentary footage.

This broadcast discloses the fugitive time of the CORTV occupiers, whose on-screen anxiety is palpable as they struggle to keep up with a programming schedule in order to fit the greatest amount of information in the shortest period of time. Fugitivity is doubly prescient in this clip because while the women preface documentation of the plantón desalojo, they await the CORTV desalojo that they know is coming at any moment. Choosing not to remove her backpack while she

[311] From footage filmed by Jill Freidberg, 2006.

appears on television, as if she may need to keep her possessions close for a quick escape, the compañera on the right presents a form of fugitive subjectivity attending the circumstances of the women at occupied CORTV. In turn, this fugitivity is reflected in the amateur aesthetic of the awkward set design and the impending miscarriage of the broadcast's budgeted time. The spinning plant and spinning hands of the compañera likely tasked with the group's time management spotlight the volatility of fugitive temporality.




[Figure 4.5. Occupied Channel 9 broadcast, August 2006.
Video still courtesy of Jill Freidberg.]

It is important to note, however, that if we are to define "fugitive temporality," it cannot be simply summarized as the improvisatory, fugacious haste of stolen time. In the broadcast I describe here, as with many of the APPO TV programs, fugitive temporality is expressed in this double sense. A lack of polish attending an urgency to disseminate material while CORTV is under their control and to keep up with the rapidity of incidents related to the uprising is met with another temporal register, one of slowness. There is a precision, prudence, and care with regard to the disclosure of information, wherein the APPO women make sure to couple denunciations of the state and its actions in the uprising with evidence – video footage, photographs, testimonies from eye witnesses – and to bring to their discussions a range of voices and opinions. The immense effort put into this labor added another temporal layer for many of the APPO women, who expressed that time felt and moved differently for them inside the CORTV station. As Itandehui tells it: "Twenty-one days is not so much time, but for me it felt like months. This issue gave us many problems – the time. The main goal for us was to provide information. Things were happening in the movement day by day and moment by moment."[312]

In the context of the prefigurative gesture to enact in real time APPO's proposed political changes, the CORTV occupiers' programming foregrounded underrepresented voices and content and communally/ collectively organized political action. Their fugitive temporality was thus also a temporality of the not-yet, of political possibility performed in the now, recalling Campt's invocation of a

[312] Interview with Itandehui Santiago Galacia, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, September 4, 2015.

"performance of a future that hasn't happened but must"[313] and Martineau and Ritskes description of a "present future beyond the imaginative and territorial bounds of colonialism... a performance of other worlds."[314] The women on occupied CORTV performed another world and an imperative future in creating a public television channel that featured the images, voices, and stories of minoritized subjects and delivered reporting on local events of critical interest to Oaxacan citizens. Further, they not only imaged but also installed women at the forefront of the movement: taking leadership roles, making decisions about Oaxaca Commune actions, events, and policies, and re-shaping the structure of the popular assembly in accordance with a decolonial feminist agenda.




[Figure 4.6. Men outside CORTV headquarters talking to female guards, August 2006. Video still, *Morena*, Roberto Olivares, Mal de Ojo TV, 2007. Courtesy of Ojo de Agua Communication.]

[313] Campt, 17.
[314] Martineau and Ritskes, IV.

**Feminist space**

Therefore, the political space that the CORTV women were carving out was a space for building solidarity toward decolonial feminist restructuring within APPO. Refining rather than just disseminating APPO's vision, they issued an injunction holding APPO to its own equity standards by shaping a popular assembly model that could actually serve the diversity of peoples it claimed to. The dialogues among women made possible by the unique space of the occupied station gathered a diversity of knowledges and perspectives in order to bring intersectional issues of gender and indigeneity to the forefront of the movement. This was a crucial revision because although APPO's communiqués indicated that the movement was dedicated to gender equality, specific initiatives to transform gender roles and to institute gender parity in leadership by addressing entrenched norms of gendered labor were not initially implemented. According to Itandehui:

> We were used to organizing all of the domestic work at home – food, children, family work. In the assemblies, organizations, unions, et cetera, all of the main decisions were still made by men. We realized that we agreed that a change was necessary. And this moment in 2006 gave us the opportunity to discuss all of this, and to find our unity...[The] uprising gave us the opportunity to get together and talk, for the first time, about all of these things. We opened our eyes for the first time.[315]

From their very first appearance on television, the women of APPO were calling upon other women to make immediate changes to their daily tasks and to take a more significant role in the Oaxaca Commune. Itandehui remembered that during the first

[315] Interview with Itandehui Santiago Galacia, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, July 5, 2016.

broadcast, "one woman took the microphone and said 'stop making dinner for your families and come to CORTV. We need your presence here, we must be united, we have responsibility and a fight.'"[316] For some, abandoning domestic tasks to participate in running CORTV was in itself a feminist critique of gendered labor and caused interpersonal conflict in their homes, as Itandehui describes: "Women would fight with their husbands saying, 'you sent me to the march, you sent me to the fight, you told me to go, and now I like it, so I'm going to stay!'"[317]

The APPO women had to subsequently defend the space they occupied at CORTV as a feminist space. Men were sometimes allowed inside the station and after the first few days served as guests on some of the television broadcasts, but security at the CORTV building entrances was run by the women, who only granted entry to men who were on a designated guest list. [Figure 4.6] Footage shot outside the CORTV station headquarters during the occupation shows a large group of men gathered near the entry gate, which is guarded by one of the women from APPO. All of the men seem to be seeking entry, but only one or two of them are allowed to pass through the gate. The other men stay outside and some of them set up a television to watch the broadcast being filmed live inside the station at that very moment. A hush falls over the group, who had been talkative and rowdy until then, and they huddle around the tiny screen, intensely attentive to the grainy image on APPO TV. In this moment, unprecedented in Oaxaca's social justice movements, women were not behind the scenes preparing the food; instead, they were running the show.

[316] Interview with Itandehui Santiago Galacia, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, July 5, 2016.
[317] Ibid.

**Gender inequities in comunalidad**

If APPO was drawing from and revising Indigenous comunalidad, and using the principle of asamblea to structure a model of decolonial democracy for urban politics, the women of CORTV insisted that this revision also correct long-held inequalities in Indigenous governance, ensuring that they would not be reified in APPO's structures and practices. A report by Vázquez García on women's exercise of citizenship rights in Oaxacan municipalities governed by usos y costumbres (UyC) makes it clear that the four pillars of comunalidad in Oaxacan Indigenous communities are riven with gender inequities. In 40% of the nineteen communities studied, women either do not vote or they vote but their participation in other community politics is minimal to nonexistent.[318] Only about 60% of the nineteen pueblos showed consistent participation from women in voting, civic affairs, and *cargos*, or unpaid civic positions. However, Vázquez García found that even in the communities where women do hold cargos, they are subject to gender discrimination within the cargo system.

Together with tequio, obligatory community service work, cargos form the "structural base from which the governance system operates."[319] Service in cargos is crucial to political participation in Indigenous communities because they "are key

[318] Verónica Vázquez García, "Los Derechos Políticos de Las Mujeres En El Sistema de Usos y Costumbres de Oaxaca," *Cuicuilco* 18, no. 50 (April 2011): 198, http://www.scielo.org.mx/scielo.php?script=sci_abstract&pid=S0185-16592011000100010&lng=es&nrm=iso&tlng=es. This 2011 report analyzes data collected between 1999-2008.

[319] J. P. Robson, "Out-Migration and Commons Management: Social and Ecological Change in a High Biodiversity Region of Oaxaca, Mexico," *International Journal of Biodiversity Science & Management* 5, no. 1 (April 24, 2009): 22, doi:10.1080/17451590902775137.

components of community identity, community organization and community social capital, and can be understood as the set of conditions that enable collective action and for problems to be resolved."[320] As Wheatley puts it, "cargo service is the social capital that a person must consistently obtain in order to maintain rights."[321] Vázquez García's study identified four forms of gender discrimination within the cargo system. The first, explains Vázquez García, is vertical discrimination based on a pyramid structure of access to authoritative roles, resulting in a "glass ceiling" effect whereby women primarily serve in cargos of inferior influence or power at the bottom of the pyramid (such as committees) and are only nominally present in the superior areas at the top of the pyramid (such as administrative and political cargos). The second is horizontal discrimination via gender segregation, whereby women may occupy political roles alongside male members of the community, but are nonetheless relegated to duties considered "gender appropriate," such as health and education advocacy. The third form of gender discrimination in many of the communities governed by the usos y costumbres structure is "marital status as a condition for a woman to enter a position of public authority."[322] This is partly due to the connection between citizenship rights to serve in communal authority and land ownership. Communal land ownership relies on family contributions to pueblo land holdings, which in turn confer citizenship rights to those who own land. The norms of land

[320] Robson, "Out-Migration," 22.
[321] M. Christine Wheatley, "Beyond Politics: The Cultural Significance of Indigenous Governance in Oaxaca, Mexico" (2019), https://www.researchgate.net/publication/242465034_Beyond_Politics_The_Cultural_Significance_of_Indigenous_Governance_in_Oaxaca_Mexico, 16.
[322] Wheatley, "Beyond Politics," 197.

inheritance are patrilineal, so women only have access to communal land through male family members or spouses. Vázquez García cites Altamarino Jiménez to insist: "women do not have equitable access to land ownership, so they exercise an incomplete citizenship."[323] Lastly, in a few Oaxacan municipalities, Vázquez García found a fourth form of gender discrimination: women are "not obligated" to serve in cargos simply because the male members of the community are included in lists of citizens (and therefore required to serve cargo positions) but women are not included on those lists. Therefore, in these communities, the women's absence in civic positions is a direct consequence of not being considered citizens at all.

Vázquez García interviewed eighteen women who did manage to hold the highest position of power in their communities as municipal presidents, one indication that the gender norms were beginning to shift toward the end of the 2000's. But there are still some Oaxacan communities observing UyC in which it is not possible for women to hold the position of municipal president, as Wheatley has shown in her ethnographic study of the village of Santa Lucia.[324] Further, Vázquez García's interviews with the female municipal presidents indicated that while these women were able to enter communal authority at the highest level, they often found themselves to be among the only women present not just in their municipal

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[323] Isabel Herrera Altamirano Jiménez, "Ciudadanía y mujeres indígenas en Oaxaca: las paradojas de la tradición," in *Women in México: towards a new type of citizenship in the 21st century*, ed. Edmé Domínguez (Finlandia: Haine Series, Nordic Network of Research on Women in Latin America, 2004): 286-304, cited in Vázquez García, "Derechos Políticos," 187.

[324] Wheatley, "Beyond Politics." Wheatley's study of this community in Sierra Norte found, in keeping with Vázquez García's report on the strict gender distinctions between cargo roles, that there were effectively two cargo systems, one for men and one for women, and that women's cargos did not include the highest municipal service, that of municipal president.

governments but also in civic affairs. For Eufrosina Cruz, "it is a dream that women of Quiegolani [her municipality] come to the *asamblea*; we are struggling to make this possible."[325]

Vázquez García's report illuminates how the lack of gender parity in asamblea is one of the main roots of gender inequities in communal governance and civic life. Communal authority finds its expression in the popular assembly, wherein all of the major decisions related to community life, including cargo roles, are made and discussed. Vázquez García's interviews with members of various pueblos indicate that the participation of women in asambleas is a nascent phenomenon and that there is much discrepancy between what is reported and what women living in the communities observe in their daily lives.[326] For example, in his seminal text on comunalidad, Zapotec scholar Jaime Martínez Luna, a resident of one of the pueblos of Sierra Norte, explains the functioning of the popular assembly structure in Indigenous communities of Oaxaca this way:

> The assembly is the moment of reunion of all the citizenship, the place where the decisions are taken for the exercise of a full – so to speak – democracy... based on consensus, diversity, and plurality. The assembly for us is the forum where the individual capacity of the speaker as well as the silent [person] are brought together and at every moment they are in a new coexistence...We all have the same opportunities [for participation].[327]

However, in practice, these principles often do not result in "the same opportunities" for everyone, especially when family unit gender roles or discrimination against unmarried women are reproduced in the assemblies, silencing some women and

[325] Vázquez García, 198.
[326] Ibid., 202.
[327] Martínez Luna, *Eso que* llaman, 82.

preventing them from entering into "a new coexistence" with those who are seen and heard. Many of the women with whom I spoke with felt that there is a long way to go in terms of gender balance in assemblies before this ideal is possible. Itandehui explained that she and some of the other APPO women at CORTV were not necessarily convinced that the concept of comunalidad is holistic enough in that it fails to acknowledge gender imbalances in Indigenous communal practices and governance: "This word [comunalidad] was created by men, for men...We think that in order to have a theory of community, it needs to include the thinking of women...Like Julieta Paredes says, 'the world has one eye,' the perspective of men, the masculine vision...We have to look with the feminine look, the look of women."[328]

**Communitarian feminism**

Itandehui refers to Julieta Paredes Carvajal, an Indigenous (Amayra) Bolivian decolonial lesbian feminist activist addressing feminist issues in Indigenous community practices throughout Latin America. Paredes founded *Mujeres Creando Comunidad* (Women Creating Community) and works with other organizations and movements, including the movement for *feminismo comunitario antipatriarcal* (communitarian anti-patriarchal feminism). For the women of APPO, the work of communitarian feminists in Bolivia, a country at the forefront of what has been called

[328] See Julieta Paredes Carvajal, "Descolonizar Las Luchas: La Propuesta del Feminismocomunitario," *Mandrágora* 24, no. 2 (December 13, 2018). It must be noted that Ita's commentary, while salient, as well as that of that of the Bolivian thinker she cites, can be read as ableist.

the Latin American "decolonial turn," was especially instructive. In Bolivia, there has been an official state process of decolonization headed by President Evo Morales, who is of Amayra Indigenous origin, since the ascendency in 2005 of his party, the Movement for Socialism (MAS).[329] Whereas pueblos Oaxaqueños practice comunalidad, Bolivianos depart from a cosmovision of buen vivir (sumac kawsay in Andean *kichwa*), or "living well," which has been described as a "moral/ political paradigm" of collective well-being "opposed to the developmentalist idea of 'living better' — at the expense of others."[330] Under Morales, buen vivir has been officially adopted as part of the Bolivian constitution and MAS government policy. In the introduction to the English translation of Paredes' book *Hilando Fino*, the editors highlight how communitiarian feminism brings to Indigenous movements in Latin America the considerable challenge that "de-colonizing the state requires its de-patriarchalization."[331]

Indeed, Paredes differentiates communitarian feminism from other, mostly Euro-U.S., feminisms by explaining its distinct definition of and approaches to the concept of patriarchy. Paredes says that while Western feminist models tend to define patriarchy as the system or relation of male domination and exploitation of women:

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[329] Julieta Paredes Carvajal, "Artisans of Hope: Perspectives from Communitarian Feminism [Hilando Fino Desde el Feminismo Comunitario]," trans. Margaret Cerullo and Antonia Carcelen-Estrada (unpublished 2018 translation document provided to the author by the translators in personal communication, 2019), translator's footnote, 3.

[330] Paredes Carvajal, "Artisans of Hope," translators' footnote, 26. As the translators explain, while MAS and the presidency of Morales represent a considerable progressive change for the country, they have been met with serious criticism from the Left, "who argue that the MAS government has pursued the classic rentier state strategy, plundering resources without making the country more productive; what has been called 'progressive neo-extractivism'" (translators' footnote, 3).

[331] Cerullo and Carcelen-Estrada, "Introduction," in "Artisans of Hope," 24.

> For [communitarian feminists] this is not sufficient. Because, yes, there is discrimination from our 'brothers' against us, but they [men in the pueblos] also suffer, and how can we explain this?...So here we have re-conceptualized [the concept of patriarchy]...[We contend that] patriarchy is THE system, of all of the oppressions, all of the discriminations, all of the violence and suffering that humanity and the natural world experience, which has historically been constructed over the body of women.[332]

Communitarian feminist Adriana Guzmán further explains the importance of their movement in modifying the commonly held belief that patriarchy had been an invention and consequence of colonialism, imposed on the Indigenous communities of Latin America (*Abya Yala*) by the Spaniards.[333] Instead, she says, Indigenous communities suffered from an ancestral patriarchy long before colonization. Therefore, the patriarchy affecting Indigenous women in Latin America is redoubled via the "patriarchal conjuncture" that took place with the Spanish invasion, when "the 'colonial patriarchy' came together with the 'ancestral patriarchy,' fusing together and strengthening, and for this reason, in the territories of Abya Yala, women live in a double-patriarchy, and it is a double-patriarchy that oppresses not only women, but also men, children [people of all ages and groups], and nature."[334]

Echoing Guzmán's theory about ancestral patriarchy and the "patriarchal conjuncture," Itandehui asserted that one of the reasons she believed that Oaxacan women needed to organize in 2006 was that the pueblo structure and cosmology,

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[332] Julieta Paredes Carvajal in koman ilel, "Feminismo Comunitario," YouTube Video, 37:25, posted August 21, 2015, https://youtu.be/C6l2BnFCsyk.
[333] Adriana Guzmán in ilel, "Feminismo Comunitario." *Abya Yala* is a term from the Kuna Indigenous peoples of present-day Panama, taken up by a Bolivian Aymara Indigenous leader, which offers an alternative name for the Latin-American continent from an Indigenous perspective. This is similar to American Indians in the U.S. terming North America "Turtle Island."
[334] Adriana Guzmán in ilel, "Feminismo Comunitario."

including the practices of comunalidad, have patriarchy built in as a "*machismo nativo* [native machismo] that joins together with Western machismo in colonization."[335] She cited her personal experience in a small Indigenous pueblo on the Oaxacan coast where she and other women took part in a phase of development for gender equality in the community. They held a workshop on community radio with a roundtable of women discussing their proposals, concerns, and needs. Itandehui said this was "a very beautiful thing, with a lot of strong women and a lot of opinions," but when it came time to bring the discussion to the asamblea, none of the women wanted to speak; they feared disapproval, rejection from families, or beatings from their husbands.[336] "How can they have community," Itandehui asked during our interview, "when they leave an entire section of the community apart?"[337]

Guzmán describes the proposal that communitarian feminists have been pushing forward in the context of the political changes taking place in Bolivia. She recognizes a double bind in fighting to preserve Indigenous communal lifeways and the cosmovisión that structures them, while also recognizing and attempting to rectify the ways in which that same structure has historically embedded gender-based oppression. She asserts that communitarian feminists, confronted with the risk that Bolivia might reify patriarchal structures by buying into the false idea that a decolonization process would automatically rid the country of patriarchy, felt that it was their political and ethical responsibility to incorporate a parallel process of de-

[335] Interview with Itandehui Santiago Galacia, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, July 5, 2016.
[336] Ibid.
[337] Ibid.

patriarchialization.[338]

In Oaxaca, the process of political change has been in some ways much slower than in Bolivia and has suffered numerous setbacks due to the dominance of the PRI in the region. At the local level, in Indigenous communities, Oaxacan women have been struggling to transform their traditional community roles, take on more authority in communal government, and build affinity groups among women dialoging about plans for achieving gender balance in popular assemblies. APPO and the Oaxaca Commune offered the opportunity to work toward political transformation at the state level, as well as the risk, as was seen in Bolivia, of failing to adopt within those political changes policies that would solve longstanding issues of patriarchal hierarchies and gender inequities. When the Oaxaca uprising began, the central concerns encircling the urgent call to democratize the state were raced and classed repression of dissent, poverty, and disenfranchisement, rather than issues of gender. APPO aimed to bring Indigenous communal governance practices to urban, state-level politics in an effort to build a more inclusive, just, and participatory democratic structure. What was initially missing in APPO's proposal, however, was the parallel anti-patriarchal process that would be necessary in order to establish the diversity and inclusivity that APPO envisioned. Oaxacan women recognized that a feminist movement within APPO was imperative to its success.

[338] Andrea Guzmán in ilel, "Feminismo Comunitario."




[Figure 4.7. Occupied Channel 9 broadcast, August 2006.
Video still courtesy of Jill Freidberg.]

**Feminist re-vision**

The women of APPO offered a feminist *re*-vision of comunalidad, developing communal thinking and collective political work in spaces and contexts where it had not existed before. They delivered this through grainy and distorted images that flickered in and out and at times appeared behind a thick curtain of electronic "noise," visual interferences that called attention to the disruption of the state's "regularly scheduled program." This evokes Martineau's suggestion that "indigeneity is the noise to colonialism's signal"[339] and Jacques Rancière's insistence that political activity "makes visible what had no business being seen, and makes heard as

[339] Martineau, "Creative Combat," 273.

discourse where once there was only place for noise; it makes understood as discourse what was once only heard as noise."[340] The static noise on APPO TV framed the production of political discourse by and for the people, and for the first time entirely produced by women. Fleeting and unstable images signaled the flux of seeking renewal and building novel options. Amateur aesthetics dissolved the dynamic of passive consumption endemic to glossy, refined media and critiqued gendered, raced, and classed value metrics in service of a new message.

[Figure 4.7] In this broadcast, a small group of women are discuss a documentary they have just aired on Channel 9. The static-filled, quivering image distorts the women's faces and visually blends foreground and background together under a scatter of grainy noise. Coincidentally, the documentary that they are discussing, which covers 25 years of struggle in the Democratic Teachers' Movement, is called *Granito de Arena* (*Grain of Sand*).[341] This title refers to the solidarity and strength built by the teachers in collective action, with activists each offering their small contribution, their "grain of sand" to the movement. While one grain of sand cannot make a significant impact, the documentary suggests, thousands coming together can create a sandstorm that is unstoppable. The women on APPO TV discuss the documentary as a reminder that collectivity and solidarity bring together individual contributions – thousands of grains of sand – for revolutionary movements to affect change. It is as if the on-screen image, in a moment of synchronicity,

[340] Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 30.
[341] Jill Freidberg, *Granito de Arena* (*Grain of Sand*), DVD (Seattle, WA: Corrugated Films, 2006).

reveals the grains of sand that have come together to make the broadcast possible, a visual reflection of the women's collective dedication and labor. In bringing together the history of the teachers' movement and the events of the Oaxaca Commune with political discourse among women and the visual testament to women's collective labor, APPO TV broadcasts such as this one began to shift public discourse about the Oaxaca commune.

The women appearing on state television were not just disseminating APPO's vision but also refining it in service of the movement's coveted body politic. They made clear how APPO's vision of a horizontal, participatory, and inclusive model of popular assembly must look like in order to live up to its name. They envisioned a constitutive diversity that went way beyond the hollow rhetoric of "diversity and inclusion" identity politics to, as Olivares puts it, "[reflect] the multicultural and multilingual realities of Oaxaca."[342] Further, they made the connection between APPO's goal of a diverse constituency with the importance of women's participation. The CORTV occupiers offered programming in at least six different Indigenous languages and featured groups of women and girls that reflected the immense diversity of Oaxaca's peoples. They were rebelliously failing the standards of television decorum, as several of the women bear out in their testimonies: "Channel 9, which had served to praise state officials, became a wasps' nest of sweaty and weary bodies. Poverty, education, violence, and human rights were the emblems.

[342] Roberto Olivares in "Media, Gender, and Indigenous Radio."

[We] spoke about our pains and our certainties;"[343] "We were [appearing] in opposition to the stereotypes because as Oaxacan women we were not the model of what is usually presented on TV. Instead we were another cultural reality and we said this on the air;"[344] "We are women who don't usually have a voice because we are brown, we are short, we are fat, and they think they we don't represent the people, but we do. WE are the face of Oaxaca."[345] Itandehui added that once the women were able to transcend their own fears of appearing as amateurs on television with their limited or developing skills, they realized:

> We were capable, we were empowered, without knowing [how], without being the stereotype of the TV personality, without the syntax, without good pronunciation, without looking pretty, [we] broke all the fears with this first step. What was most important was just hearing the voices of women and seeing their passion for expression. This changed the lives of women in Oaxaca.[346]

Viewers witnessed in real time the transformation of Oaxacan women from the objects of television commentary to the speaking and acting subjects of political discourse. Their on-screen presence disseminated the women's lived realities, building alliances with other Oaxacan women who identified with the CORTV protagonists. As Stephen observes: "There is a world of difference between the way a TV report on malnourished children in the Mixteca done by a well-fed, tall, urban

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[343] Itandehui Santiago Galacia qtd. in Alejandra Canseco and Laboratorio de narrativas., *Curándonos de espanto: Oaxaca 2006-2016* (Oaxaca, México: Editorial Pez en el Árbol, 2016), 71.
[344] Patricia Jiménez Alvarado qtd. in Margarita Zires, "Estrategias de Communicación y Acción Política: Movimiento Social de La APPO 2006," in Martínez Vásquez and Zires, *La APPO*, trans. in Stephen, *We Are the Face*, 159.
[345] Fidelia Vásquez qtd. in Stephen, *We Are the Face*, 1.
[346] Interview with Itandehui Santiago Galacia, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, July 5, 2016.

white female reporter is perceived and the perception of the same information when it is delivered by a Mixtec woman and her children describing their daily lives and routines."[347] However, appearing on television also exposed the women to sexist and racist criticism from some who called them "dirty" or "*chimecas*," a derogatory term for badly behaved or ignorant Indigenous women.[348] Patricia said that she had to send her children away from Oaxaca City after she received death threats from people who had seen her on television and took issue with the women's political positions. Therefore, the protracted fugitive time of non-stop radio and television production labor was exacerbated by separation from loved ones, given that many of the women were away from their children and families for much of the occupation. According to Patricia, some viewers were perhaps "ashamed to realize precisely, all the misery, all the poverty in this pueblo" but that finally it was important that "we clarified that in the movement there was everyone from peasants to...workers, from housewives to professionals."[349]

**Little school of struggle**

The labor of occupied CORTV production was in some ways a great leveler, however, because in that enterprise, all of the women were amateurs in that they were initially untrained in televisual broadcasting and were all performing unpaid work. In contrast to the polish of corporate media, the homegrown aesthetic of occupied

[347] Stephen, *We Are the Face*, 154.
[348] Ibid., 159.
[349] Patricia Jiménez Alvarado qtd. in Zires, "Estrategias, " 177.

CORTV broadcasts suggests the political dedication of ordinary women. At that moment of the Oaxaca Commune, the media smear campaign against APPO and the teachers had for months disseminated negative optics that distorted the movement's message. APPO was very much in need of a humanizing counter-effect to allow them to build greater support to advance movement goals. Julia Bryan-Wilson's writing on amateurism and women's creative labor reminds us that the word amateur is linguistically rooted in *amare*, "to love."[350] The non-professional and voluntary nature of the work going into CORTV broadcasts suggested to the counterpublics they hailed that the women's efforts were a labor of love extending from a deep belief in APPO's political project.

Commenting on the experience of going into the CORTV occupation with no prior media production experience and then serving as the co-producer of APPO TV, Patricia said she learned in a trial-by-fire as she produced for Channel 9: "about pauses and transitions between programming, how to move from one camera to another, different perspectives, adding images, [how to work] the control booth, how to zoom in, little details of the technology, how to focus on the people talking, how to produce the transitions, how to read the news, to read things ahead of time so they weren't just reading [on camera], not to make mistakes on camera, how to make talking cards, cue cards, and prompts."[351] Patricia added that her co-producer, Nancy, who had a little more experience with video production, called CORTV their "little

[350] See Julia Bryan-Wilson, *Fray: Art + Textile Politics* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017).
[351] Interview with Patricia Jiménez Alvarado, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, July 3, 2016.

school of struggle," since the women were teaching each other and learning together how to use the tools they had seized in order to fight.[352]

In doing so, they embodied the revisions to gendered labor in comunalidad that they advocated, organizing occupied CORTV according to the communal practices that they were often marginalized or excluded from in their own communities. Their amateur enterprise at CORTV, making use of coordinated and structured work brigades, expressed a version of tequio – community-service labor – one of the pillars of comunalidad. This labor went far beyond television production to include "staffing security posts in an around the station and the transmission towers, programming the radio and TV, handling the food and the cooking, receiving and organizing the visiting individuals and delegations that came to get on the air, and taking care of outreach and contact with movement activists to monitor events, marches, and security concerns."[353] A collective community effort answering the women's requests for help with resources, supplies, assistance with the technical aspects of media production, news items for dissemination, and security for the CORTV building and the site of the transmitters also made all of this possible. Some of the technicians from Radio Universidad came in to assist with the radio machinery. Members of Mal de Ojo TV helped with the video equipment and provided some of their documentary materials for use in TV programming. Other members of APPO shared information for news broadcasts and updates. And a critical mass of APPO members and supporters provided security for outside the CORTV building and at the

[352] Interview with Patricia Jiménez Alvarado, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, July 3, 2016.
[353] Stephen, *We Are the Face*, 150.

site of the transmitters to protect both from government interference.



[Figure 4.8. CORTV asamblea, August 2006.
Video still courtesy of Jill Freidberg.]

**Community space**

Holding assembly forums was also a frequent practice at occupied CORTV for discussing plans, conflicts, and political concerns and served as a way to come to agreements that could then be brought to the larger APPO assemblies during the Oaxaca Commune. [Figure 4.8] Footage shot by Friedberg documents one such women's assembly meeting in an area outside the CORTV building that could accommodate not just the women occupying the station but also anyone from the

community who wished to join. They stand in a large circle and take turns offering opinions and suggestions, deliberating issues related to the media takeover and its relationship with larger APPO aims. We see young and old women, women with their children, and participants identifying themselves variously as teachers, members of Indigenous organizations, neighborhood residents, market vendors, and housewives. When two community elders enter the circle, one carrying a cane and both moving quite slowly, the other women clap and cheer, acknowledging the importance of the elders' presence in this historic asamblea. Some of the issues that come up in the discussion are: how to include men in the various aspects of the media occupation, how to handle male presence at the station, how to make space for women from the rural communities and others beyond the core group, and whether or not they consider what they are doing a feminist movement.

What this footage demonstrates is how the women at CORTV were actively modifying gender imbalances in the practice of APPO's asamblea by constructing a people's assembly entirely made up of women coming to consensus among themselves before bringing their comments, suggestions, and concerns to the statewide APPO assembly forum. APPO, we recall, was referred to as an "assembly of assemblies," a coalition bringing together a wide range of organizations, many of which also operated as assemblies. The process of consensus building in smaller assemblies with diverse social and political aims, affiliations, and allegiances aided in smoothing out the consensus process in the general assemblies, where representatives from each constituent assembly were offered opportunities to be heard. Therefore,

there was indeed a precedent for the creation of a smaller assembly like the one formed at CORTV and for its participation in APPO. However, the APPO women's assembly was the first of its kind in Oaxaca, bringing together women from diverse backgrounds who were already dedicated to participation in APPO but had not previously committed to building unity and solidarity with one another, and certainly not based in gender concerns. Additionally, the CORTV group included many women who, as teachers and union members, were accustomed to fighting for a voice in the general assemblies without having the leverage of a women's affinity group or the consolidating benefit of prior consensus on issues of pressing concern to female members of APPO.




[Figure 4.9. Occupied Channel 9 broadcast, August 2006.
Video still courtesy of Jill Freidberg.]

[Figure 4.9] These spaces of testimony and deliberation were brought on screen and on the air with Channel 9 broadcasts like this one, featuring roundtables on societal and political issues, matters related to gender dynamics, and messages from Indigenous communities regarding the particular concerns of their pueblos. CORTV occupier Conchita Nuñez attests to the diversity of voices that the on-screen space at CORTV was able to accommodate:

> The people began showing up from all over the place. They came from all of the communities to denounce the injustices they were experiencing and to expose what was going on in their communities. Many of these people had never been in front of a microphone. But they dared to speak out...But what was really marvelous were the moments of real democracy and civility that we experienced when the people knew they could really create something and really speak and express their complaints and thoughts and that thousands of people were listening to them.[354]

Nuñez further explains that she and the other women were dedicated to transforming the public television channel into "what it should be: an accurate and effective source of information, and also a formative tool for the people that will give them different types of messages that have more to do with Oaxaca's reality. This is a plural and inclusive society misrepresented by the trash of the mainstream media."[355] The effort on the part of CORTV occupiers to transform Channel 9 by including a plurality of voices is clearly demonstrated in a video filmed outside the CORTV building upon the arrival of representatives from a faction of APPO in a nearby community of San

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[354] "Conchita Nuñez on Women's APPO Movement," Media, Gender, and Indigenous Radio – Videos*, We are the Face of Oaxaca* website: https://faceofoaxaca.uoregon.edu/media/video-testimonials/. doi:10.7264/N3CR5R8J. Many of the people who came to CORTV during the occupation chose to speak on Radio Cacerola instead of appear on APPO TV due to the risks involved in exposing one's identity on television. When possible, members of Oaxacan communities served as representatives in televised forums.

[355] "Conchita Nuñez on Women's APPO Movement."

Francisco Telixtlahuaca. Patricia greets the APPO members with these words, which are useful to quote at length:

> My friends, we welcome you. But now, once again, we want to declare to you that on August 1st, the space that was reserved for those who were threatening the interests of the people was recuperated. And this is a space that since August 1st has transformed, and is now a center of expression for the necessities of the Oaxacan people, the necessities of the poor people of the Oaxacan population. This is going to be a space of denunciation of the people's aggressors. But also, compañeros, we need to recognize that this space has been recuperated by the APPO, this enormous organization that contains all the organizations that represent the Oaxacan people. And we need to strengthen it. And as the pillars on which this resistance stands, we of the APPO need to stick together. We need to participate in all APPO activities, because this is our organization and it represents us, and also, compañeros, this is the expression of the APPO. We are calling out to you to reinforce this space, which is your space.[356]

Patricia links the "expression for the necessities of the Oaxacan people;" that is, political expression and the creation of new political subjects via that expression, with participation in APPO. Thus Patricia's speech brings together and underscores several of the media takeover's goals and accomplishments – the transformation of Oaxaca's public radio and television stations into a public sphere that had been prevented by the state government in order to preserve its narrow political interests, the conversion of that space into a community space for minoritized Oaxacans to voice their concerns, and the carving out of a political space to strengthen and sustain APPO. When Patricia reminds the visitors that the space of CORTV is "their space," she is confirming that APPO TV and Radio Cacerola offer an opportunity for all Oaxacans to exercise their political agency under APPO, even if for the first time.

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[356] "Manifestation supporting women's takeover of Channel 9 by APPO members from Telixtlahuaca, Oaxaca," Media, Gender, and Indigenous Radio – Videos, *We are the Face of Oaxaca* website: https://faceofoaxaca.uoregon.edu/media/video-testimonials/. doi:10.7264/N3F18WNN.




[Figure 4.10. Oaxacan children appearing in an occupied Channel 9 broadcast, August 2006. Video still, courtesy of Jill Freidberg.]

[Figure 4.10] As mothers and teachers, the APPO TV producers were able to broadcast another first on state television – programs that featured children stating their own needs, social concerns, and perspectives on the social movement. In this broadcast, six children who appear to be between the ages of 6-12 years sit in a semicircle of chairs in front of an "appo" logo and a poster calling for "Freedom for Political Prisoners!" As a whole, this segment with children talking and singing together on Channel 9 makes clear that APPO's movement includes Oaxacans of all ages and links the children's support for their teachers with bolstering their own

futures. Unscripted moments and the kinds of ungainly, awkward stops and starts that one might expect when putting young non-professional children in front of a camera come across as endearing and genuine. One of the youngest boys takes the microphone and delivers a message to his fellow students, with a strong and persuasive voice despite his small size: "Well, compañeros, we have just finished our song, but we want to tell all of the students to follow this movement, to support the teachers...[and to] join the struggle, because it is just!"[357] As he finishes his testimony, the boy next to him starts to smile and giggle. The boy with the microphone, noticeably embarrassed, instantly drops his proud and articulate manner and begins to whisper into the microphone, asking what he is supposed to do now. Off-camera adults tell the children to stand up, and the broadcast ends with all six children singing the Mexican national anthem with four adults, one of whom keeps the tune with a guitar. This broadcast skirts a line, as many of them do, between planned elements and impromptu moments. While it is obvious that the children's presence on the program has been solicited and organized by the adult participants, they have been nonetheless permitted the space to deliver messages with their own voices and in their own words.

**Amateur imperative**

[Figures 4.11] When on-the-ground Oaxaca Commune events necessitated that the CORTV women respond with impromptu broadcasts, the producers'

[357] From footage by Jill Freidberg, 2006.

amateurism was made particularly evident in the on-screen aesthetics. Handheld microphones and crude in-camera editing underscore the immediacy of these transmissions. In this broadcast, three women sit together on a CORTV set while one announces that several hours prior, a group of APPO members were abducted in an unmarked minivan.[358] She explains that they now consider this incident a forced disappearance rather than a police detention because they know nothing about where the compañeros were taken, nor do they have any assurance of their physical safety. One of the disappeared, she says, is Professor Germàn Mendoza Nube, a disabled teacher whose wheelchair was left at the site where he was taken. As the woman delivering this news on Channel 9 speaks, the on-screen image shifts from a close-up of her face to a set of still photographs – first of the moment of the disappearance, showing a residential street with a deserted wheelchair and the minivan driving away, followed by a photograph of Mendoza Nube with his family. A series of maladroit cross-fades attempting to focus on the moving and still images in turns betrays the amateurism of the broadcast's producers, but also evokes the unsettling disunion of the movement's distressing conditions and the urgent need for public response. Additionally, the cross-fades highlight the acute community concern attending this incident, as the aggrieved face of the woman delivering the news floats over the image of Mendoza Nube's abandoned wheelchair bearing the weight of his absent body. Absence and presence are visually yielded as unstable states and the fragility of the victim's body is made manifest in the lapsing images.

[358] From footage by Jill Freidberg, 2006.



[Figure 4.11. A series of cross-fades in an impromptu Channel 9 broadcast, August 2006. Video still courtesy of Jill Freidberg.]

[Figures 4.12-4.14] The interludes in between programs on occupied Channel 9 evinced the apprenticeship of the amateur TV producers by both exhibiting a fundamental naiveté and suggesting a growing facility with the televisual medium. In this interlude sequence, a graphic of Professor Mendoza Nube in his wheelchair serves as a visual lodestar of the state's biopolitics – their attempt to control APPO via the assault, abduction, and incarceration of hundreds of political prisoners over

the course of the Oaxaca Commune.[359] This interlude brilliantly harnesses the amateur "look" of the image to bring attention to the critically important crisis of APPO political prisoners, seizing on the bright colors of the static noise and the pulse of the unstable picture to embolden the simple black and white graphic and give the image movement and verve. The initial black and white image of the professor is interrupted with rainbow static, which is then mirrored in the APPO star symbol on Mendoza Nube's shirt. The star then begins to change color along with the static around the image, as the text identifying the professor and his role in the movement is typed out. The flickering and color-shifting intensifies until the word "*LIBERTAD*" ("FREEDOM") appears across the image and text – blinking, changing color, and filling up with a rainbow of bright tones that leap toward the viewer. Suddenly, the rainbow static disrupting the edges of the frame reads as an aesthetic choice rather than an amateur error. The intensity of the composition, its erratic and unsettled rhythm, punctuates multiple layers of fugitivity embedded in the message. The women on CORTV, fugitives tenuously holding on to their freedom, nonetheless put their liberty at risk by using it to call out the state and to demand the release of those who are not free and therefore not able to speak for themselves.

[Figure 4.15] Other transition interludes, more than just cultivating visual dynamism to focus attention, went further to extend an invitation to the CORTV audience to participate in and help build APPO. One animated transition image in which a blank white screen generates its own Channel 9 logo and slogan in a step-by-

[359] Clip from Olivares, *Morena*.

step process, for example, subtly suggests the emergent and ongoing creation of APPO. First, a series of red oblong shapes form a spiral shell, culminating in the figure of a triumphant fist. Then, "Channel 9" appears underneath the icon and the slogan "All Power to the People" is typed out below, letter by letter, as a woman's voice declares: "Channel 9 has been taken over by all the brave women of Oaxaca."[360] The iconography of the spiral, snail shell, or conch shell (*caracol*) is significant, as it is important in the ideology of the Zapatistas, APPO's comrades to the south. For the Zapatistas, the caracol signifies both coming together in community, rooted in the Mayan tradition of sounding a conch shell to call community members together, and the slow, snail-like, process-oriented approach to achieving Indigenous autonomy in resistance. Zapatista autonomous zones in the highlands of Chiapas are organized in caracoles, sovereign spaces of communal living, with schools, clinics, and community survivance essentials. Quoting the Zapatista icon of community, autonomy, and land sovereignty in a fleeting interstitial expression of the conversely slow and careful process of building the space of APPO as a site of popular power, this seemingly insignificant interlude and its amateur aesthetic speaks volumes. What could easily be read from outside the Oaxaca Commune context as no more than the crude look of unskilled production is in fact layered with messages issuing from a variety of semiotic registers, inviting a CORTV counterpublic into a process aimed at popular assembly consensus rather than the manufacturing of consent.

[360] Clip from Olivares, *Morena*.




[Figure 4.12. Transition sequence on occupied Channel 9, August 2006.
Video still, *Morena*, Roberto Olivares, Mal de Ojo TV, 2007.
Courtesy of Ojo de Agua Communication.]




[Figure 4.13. Transition sequence on occupied Channel 9, August 2006.
Video still, *Morena*, Roberto Olivares, Mal de Ojo TV, 2007.
Courtesy of Ojo de Agua Communication.]




[Figure 4.14. Transition sequence on occupied Channel 9, August 2006.
Video still, *Morena*, Roberto Olivares, Mal de Ojo TV, 2007.
Courtesy of Ojo de Agua Communication.]




[Figure 4.15. Occupied Channel 9 caracol interlude, August 2006.
Video still, *Morena*, Roberto Olivares, Mal de Ojo TV, 2007.
Courtesy of Ojo de Agua Communication.]

**Becoming otherwise to power**

As the preceding visual analysis has highlighted, the occupied CORTV broadcasts presented a compelling set of images declaring what decolonizing democracy looks like: a rough-hewn, often improvised fugitive and amateur project of learning the rhizomatic attention necessary to listen to and see one another, speak, be heard and seen; an intrinsic diversity grounded in feminist indigeneity that rejects a jejune politics of inclusion to create, instead, an assemblage of radical alterities that still hazards toward unity. The women's on-screen presence delivered an image of empowered resistance against the state and showed the realities of populations minoritized and disenfranchised by its rhetorical democracy in widespread failure.

Meanwhile, the women of CORTV were flipping failure on its head, as public response to occupied Channel 9 broadcasts was overwhelmingly positive. Ratings for Channel 9 were higher during the weeks of the women's occupation than they had been in years and even surpassed the ratings of the two main national television stations.[361] Still, Televisa and TV Azteca did not cover the women's media occupation. Zires reports:

> During those 20 days the national television media made no mention of how the television was operated by women who were totally unaware of how to conduct it. When [the station] was taken, the event was recorded [only] as...confirming the illegal and violent nature of the movement. The experience of a group of Oaxacan women making television was not news...To provide their point of view would be to legitimize it.[362]

Mainstream media and those in power behind it only recognized the women as

[361] From accounts by Patricia Jiménez Alvarado and Fernando Lobo in Freidberg et. al., *Un poquito*.
[362] Zires, 179.

fugitives that could be vilified and dismissed either as "delinquent teachers" or as ignorant indígenas "imagined as always on the lam from progress and civilization...disappeared or in a constant state of disappearing."[363]

What they did not recognize was the strategic possibility for the women to inhabit the outwardly imposed condition of fugitivity to reach, via the television, those whose participation APPO needed to build the decolonial democracy it was prefiguring. If we take seriously Martineau's insistence that fugitive indigeneity "traces a strategic arc in flight from legibility to the settler gaze, state surveillance, and captivation," allowing possibilities for "*being elsewhere* and *becoming otherwise* to power,"[364] we can see that the success of the CORTV broadcasts was reflected in their failure to register as news to the mainstream media. In the course of three short weeks, the CORTV occupiers managed to disseminate a wealth of information never before seen on television; galvanize the rural, Indigenous, and female populations of Oaxaca in support of the movement; and begin the work of feminist restructuring within APPO, all while avoiding eviction or signal interruption by the state government. What state powers likely wrote off as a "safety valve" allowing for women whose political opinions were considered insignificant to let off steam was in fact a sea change signaling the rapidly increasing traction of APPO's movement and the vital role of women in its success. By "mobilizing and self-valorizing this strategic illegibility to power," while remaining "internally intelligible and

[363] Nick Estes, "The Surrounded: #NoDAPL and Geographies of Indigenous Resistance," *The Funambulist* 8, (2016), 12-13, https://thefunambulist.net/articles/guest-columns-surrounded-nodapl-geographies-indigenous-resistance-nick-estes.
[364] Martineau, "Creative Combat," 8.

coherent"[365] to the intended audience, APPO's women were able to advance the movement on CORTV, trading on their status as amateurs and fugitives to escape assimilation into state logic. It was not until it became clear that the CORTV women were quickly becoming politically organized *and* well versed in the craft of television production that URO sent in his paramilitary unit to shut the operation down.

**Creative non-surrender**

Arriving just before dawn on August 21, 2006, the governor's paramilitary unit shot down the CORTV transmission towers, forcing the women to abandon their occupation. In a show of creative non-surrender, APPO took twelve commercial radio stations in Oaxaca City that same day.[366] Ten days after the CORTV occupation had ended, the women unified by the takeover founded the Oaxacan Women's Coordinating Committee (*Coordinadora de las Mujeres de Oaxaca*, COMO). COMO expanded beyond the CORTV takeover group, bringing together women from various social and political organizations in order to consolidate, strengthen, and protect the political agency that women had generated during the media occupation.

[Figure 4.16] Patricia publicly announced COMO's creation at a rally in Oaxaca City on September 1, 2006, one month after the cacerolazo and the historic takeover of CORTV, her words echoing a new feminist consciousness within APPO:

> Women had to respond in an organized manner, discussing our needs and our own demands. To that end, yesterday representatives from various organizations met and at 7:30 PM, the August 1st Oaxacan Women's

[365] Martineau, "Creative Combat," 114.
[366] Of these twelve, APPO kept two stations for ongoing Oaxaca Commune communications.

> Coordinating Committee (COMO) was formed. The COMO will be participating in APPO, promoting reforms for inclusion in a new constitution and doing our part in the struggle to set up a new government for the people.[367]

Along with the gains they assisted APPO in making, the transformation of Oaxacan women into powerful social actors marked an upheaval acutely threatening to URO's regime and to President Vicente Fox, who had notoriously referred to Mexican women as "washing machines with two legs."[368] The magnitude of this threat was reflected in President Fox's decision to send in his Federal Preventative Police force to violently suppress the Oaxaca Commune two months later in a November 2006 standoff.[369]




[Figure 4.16. Patricia Jiménez Alvarado announcing the founding of COMO, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, September 1, 2006. Video still, *Morena*, Roberto Olivares, Mal de Ojo TV, 2007. Courtesy of Ojo de Agua Communication.]

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[367] Patricia Jiménez Alvarado in Olivares, *Morena*.

[368] James Hider, "Mexico Confronts Woman's Right to Abortion," NPR.org, March 10, 2016, https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5256388.

[369] I will elaborate on the final suppression of the Oaxaca Commune in the conclusion/ coda.

However, Oaxacan women were only getting started with their collective political work. The seeds planted by the media takeover continued to grow in a multitude of directions, notably in the work of Oaxacan women and the organizations they built following their time at CORTV. Itandehui, who founded *Colectivo Mujer Nueva* (New Woman Collective) following her time at CORTV, reflected that the APPO women who had occupied the station had been amateurs in all ways, not just in television and radio production: "We did not have any kind of experience – politically, technologically, with media;" "We did not know we were capable of doing all of the things that we did...[but] we were much more strong and ready than we thought."[370] And in the words of Oaxacan activist Layla Centeno:

> This movement grew so much, because what it did was change the roles of everyone. *We* [women] changed it; we transformed it. And what we did was to leave the chores that we were stuck in and take on a political role...And in these spaces is where women are building and where they view this construction of the power relation in different ways...[as part of] the construction of popular power. That's the way I see it.[371]

The way Layla and her compañeras see it – that is, their perspective on and vision of feminist decoloniality – is exactly what came so clearly into focus on APPO-occupied Channel 9 in the summer of 2006. It is a vision as vital and indelible now, in Oaxaca's continuing fight for decolonial democratic options, as it was amateur and fugitive in the time of its emergence.

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[370] Interview with Itandehui Santiago Galacia, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, July 5, 2016.

[371] Layla Centeno in *La rebelión de las Oaxaqueñas* (Oaxaca, México: Consortio para el Diálogo Parlimentario y la Eguidad Oaxaca A.C. and Mal de Ojo TV, 2007).

## Conclusion/ Coda.
## *Oaxaca in the Future Anterior II*

At the end of October 2006, following APPO's six-month run as the functional governing body of Oaxaca City and the transformation of the popular uprising into a grassroots social justice movement, President Vicente Fox sent the Federal Preventative Police into the capital city to put the Oaxaca Commune down by force. The chronology of events were summarized this way in the introduction to *Teaching Rebellion*, a volume compiling testimonies from participants in the Oaxaca Commune:

> On October 19, 2006, the Senate approved a resolution stating that Oaxaca was experiencing grave instability and *ingobernabilidad*, meaning that the state government had shown itself incapable of governing Oaxaca. In other words, the Senate explicitly recognized that all the conditions existed to dissolve the regime and demand the resignation of the state governor. Despite these statements, however, the Senate never actually declared the state governor's illegitimacy. On the contrary, the governor maintained his position and authority. On October 28th, the federal government sent 4,500 federal police troops into Oaxaca. They attacked barricades all over the city and turned the historic central plaza of Oaxaca, the zócalo, into a military base, where the troops remained until mid-December.[372]

The most brutal standoff between the PFP and movement participants took place on November 2, 2006, when APPO protected the local university, UABJO, for hours while paramilitary tanks sprayed tear-gas and advanced on protesters defending Radio Universidad. APPO managed to run the PFP off, but many had been injured and arrested. The violence continued for the rest of the month, with APPO marches and manifestations punctuated by PFP attacks. The outward suppression of the Oaxaca

[372] Denham and C. A. S. A., 34.

Commune, which reached its terminus on November 25, 2006, left all told more than twenty-five dead; hundreds injured, incarcerated, and disappeared; and thousands of human rights abuses unpunished. APPO reinforced its ongoing goals on the following day:

> We reaffirm our struggle for social, political, economic, and social transformation, the struggle for popular power, and we reaffirm that the fall of the tyrant Ulises Ruiz is the start for the re-establishment of peace and tranquility for the Oaxaqueños, as well as the immediate withdrawal of the PFP, since starting with their arrival, violence and ungovernability increased.[373]

While the movement did not achieve its goal of ousting Governor Ruiz Ortiz from his position, they had succeeded in running him and the rest of Oaxaca government out of the city for the uprising's duration, and installing APPO as an alternative – a working prototype of decolonial participatory democracy. By the end of that year, APPO had lost strength due to the deaths, forced disappearances, and incarceration of many of its members. Popular assembly forums continued with depleted membership but emboldened determination. In the postscript to her day-by-day reporting on Oaxaca Commune events, Nancy Davies takes heart from the *Foro de Pueblos Indígenas de Oaxaca* (Forum of Indigenous Peoples of Oaxaca) that met on November 28 and 29, 2006 to formally declare their alignment with APPO and to reaffirm the struggle alongside the popular assembly: "The government can arrest 500 or more, but this movement is invincible because when a people decides to transform itself, it does."[374] In her own assessment of what might happen next, Davies

[373] Davies, 192.
[374] Gliberto López y Rivas, *Noticias de Oaxaca*, November 29, 2006, qtd. in Davies, 194.

states: "Oaxaca presents a uniquely appropriate culture for an anti-neoliberal social movement because of its traditions of community labor (*tequio*), mutual aid (*guelaguetza*) and local popular assemblies. But other states in Mexico are watching. Other peoples around the world are watching. Inevitably Oaxaca will provide a model for change."[375]

In this dissertation, I have taken the position that visual culture does important discursive and political work in social justice movements and have offered this case study on the Oaxaca Commune to analyze the nuances of this process. I argued that the three primary visual culture projects initiated as part of and in support of APPO in 2006 assisted the popular assembly in visualizing, manifesting, and sustaining its model of alternative governance, which I have called a decolonial democracy. My primary goal has been to examine the ways in which APPO's visual culture and the participants that created and animated it were able to grow, build, and modify the popular assembly by prefiguring different aspects of the decolonial democratic model it proposed. Along the way, I have put forward some defining gestures responding to the central questions about just what APPO was, what goals APPO was working towards, and how APPO's ordinary citizen-participants used creative visual, performative, and embodied means across a diverse set of media to bear its experiment out.

Each of the visual projects I analyzed made a vital contribution to the development of APPO as such. Each initiative a) galvanized different sectors of civil

[375] Davies, 200.

society whose participation was key to building a functional popular assembly and b) served a fundamental purpose in negotiating, prefiguring, and manifesting the terms of APPO's model. Graphic art appealed to a multi-lingual population with its publically disseminated images, symbols, and iconography that drew inspiration from a wealth of local and national traditions and invested them with a new political potency. The anarchic tactics and seditious sentiment of much of the graphic art of the Oaxaca Commune spoke to young urban left-leaning youth, but other formations such as prints and tapetes with allegiance to indigeneity and homage to religious ritual inspirited a broader Oaxacan demographic. Artist collectives, via a variety of different forms, styles, and approaches, blanketed Oaxaca City with denunciations of the government, critiques of the political system, impetus for change, and inspiration to bring it about. Street art, graffiti, prints, posters, and tapetes broadcast the issues and questions central to the Oaxaca Commune in a manner that ignited a dialogue. The artworks revealed the stakes of the movement and its layers of complexity without pretending to have solutions, and positioned APPO as a forum for discussing these matters and producing plans for action.

The People's Guelaguetza was pivotal in advancing the discourse about indigeneity in the Oaxaca Commune – the participation of Indigenous communities in APPO; the ways in which the practices of autonomy, self-governance, and horizontality could be adapted for the urban popular assembly; and how to honor the elements of comunalidad, in particular communal fiesta and mutual aid/ guelaguetza, in APPO's movement. The Guelaguetza Popular recuperated, to use APPO's

language, a space for Indigenous self-representation of their lifeways and practices of communal celebration, and then proposed self-expression and embodiment of Indigenous identity as fundamental to political self-representation, participation in APPO, and the cultivation of a form of decolonial governance built from below.

The beautifully unrefined presentation of live public television programming for APPO-occupied CORTV that a group of several hundred Oaxacan women produced against all odds radically revamped APPO's approach to Indigenous feminist concerns and permanently shape-shifted gender configurations in Oaxacan grassroots politics. Inside the fugitive interspace that the APPO women commandeered at CORTV headquarters, they were able to generate solidarity and camaraderie unimpinged by toxic machismo and gendered labor norms familiar in Mexican society writ large, Oaxacan state policies, their original communities, and APPO itself. The women defiantly and creatively inhabited their undervalued and invisibilized status, in a televised public forum on Channel 9, to take their rightful place as social and political leaders. The CORTV occupiers sparked amateurism as a labor of love and engaged fugitivity as a state of emergence to call women and Indigenous peoples, and all subjects disregarded by hegemony, into a powerful act of counter-refusal and resistance to raced, classed, and gendered value metrics in Oaxaca and its uprising alike, and to demand a truly decolonial and democratic space in APPO.

## Coda: Anterior futures

I want to accomplish two things in this final part of this text. In the first place, I want to briefly survey what vestiges remain of APPO and its visual culture projects, more than a decade after the Oaxaca Commune. What changes were wrought as a result of the Oaxaca Commune and how do they show up in the visual initiatives that were manifested as part of APPO's movement? In the second place, I want to consider the related social justice work that remains pending in the Oaxaca region at this very different moment in history. What prefigures Oaxaca's future anterior now?

### New Women

As part of a roundtable community discussion in 2016 reflecting on the Oaxaca Commune and the APPO ten years after their emergence, Itandehui Santiago Galacia spoke at length on the role of women in the movement and the impact of the CORTV takeover:

> Definitely, the women of the APPO had a very important participation...the women 'sustained' the movement, even against the ideas and sexist practices of our compañeros, sustained it in every way: in the preparation of food, in cleaning, in the work of caregivers, and in the participation in the marches, blockades, brigades, etc., as well as in the takeover of Channel 9, which was a watershed for women... ten years later, for many women there have been substantial changes, we are not and will never be the same, we recognize our fundamental rights, we have become aware of the importance of organizing to fight against the patriarchal system and its subjectification of women and to fight for the recovery of our bodies and our stories. And we are also clear that no fight can be won without our participation.[376]

[376] Canseco and Laboratorio, 23–24.

For some of the women, the gains they made with the media takeover came at an extraordinary cost. Patricia Jiménez Alvarado told me that her life was repeatedly threatened because of her appearances on television and her visibility as part of APPO's women's movement. She was separated from her three children for months after the CORTV takeover because she felt that it was not safe for them to be with her. She sent them to stay with relatives outside the city. But Patricia still believes that her sacrifices were worth it, as they inspired the next generation of young women to find their voices and use them to affect change. She proudly reported that one of her daughters, who spent time with her at CORTV and helped with Radio Cacerola, is now in college for communications.[377]

The women's collectives and organizations built from the solidarity and momentum of the 2006 CORTV takeover have diversified their foci to address the most pressing needs of Oaxaca's women. Their demographics speak to the connections created by the Oaxaca Commune, as well as the fractures. The COMO (Coordinadora de las Mujeres de Oaxaca) has split and reformed several times since the end of the Oaxaca Commune, and ultimately formed the basis for several other projects. From Patricia's perspective, COMO had problems with organizing because everyone wanted to push their own agendas. With all of the in-fighting, she said, they started to lose their focus on women's rights. "COMO continues," she asserted, "but it's like APPO, it's an idea or concept that doesn't always have manifestations."[378]

[377] Interview with Patricia Jiménez Alvarado, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, July 3, 2016.
[378] Ibid.

As I mentioned in the preceding chapter, Itandehui and a few of the other women from the CORTV takeover and COMO separated from the COMO group to form Collectivo Mujer Nueva (New Woman Collective). Mujer Nueva has both built upon the political dialogue and solidarity among women that the media takeover started and expanded into other forms of mutual aid and community work. In my conversation with Ita in 2016, she said that some of the women's priorities shifted after the movement's suppression. They still wanted to organize politically but also wanted to do something that would help the broader community of women in Oaxaca. Mujer Nueva started to offer a *tianguis* (open market) to distribute organic foods, natural healing products, and information about health and well-being to the women of Oaxaca. "One compañera died of cancer in 2007," Ita says; "We began to talk about curing and saving ourselves from these health problems. We began to say, we need to change our lifestyles; we can make healing products and also avoid the products of capitalism. We can try to change this world that we live in and begin with our own bodies and our own local communities. We are applying our ancestral roots and what we have learned, retaking these strategies and paths for health and community."[379] When I visited Mujer Nueva's tianguis in the summer of 2016, women were browsing tables in a courtyard garden lined with organic produce, health and beauty products made from plants, handmade crafts, and pamphlets on women's health. In another area of the garden, women were gathered in a circle, sitting in

[379] Interview with Itandehui Santiago Galacia, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, July 5, 2016.

folding chairs and having a dialogue about organizing a commemorative women's march, as they do every year.

The day of the march, on August 1, 2016, ten years after the cacerolazo that changed Oaxacan women's lives, hundreds once again took to the streets of Oaxaca City. The camaraderie amongst the women was very evident and gave the event the warm and familiar feeling of a gathering of old friends. Ita expressed to me that even though many of the women have created their own organizations and do not necessarily align in all of their politics, they always come together again to support one another on the day of the women's march. It allows Ita to see the possibility of overcoming the disagreements and volatility that she believes is another remnant of patriarchy: "We are in the process of destroying these ingrained ways of thinking so that we can walk together and struggle together, so that we can create a new vision. One of things we say is 'now more than ever, we need to walk together.' In order to confront all of the disappearances, the repression, femicides, and harassment of women, we need a unified society."[380] At the anniversary women's march, some of the women from the media takeover stopped outside the CORTV headquarters and formed a circle around an elder *abuelita* (grandmother) holding a *copalero,* a ceramic bowl for the burning of copal tree resin as a ritual offering or energy-clearing ceremony. As the aromatic smoke formed arabesque curls in the air around the women, they joined hands and looked around the circle, silently acknowledging one another and how far they had come both together and individually.

[380] Ibid.

**Printing politics**

Graphic art has claimed a renaissance in Oaxaca City over the last decade. More than a dozen new graphic talleres have opened up in the years after the Oaxaca Commune, many of them dedicated at least in some part to overtly political artwork. ASARO gained the most notoriety for its production during the uprising and has expanded the workshop space at Espacio Zapata, added more members, and embarked in outreach programs such as teaching free workshops in the rural pueblos on the outskirts of Oaxaca City or to Indigenous youth who come to the urban area to learn graphic techniques and the tactics of disseminating political art.

However, the popularity of ASARO and affiliated talleres has also been mobilized for tourist revenue. One rather benign example is that several of the collectives, including ASARO and Jaguar Print, have in the past few years organized the *Pasaporte Gráfico*, a graphic arts excursion for tourists in which a group of visitors tours the Oaxaca City graphic arts workshops with a guide. Gathering for about twenty minutes at each workshop, the group is welcomed and told a bit about the history of the taller and its membership, and given a chance to look at and optionally purchase their graphic artwork; sometimes there is also a short demonstration. Each tourist gets a folded paper "graphic passport" with about a dozen empty squares printed on the inside so that they can get a stamp in their passport from each collective on the tour. Espacio Zapata and Taller Siqueiros, ASARO member Yescka's workshop across the street, get a regular stream of tourists and visitors coming in to the gallery/ storefront area, where they sell prints, posters, t-shirts,

stickers, and even mugs bearing graphic art. But the most surprising development that I have uncovered is that several of the collectives whose members were the most radical and active in anti-state demonstrations during the Oaxaca Commune are now supported with government funding, an irony that some of the members of ASARO with whom I brought this up, for example, were not keen to discuss.

Factionalism among artist assemblies and collectives, some of it related to differing policies on accepting or courting local notoriety and tourist and/ or government dollars, has resulted in the division of groups. Mario Guzman, as I briefly mentioned in a prior footnote, left ASARO in 2016 to create a new taller across the street from Espacio Zapata, Community Art Workshop (*Taller Artístico Comunitario*, TAC), and the artist assembly it houses called URTARTE. As he has always done, Mario is constantly creating and promoting art projects that support social justice movements both in Oaxaca and across Mexico (as well as connections to movements abroad, such as in Palestine). Mario continues to work with the artists at ASARO and to collaborate with them in street art installations during protests, manifestations, and marches. In addition to its street-level politics, graphic activism in Oaxaca is now mobilizing increasingly through social media and online platforms, bringing the visual culture of Oaxaca's social movement to a much wider audience.

One major positive change in the Oaxacan graphic arts scene has been the incorporation and participation of many more female artists. Women's leadership in the Oaxaca Commune transformed gender roles in political organizing and in the visual projects through which it operates, as we saw in Chapter 4. However, much

work remains to achieve gender equity, particularly in the graphic arts circle. As I mentioned in Chapter 2, Espacio Zapata and some of the more male-dominated talleres in Oaxaca City have been criticized for being unsafe spaces for women and the LGBTQIA+ community, with rumors, or in one case a credible accusation, of sexual assault perpetrated by collective members. Additionally, as femicides, sexual assaults, and violence against queer and trans community members across Mexico steadily rise, the creation of women-run and queer art-making spaces has become an even more pressing initiative. The process of developing those spaces continues in Oaxaca at the time of writing. Mario's project URTARTE has made a significant effort to bring female artists into the TAC workshop, offering all-female classes and demonstrations, spaces for feminist dialogue around political causes and art, and promoting the work of women and Indigenous artists in Oaxaca City and its surrounding areas. The recently opened Hoja Santa taller is also setting a new precedent; it has an all-female membership and a dedication not just to feminist themes, but also to redefining/ undermining what a "feminine aesthetic" might mean and how it might operate.

On the ten-year anniversary of the desalojo that led to the Oaxaca uprising, ASARO, Jaguar Print, Gabinete Grafico, URTARTE, and members of a few other artist collectives came together to collaborate on street art and install it alongside the commemorative march, as I described in the opening vignette for Chapter 2. The work they made for the march was a testament to both the political transformations that have taken place since the Oaxaca Commune and the political stagnation that

necessitates the ongoing struggle for horizontal, participatory democratic practices supporting equality, dignity, and autonomy for minoritized Oaxacans. The tissue prints that we looked at in Figure 2.8, imaging a young child staring indignantly at the viewer with arms folded across their chest, spoke to the continuing teachers' union fight – not just for the ever-present goals of free education and democracy in the union/ government – but also, sadly, for basic respect in regard to educators' work and cause: "My teacher is not a delinquent, [they] are fighting for a better education for us."

**Guerraguetza**

When APPO and Section 22 once again collaborated to host the second People's Guelaguetza in July 2007, they attempted to blockade the state Guelaguetza on Fortín Hill as they had the year before, but were met with police in riot gear on their way up to the auditorium and many were badly injured in the ensuing scuffle. Meanwhile, the Guelaguetza Popular dance performance was taking place at the base of Fortín Hill in the *Plaza de la Danza* (Plaza of Dance), an open stone plaza with tiered seating that was built in 1950 for public folkloric performances. The standoff between APPO and the police protecting the official Guelaguetza resulted in APPO members being chased downhill to the plaza while the dance showcase was underway. Even though the police had managed to prevent APPO from interrupting the state show, their accidental appearance at the Guelagueta Popular and the jeers they received from the crowd at the plaza caused them to stand down. The event

continued in defiance of the police attack and reinforced the People's Guelaguetza as a form of resistance, not just to the adulteration of Indigenous culture, but to state violence in all of its forms. The Guelaguetza Popular still takes place every year alongside the official festival in an uneasy coexistence known locally as the "*Guerra*guetza" ("war of the Guelaguetzas"). In recent years, it has been funded and organized entirely by union Local Section 22 and its once overt connection to APPO is now nearly imperceptible in the visual register.

**Interlude: from Ayotzinapa to Oaxaca**

Returning to my brief survey in Chapter 1 of the history of the rurales normales will help to highlight how Section 22 and the Guelaguetza Popular connect to the ongoing fight for a democratic government and education system, the preservation of rural and Indigenous instruction that is respectful to the lifeways of Oaxaca's original peoples, and the right to speak out against bad government. As I explained, many of the rural teacher training colleges were shut down in the late 1960's because of their reputation as nesting sites of political dissent. One school that has housed some of the most active and militant student teachers in political organizing, however – Raúl Isidro Burgos Rural Teachers' College in the town of Ayotzinapa, Guerrero, Mexico – stayed open, and in 2014 became infamous as the target of one of the most violent repressions in Mexican history.[381]

[381] Lauren Markham,"The Missing 43: Five Years Later," *The New York Review of Books* (September 26, 2019), https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2019/09/26/ayotzinapa-missing-five-years-later/.

On September 26, 2014, about a hundred student teachers, young men from 18-24 years old from the Ayotzinapa normal school, were traveling on buses they had commandeered to transport them to Mexico City for the anniversary event memorializing the 1968 Tlateloco Massacre. When the buses reached a nearby town called Iguala, they were ambushed by municipal police, who shot at them and killed several people, including a bystander in a taxi, the driver and a 14-year old passenger of a bus holding a local soccer team that was mistaken as the normalistas' bus, and two student teachers from Ayotzinapa. About half of the group survived, while 43 of the Ayotzinapa student teachers were taken to a nearby police station for questioning and were never seen again. The body of one another student was found, severely mutilated, near the scene of the ambush the next morning.[382]

No convincing evidence of what happened to the remaining 43 student teachers has yet materialized. The "Ayotzinapa 43," as they came to be called, are still missing, and their families have received no resolve about their disappearance. Several investigative reports have revealed a high probability that the federal government and state officials were involved in the teachers' kidnapping. One report said that the students were handed over to a drug gang, killed, burned, and their remains dumped, but it was later found that the cartel bosses' confessions had been coerced with torture. Some of the teachers' relatives believe that the young men were

[382] Lucina Melesio, "Case of 43 Ayotzinapa Missing Students Unresolved Five Years On," *Al Jazeera* (September 26, 2019), https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/case-43-ayotzinapa-missing-students-unresolved-years-190926204902655.html.

taken by the police to a local army base and killed there.[383] Respected Mexican journalist Anabel Hernández's exhaustive research concluded that one of the buses was carrying over a million dollars in heroin, which the normalistas did not know, and they were attacked in an attempt to recover the drugs.[384] Many believe that José Luis Abarca, mayor of Iguala at the time, and his wife, María de los Ángeles Pineda Villa, were behind the attack, as they have family connections to drug cartels. At the time of the attack, the mayor and his wife were hosting a political event in Iguala and may have feared that the normalistas were headed to town to disrupt it.[385]

Despite these and other theories from investigations of the attack, the true story of the Ayotzinapa 43 has yet to be fully uncovered.[386] But the violence and impunity at the heart of the story is a reminder of how Mexican teachers, especially politically radical teachers, are considered threatening enough to the state be silenced by extreme force. The slogans "*Nos faltan 43*" ("We are missing 43") and "*Fue el estado*" ("It was the state") accompanying the faces and names of the disappeared Ayotzinapa student teachers continue to appear in graphic art by Oaxaca City collectives and in the Guelaguetza Popular. This insistence on showing the faces of the young men and keeping their names in the minds of the public serves as a

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[383] Ryan Deveraux, "Mexico: How 43 Students Disappeared in the Night," *The Intercept* (May 4, 2015), https://theintercept.com/2015/05/04/how-43-students-disappeared-in-mexico-part-1/.
[384] Markham,"The Missing 43."
[385] Deveraux, "Mexico."
[386] Two exhaustive reports of over 500 pages were generated by Grupo Interdisciplinario de Expertos Independientes (GIEI), ''Informe Ayotzinapa: Investigación y primeras conclusiones de las desapariciones y homicidios de los normalistas de Ayotzinapa'' (Semptember 2015) and ''Informe Ayotzinapa II: Avances y nuevas conclusiones sobre la investigación, búsqueda y atención a las víctimas''(April 2016), are both available at http://prensagieiayotzi. wixsite.com/giei-ayotzinapa /informe-.

sobering reminder of the extremes of brutality and impunity that political dissidents are subject to in Mexico, and how infrequently the victims and their families see justice.




[Figure 5.1. Promotional video for the 2016 People's Guelaguetza, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, 2016. Video stills, *Spot Guelaguetza Magesterial y Popular 2016*, CNTE, Section XXII, Cencos 22, Coordinadora Nacional de Trabajadores de los Medios Libres y Comunitarios, Radio Plantón, and Secretaria de Cultura y Recreación, 2016.]

**The post-APPO Guelaguetza Popular**

The teachers' continuing fight has remained most visibly manifest in the annual People's Guelaguetza. In its post-APPO iteration, the festival's focus has been on opposition to neoliberal government education reforms and endorsement of union-generated educational initiatives addressing the needs of Oaxaca's Indigenous rural poor. The 2016 Guelaguetza Popular took place in the context of the aforementioned social movement resurgence unfolding during the tenth anniversary of the Oaxaca Commune. Commemorative marches and manifestations, along with protests against the implementation of neoliberal structural reforms instituted by President Peña Nieto in 2013 created a tense atmosphere reminiscent of the uprising's beginning ten years before. Then, on June 19, 2016, Section 22 teachers and supporters protesting Peña Nieto's education reforms with a highway blockade an hour north of Oaxaca City near the town of Nochixtlán were ambushed by heavily armed federal police. There is no consensus on the number of casualties, but one journalist reported over a hundred injured and at least eight killed.[387]

[Figure 5.1] By the time of the People's Guelaguteza on July 25th of that year, Section 22 organizers were mourning these loses but remained seditious as ever. In the weeks leading up to the festival, the union local produced an incendiary promotional video that was disseminated through social media.[388] In part a satirical commentary on the slick and stylized video promotions that Oaxaca's Secretary of

[387] Jeff Abbott, "Mexico's Uprising Against Education 'Reform,'" Progressive.org (January 26, 2017), https://progressive.org/api/content/c4ba39ee-d8e7-11e6-9bf5-0aea2a882f79/.
[388] CNTE, et.al., *Spot Guelaguetza Magesterial y Popular 2016*, YouTube video, 2:08, posted July 12, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TWcStbyZoOI.

Tourism creates for the official Guelaguetza, the video features teachers as Guelaguetza performers outfitted in Indigenous customary dress from Oaxaca's eight regions, standing on the highway at the site of the Nochixtlán massacre and dancing beside or on top of the burnt-out shells of cars and buses. In the background are banners calling out "Murderers of the People!" with caricatures of President Peña Nieto and a paramilitary figure. The video was controversial, but it sent a clear message of perseverance in the aftermath of Nochixtlán and countered rampant rumors claiming that the teachers' movement was dead and the People's Guelaguetza cancelled. In the final moments of the video, a voiceover repeats the words that appear above the heads of the teachers, who stand in a semicircle with fists in the air: "Section 22 will die on the day that the sun dies."




[Figure 5.2. Convite Popular, 2016 People's Guelaguetza, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, 2016. Photograph courtesy of Desde las Nubes.]

[Figure 5.2] Ten years after the inaugural People's Guelaguetza, the cultural/ political hybridity of the event was expressed with more nuance and inventiveness. The 2016 convite and calenda were each massive marches testifying to the ongoing strength of the teachers' movement and its unrelenting dedication to social justice. Traditional star-shaped faroles were modified to display the faces of political prisoners and fallen or disappeared compañeros and marmotas announced popular solidarity with Oaxaca's teacher-activists. Some groups included banners protesting mines and other transnational extractive projects that threaten Indigenous communal lands, attesting to the continued effort to keep the Guelaguetza Popular responsive to the political issues of the current moment and connected to the specific struggles of the participating Indigenous communities.

[Figure 5.3] During the performance showcase, familiar songs and dances were transformed into protest ballads with creative visual modifications. The opening sequence traditionally features the *Chinas Oaxaqueñas* from the Central Valley region, dressed in brightly colored skirts, dancing with floral baskets on their heads in simple shapes like hearts and religious crosses. In this Guelaguetza Popular, the dancers' floral arrangements instead spelled out, letter by letter: SECTION XXII. [Figure 5.4] Indigenous groups also included their own political messages as part of their performances, such as the protest visuals incorporated by community members from the Cañada region. Their banner reads: "Free, Public Education! In memory of our disappeared, fallen, and political prisoners. Never forgive, never forget! Region Cañada." Next to the banner, a little boy holds a homemade portrait of Ricardo Flores

Magón, the Oaxacan anarchist who agitated for Indigenous communal practices to form the basis of a post-Revolutionary Mexico.




[Figure 5.3. Chinas Oaxaqueñas, Central Valley region, 2016 People's Guelaguetza, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, 2016. Photograph by the author.]




[Figure 5.4. Region Cañada, 2016 People's Guelaguetza, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, 2016. Photograph by the author.]

Even with these and other clever modifications that evinced the festival's ongoing evolution, many felt that the People's Guelaguetza had lost its overall impact. Section 22 teachers, including those who had been involved in the event's creation, expressed that while the fevered conditions of the political crisis in 2006 forgave some of the lack of criticality then, ten years later without signs of significant change seemed inexcusable.[389] For example, the format remained fairly static as an oppositional mirror to the state's Guelaguetza and efforts had not been made to alter some of the sexist and heteronormative aspects of the dance performance. Professor Soberanes conceded that the potency of the Guelaguetza Popular had "diluted little by little because there wasn't the great movement like in 2006 [to sustain it]."[390]

With no vestige of APPO in site, Section 22's 2016 Guelaguetza Popular had also scaled back its focus to the reflect the organizers' most immediate and pressing concern – education. While the CNTE-aligned union local is still committed to its ambitious democratization plan, the most urgent labor union struggle is to keep education free, public, and responsive to students' needs. In Oaxaca, that means fighting for rural Indigenous education, which has been under even more dire threat since President Peña Nieto's education reforms were introduced. The reforms are but one part of a sweeping government campaign to privatize public social services, with public education as principal among them. Widely criticized as thinly disguised labor union reforms, Peña Nieto's education reform plan mandates standardized tests and other bureaucratic hoops for teachers to jump through in order to get and keep their

[389] Interview with Omar Olivera Espinosa, Oaxaca, Oaxaca, October 3, 2018.
[390] Interview with Professor Fernando Soberanes Bojórquez, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, July 17, 2016.

jobs. The CNTE insists that these rules are designed to weaken the union and lay off union teachers. "At stake," journalist Jeff Abbott claims, "are two competing ideas of what education should be. On one side are the unionized teachers, who have maintained protests and blockades against the education changes passed in February 2013; on the other side are corporate leaders and their political allies, who seek to dismantle the teachers' unions, and open up education to private investment."[391] And according to Professor Soberanes:

> [Peña Nieto] rolled the education reforms out first because they are targeted against a sector that has historically been very politically active, that has fought against the state and denounced the government. I think that in the logic of the government, the idea was to first hit the teachers' movement and the union, and to take it apart, because it would be difficult to articulate or manifest the struggle against the structural reforms without the teacher's union [since] the teacher's union might be the only sector that is strong enough to withstand government force. Above all [the reforms] are going to affect the pueblos...the original communities of Oaxaca.[392]

In Oaxaca and other poor states with large Indigenous populations, the most problematic aspects of the education reforms are those in which resources from the rural schools are transferred to the urban centers and national education standards are imposed without deference to Indigenous cultures, languages, and communal lifeways. Peña Nieto's reforms also impose standardized testing for students without the instituting a proper educational structure to ensure that they have opportunities to do well on these evaluations. Section 22 teachers were ready to respond to the President's reforms with a reform plan of their own, the Program for the

[391] Abbott, "Mexico's Uprising."
[392] Interview with Professor Fernando Soberanes Bojórquez, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, July 17, 2016.

Transformation of Education in Oaxaca (*El Plan para la Transformación de la Educación de Oaxaca*, PTEO), which they had been developing since the last round of government education restructuring initiatives were introduced in 2008. PTEO coordinator Tranquilino Lavariega Cruz insists: "Education must be diverse because Oaxaca is an extremely diverse state...Communities should be able to generate their own educational processes, and teachers should be part of it."[393] But the PTEO faced an uphill battle from the start because it also promotes, according to Lavariega Cruz, "a training program that sees a teacher as an agent of social change...someone who has roots in a community, is interested in all the problems of the children, is familiar with the culture of the people, who can promote education projects with parents. In other words, a teacher the ruling class doesn't want."[394] This connects back to the phasing out of the rurales normales. With stated goals, as Poy Solano attests, "to bring education to the poor rural population, but also to combat social injustice and maintain the dignity of the poor," rurales normales and the normalistas who attend them have been, as we have seen, targets of fierce government repression.[395]

In addition to forced disappearances, state and federal government paramilitary operations discipline teacher-activists and members of dissident CNTE-aligned union locals by "arresting them and banishing them to federal prisons in

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[393] Tranquilino Lavariega Cruz qtd. in David Bacon, "Oaxacan Teachers Challenge the Test," *People's World* (May 6, 2013), http://www.peoplesworld.org/article/oaxacan-teachers-challenge-the-test/.

[394] Tranquilino Lavariega Cruz qtd. in Bacon.

[395] Laura Poy Solano, "Pese a Décadas de Abandono, Normales Rurales Cumplen Con Llevar Educación a Los Más Pobres," *La Jornada* (September 26, 2015), http://www.jornada.com.mx/2015/09/26/politica/008n1pol?partner=rss.

distant Mexican states, retaining teacher union leaders' salaries and freezing union bank accounts, violently destroying strike encampments, and arresting and killing protesters, whether teachers or community members."[396] The Nochixtlán massacre was clearly part of this relentless pattern of government repression. Yet Section 22 teachers must still push for government support, because, as Lavariega Cruz explains, "the money comes from the federal Department of Public Education, [and] we need their agreement to implement the PTEO."[397]

At the heart of the PTEO and other pedagogical initiatives created by Section 22 over the last twenty years is a focus on Indigenous comunalidad and an injunction to the Mexican government to deliver on their promise, instantiated in the United Nation's 2007 Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), to "respect the linguistic, cultural, territorial and other rights of Indigenous Peoples within its national territory and to grant them educational autonomy."[398] Support from Oaxacan civil society is crucial to resisting neoliberal structural reforms and securing the proper infrastructure to implement alternative educational programs. Crucially, education plans designed by Section 22 are not just tolerant of Indigenous realities, but built in practices of comunalidad, as the "historic foundation of indigenous life, identity and cultural resistance."[399] The People's Guelaguetza continues to galvanize

[396] Lois M. Meyer, "Resisting Westernization and School Reforms: Two Sides to the Struggle to 'Communalize' Developmentally Appropriate Initial Education in Indigenous Oaxaca, Mexico," *Global Education Review* 4, no. 3 (October 8, 2017): 93, http://ger.mercy.edu/index.php/ger/article/view/351.
[397] Bacon, "Oaxacan Teachers."
[398] Meyer, "Resisting Westernization," 90.
[399] Benjamín Maldonado Alvarado qtd. in Meyer, "Resisting Westernization," 90.

for Section 22 by reinforcing the union local's commitment to Indigenous dignity and prefiguring, through the admixture of Indigenous fiesta and political agitation, a future in which these values are cemented in state and national education.

Oaxaca's Local Section 22 of the national teachers' union was able to take advantage of the Oaxaca Commune moment, when the force of public support coalesced around goals that they had been working on for decades with limited success. It was the first time that Section 22 had enough collective popular power to make strides toward the dissident CNTE's most ambitious goal – national democracy, instituted from below, by and for the people. As Professor Soberanes explained, one of the first principles of the CNTE is that "every form of struggle is acceptable as long as it dignifies the struggle."[400] Section 22 has faced its biggest challenge in manifesting forms of struggle that Oaxacan civil society considers "dignified" enough to rally behind. The People's Guelaguetza has been one of the strategies most accepted by the public and continues to be the "good face" of Section 22 in Oaxaca – an event that everyone can participate in. APPO was a reckoning for many years of PRI control, government impunity, and state repression. But it was also an opportunity for Oaxaqueños to discover and develop their political agency – the means and the ability to organize, work collectively, and imagine a space for political participation dedicated to decolonial social justice. Section 22 teachers are the beacons of that prefigured future. They existed before APPO and the Oaxaca Commune, and they are still here long after APPO has faded from public sight.

[400] Interview with Professor Fernando Soberanes Bojórquez, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, July 17, 2016.

At the 2019 Guelaguetza Popular dance performance, I sat next to a large family huddled under the shade of various umbrellas, sheltering from the hot sun beating down on the stadium seats. They were enjoying the various refreshments offered during the event – *gelatinas* (jello desserts), tacos, and ice cream. One of the adult women in the group confirmed that they were there because she is a union teacher and that her extended family are also supporters of the teachers' movement. But, she insisted, above all, her family continues to come every year to the Guelaguetza Popular because "it is the real fiesta, which belongs to the people."[401]

During the performance, political speeches and chants called for justice for Nochixtlán and Ayotzinapa and freedom for political prisoners – jailed or disappeared members of Section 22 and other CNTE-allied union locals. But most of the focus was on the union's persisting struggle for free public education for all children in Oaxaca and across Mexico. Mexico's new president, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, has promised to dismantle Peña Nieto's education reforms, but Section 22 did not appear ready to rest on their laurels yet. A group of teachers took the microphone during a pause in the dance performance, standing on the stage with postures of determination and fists raised. "Viva Section 22!" they shouted. "Viva!" the crowd shouted back. "Viva la Guelaguetza Popular!" the teachers' booming voices encircled the stadium, animating a sea of people – other teachers, students, parents, children – gathered here in the muggy July sun, rising to their feet, calling back, their faces lit with pride: "Viva! Viva!"

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[401] Interview with anonymous People's Guelaguetza attendee, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, July 22, 2019.

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