

A MOVEMENT IN FRAGMENTS: OAXACA, MEXICO 2006

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## ABSTRACT

In the early morning hours of June 14th, 2006, Oaxacan state and municipal police advanced upon the twenty-seventh annual teachers union *plantón* (encampment) in an attempted *desalojo* (eviction). The following events caught everyone by surprise as multitudes of Oaxacan civil society came forth in support of the striking teachers union, occupied the public buildings of the capital city, and transformed a labor issue into a broad-based, cross-class social movement.

Behind the facade of social movement unity were political ideologies, contradictions, and organizations competing for power and voice within the movement. This project examines the growing body of literature on the 2006 movement, supplemented by participant interviews, to understand the inner workings of a diverse social movement. Drawing primarily upon social movement theory of Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow, I have sought to explain the nature of mobilization and duration of the 6-month long movement by disaggregating the movement into its component parts and examining the various strands of participation. I have found that the Oaxacan movement was far less unified than it appeared on the surface and that the various sectors of the movement had many more demands in mind than the overarching demand of the removal of the Oaxacan Governor. Finally, by understanding the workings of a Mexican social movement in this short twenty-first century, we are closer to understanding the democratic ideals that have fueled similar social movements in recent years. When looking at the Oaxacan

movement's concrete demands to address the gap between democratic ideals and practice, we realize that Oaxaca is not so far from Egypt, from Tunisia, or from Wall Street.

Many thanks to all who helped and supported me in the completion of this project. Thanks to Professors Langer and Tutino for seeing this thesis through to completion, for pushing me to be a better writer, and for helping me look at the big picture when it was so easy to get lost in the details. Thanks to René and Afsaneh for their friendship, hospitality, and advice. Thanks to Carlos for invaluable assistance and excellent conversation. Most of all, this project could not have happened without the patience, support, and love from Sarah - this is for you.

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## Introduction

In the early morning hours of June 14th, 2006, the Oaxacan state and municipal police advanced upon the twenty-seventh annual teachers union *plantón* (encampment) in an attempted *desalojo* (eviction). Just as in the previous twenty-six years, the teachers union had occupied central Oaxaca de Juarez during their annual strike and the ensuing negotiations over wages, benefits, and infrastructural and material investment in education. Although the long-running teachers movement had seen its share of repression, violence, and arrests, they had never been victims of such transparent violence in a metropolitan setting. The words of one retired teacher were often echoed in other conversations and interviews: "We had never seen so much repression, the government always negotiated."<sup>1</sup>

What followed seemed to catch everyone by surprise. Rather than successfully evicting the striking teachers, the state and municipal police were forced to retreat by an outpouring of popular support that allowed the teachers to reoccupy the central plaza (the Zócalo) and the surrounding streets. In droves, allied unions, non-governmental organizations, civil society organizations, and unaffiliated individuals who jumped at the opportunity to protest the state government, all poured into the streets and battled the authorities back. By June 17th, what had been a labor issue had transformed into a broad-based social movement, bringing together more than 350 existing organizations into what would become The Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca (La Asamblea Popular de los Pueblos de Oaxaca, or APPO).

How are we to understand the nearly instantaneous popular reaction to state repression? What maintained mobilization of disparate organizations, factions, and groups over the course of

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<sup>1</sup> Sergio Vale Jiménez, interview with author, July 27, 2012.

months as the movement demanded the resignation of Oaxaca's governor, Ulises Ruiz Ortiz? In the romantically revolutionary view, some have drawn comparisons to the Paris Commune and radical democracy,<sup>2</sup> while others have focused on popular discontent with what Edward Gibson termed "subnational authoritarianism."<sup>3</sup> Still others attribute the popular mobilization to, depending on their personal perspective and involvement, a long history of resistance in Oaxaca,<sup>4</sup> previous mobilization(s) in the state for indigenous rights and autonomy,<sup>5</sup> and precedents set by Coalition of Workers, Campesinos, and Students of the Isthmus (COCEI) in the Isthmus of Oaxaca in the movement for democratization and leftist electoral victories.<sup>6</sup>

The differing perspectives on the rise of the movement both complicate and illuminate the processes of mobilization in a widespread, cross-class social movement. On one hand, they point to the various ideological currents within the movement and the contradictions that arise as a result of competing ideologies, complicating our understanding of cohesion within a movement. On the other hand, the wide spectrum of participation points to other processes at work, particularly the leveraging of existing networks (both formal and informal) to encourage mobilization. Such diversity in understanding why and how a movement occurred indicates the diversity of movement participants, each sector or individual involving themselves for their own

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<sup>2</sup> Gustavo Esteva, "The Oaxaca Commune and Mexico's Coming Insurrection" *Antipode* 42.4 (2010); Carlos Beas Torres, "La Batalla por Oaxaca," in *La Batalla por Oaxaca*, ed. Carlos Beas Torres (Oaxaca: Ediciones Yope Power, 2007).

<sup>3</sup> Víctor Raúl Martínez Vásquez, *Autoritarismo, Movimiento Popular, y Crisis Política: Oaxaca 2006*.

<sup>4</sup> David Venegas, interview with author, July 17, 2012.

<sup>5</sup> Jorge Hernández Díaz, "Las demandas indígenas en el movimiento de la Asamblea Popular de los Pueblos de Oaxaca," in *La APPO ¿rebelión o movimiento social? (nuevas formas de expresión ante la crisis)*, ed. Víctor Raúl Martínez Vásquez (Oaxaca: UABJO, 2009).

<sup>6</sup> Rubén Valencia and David Venegas, "Conversaciones con Rubén Valencia y David Venegas: Una visión del movimiento de Oaxaca contada por una de las muchas voces," in *Cuando Hasta Las Piedras Se Levantan: Oaxaca, México, 2006*, eds. Gustavo Esteva, Rubén Valencia, and David Venegas (Buenos Aires: Editorial Antropofagia, 2008).



particular reason and understanding. Thus examining the movement becomes a question of how networks of formal organizational ties (such as alliances between public sector unions) and informal ties (neighbors working side by side constructing barricades) served to mobilize and sustain a movement in spite of contradictory ideological currents flowing beneath the surface.

As convenient as it would be to view the uprising in Oaxaca as a spontaneous action arising from police brutality against the striking teachers, very rarely is reality so simple. For example, Rosa Parks did not spark the Montgomery Bus Boycott just because her feet were tired and she wanted to keep her seat. Nor did four students at North Carolina A & T spontaneously decide to start sitting in at a lunch counter. Rather, both sets of activists were well informed of previous similar actions and had existing organizations of support and information dissemination behind them to facilitate the efficacy of their actions.<sup>7</sup>

In the case of Oaxaca, to examine the creation of formal and informal networks, we must look at Oaxaca's demographics and its long history of mobilization, activism, and network building prior to the police actions against the strikers. That is to say, the events of 2006 did not exist in a vacuum, but rather drew upon a history of organization and protest, of course changing over time in scope and scale.

Oaxaca, situated along Mexico's southern Pacific coast between Guerrero and Chiapas, is one of the poorest states in the country. According to the most recent data (2010) collected by the Mexican census, the state of Oaxaca has a population of 3.8 million people, with nearly 300,000 living in the capital city. Oaxaca remains profoundly rural and indigenous, with 52% of the

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<sup>7</sup> Aldon Morris, "Black Southern Sit-In Movement: An Analysis of Internal Organization" in *Readings on Social Movements: Origins, Dynamics, and Outcomes*, eds. Doug McAdam and David Snow (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

population living in towns of less than 2,500 people. Within Oaxaca, the Instituto Nacional Indigenista recognizes 16 distinct ethno-linguistic groups, making up nearly 35% of the state population. The most commonly used indigenous languages in the state are Zapotec, Mixtec, Mixe, and Mazatec. The rural nature of the state, as well as the mountainous geography, and long patterns of state planning that had concentrated income-producing industrial projects in the prosperous northern regions of Mexico has left Oaxaca with drastically lower levels of income and higher poverty rates compared to Mexico as a whole. While the average GDP per capita in Mexico was roughly \$8,950 USD in 2007, Oaxaca's average GDP per capita was \$4,000 USD.<sup>8</sup> An estimated 62% of Oaxaca's population lives in poverty, and 29% in extreme poverty, compared to national levels of 45% and 10% respectively as of 2012.<sup>9</sup>

The historiography and literature of post-independence Oaxaca is rich in examples of popular movements for land, citizenship rights, and public services. Peter Guardino and Karen Caplan<sup>10</sup> examined Oaxaca in the era of independence and immediate post-independence respectively and found that both urban subalterns and rural indigenous communities adapted to and transformed the political and social changes occurring in New Spain and what would be Mexico. Through engagement in partisan politics or the adaptation of new rhetoric of citizenship, electoral democracy, and liberalism, "the establishment of new hegemonic political cultures depend[ed] ultimately on the actions of subaltern people and groups."<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> All data retrieved from Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía, [www.inegi.org.mx](http://www.inegi.org.mx).

<sup>9</sup> Poverty data retrieved from Consejo Nacional de Evaluación de la Política de Desarrollo Social, [www.coneval.gob.mx](http://www.coneval.gob.mx).

<sup>10</sup> Karen Caplan, *Indigenous Citizens: Local Liberalism in Early National Oaxaca and Yucatan* (Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009).

<sup>11</sup> Peter Guardino, *The Time of Liberty: Popular Political Culture in Oaxaca, 1750-1850* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 290.

In his study on Oaxaca during the Porfiriato, Mark Overmyer-Velásquez tracked the contentious nature of capitalist transformation in the state. He argues, similar to the later expressions of indigenous tradition and organization that flourished in the 2006 movement, that modernity was a negotiated process involving both elites and commoners. In other words, "the disruption and dislocation of cultural and social practices caused by the processes of capitalist development generate[d] the desire to construct new frameworks of modernity and tradition that [would] create meaning for those disruptions and dislocations."<sup>12</sup>

During the same era, Francie Chassen-López finds that Oaxacan rural mobilization in the state remained strong in opposition to land privatization and capitalist expansion, particularly in the Isthmus. In locations of contention, indigenous communities "employed an impressive array of strategies to retain or recover their lands and resources and otherwise improve conditions for their families and communities."<sup>13</sup> In the urban setting, Chassen-López challenged the previously prevailing historiography that opposition to Porfirio Díaz was nearly nonexistent in his home state. She found that "urban professionals and artisans, along with rural ranchers and townspeople, formed a middle-class opposition...[and] the radical liberalism of Ricardo Flores Magón's Mexican Liberal Party...suggests a relationship between the radical opposition and the regions of Porfirian development."<sup>14</sup>

The rise and proliferation of political clubs and organizations, alongside a massive expansion in printed material would continue in post-revolutionary Oaxaca. Although Oaxaca's

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<sup>12</sup> Mark Overmyer-Velásquez, *Visions of the Emerald City: Modernity, Tradition, and the Formation of Porfirian Oaxaca, Mexico* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 9.

<sup>13</sup> Francie Chassen-López, *From Liberal to Revolutionary Oaxaca: The View from the South, Mexico 1867-1911* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004), 329.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, 450.

twentieth century can be defined by overwhelming support for the PRI, often harkening back to the popular memories of visits and land distributions of the Cárdenas presidency,<sup>15</sup> it "also witnessed the creation of a new set of urban networks, cultures, and cross-class mobilizations as [intrastate] immigration and commercial expansion established *vecindades* and markets as spaces in which state policy could be debated and expressed."<sup>16</sup>

By the 1940s, population growth in the city of Oaxaca began to accelerate. The growth of the city of Oaxaca was, in large part, a result of land invasions and occupations, the most successful of which relied on continued neighborhood organization to press for titles and public services.<sup>17</sup> The neighborhood organizations, alongside other political organizations such as labor unions, political clubs, and market vendor associations, have been "instrumentally valuable in their confrontations with local conditions of social inequality."<sup>18</sup> Over the course of the twentieth century, three Oaxacan state governors were forced to resign following cross-class social movements.

The structure of the PRI, at least until the 1990s, was such that state governors were imposed and appointed by the national party. In the formation of what Gibson calls peripheral electoral coalitions, "ruling party elites expected governors to maintain political stability and deliver quotas of votes to the PRI in local and federal elections."<sup>19</sup> As governors were sent into

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<sup>15</sup> On the resonating personal identification with Cárdenas among ejidatarios, Lynn Stephen, *Zapata Lives!: Histories and Cultural Politics in Southern Mexico* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002), 283-286.

<sup>16</sup> Benjamin T. Smith, *Pistoleros and Popular Movements: The Politics of State Formation in Postrevolutionary Oaxaca* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), 287.

<sup>17</sup> Arthur Murphy and Alex Stepick, *Social Inequality in Oaxaca: A History of Resistance and Change* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), 64-69 on the growth of *colonias populares* as a result of land invasions and squatting, 121-132 on voluntary organizations in the form of neighborhood political organizations.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, 121.

<sup>19</sup> Richard Snyder, *Politics after Neoliberalism: Reregulation in Mexico* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 26.

their states, after having often spent the majority of their career in Mexico City rather than in their home states, they were subject to dual constraints. On one hand, they were accountable to the national party, expected to maintain hegemony on the state level and answer to national superiors. On the other hand, "governors faced pressures to ally with local groups such as traditional elites who controlled patronage networks and political bosses from the PRI's corporatist confederations."<sup>20</sup> To maintain state stability, governors were given relative autonomy to craft local coalitions and strike a balance between the corporatist interests. Failure to maintain equilibrium often resulted in revocation of governors as the national party responded to local unrest by removing governors and replacing them with figures more amenable to local conditions.

The first governor forced out by local mobilization was Edmundo Sánchez Cano, removed in 1947 after two years in the governorship. Across the state, displaced local *caciques* (political power-holders), rural and urban union leaders, and a cross-class mix of urban residents, protesting nepotism, the lack of public services and infrastructure, commercial monopolies, high food prices, and imposition of unpopular municipal authorities, all united in opposition to force the president, Miguel Alemán, to replace the governor.<sup>21</sup>

The second Oaxacan governor to fall to popular pressure was Manuel Mayoral Heredia, elected in 1950 and removed from office by 1952.<sup>22</sup> Presaging the events of 2006, "the fall of Mayoral Heredia was partly due to various social forces taking advantage of the political opportunity opened up by Mexico's presidential elections and the governor's ham-fisted

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 27.

<sup>21</sup> Smith, *Pistoleros*, 289-327.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 362-401.

treatment of public demonstrations."<sup>23</sup> Rampant corruption in public infrastructure projects, the reintroduction of product monopolies (such as eggs), and increased taxes on staple goods led to the formation of a cross-class coalition under the banner of the Comité Civico Oaxaqueño that incorporated students, market vendors, artisans, and workers, as well as opposition political parties such as the National Action Party (PAN) and rich merchants excluded from the fruits of corruption and monopolies. After four months of mass protest, strikes, and displays of popular power, the coalition was able to force the resignation of governor Mayoral Heredia. Smith repeatedly emphasizes that the movement was far from an elite push to remove the governor, but rather it was the students and market vendors, particularly the female market vendors who, "although they allied with elite groups, they resisted co-optation and drove the movement forward at key moments."<sup>24</sup>

The politicization of students, citizens, and particularly the rise of the women as political agents would take similar shape in Oaxaca in the third ousting of a state governor in 1977. The election of Manuel Zárate Aquino as governor in 1974 marked a new era of social strife as his administration went after independent labor unions and voluntary organizations. In the city, the governor decertified and dismantled the bus drivers and auto mechanics unions and turned on land occupations in a campaign of evictions and destruction, including the burning of new *colonia popular* (squatter settlement).<sup>25</sup> In conjunction with students from nearby Universidad Autónoma Benito Juárez de Oaxaca (UABJO), students, squatters, and unionists began a two year struggle against ever-increasing state repression that saw mass marches, university strikes,

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 367.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 387.

<sup>25</sup> Murphy and Stepick, *Social Inequality in Oaxaca*, 117.

union strikes, and even a three day city shutdown. The day after the citywide shutdown in 1977, a demonstration marching toward the Zócalo was attacked by the state police, resulting in at least twenty-five wounded and one death. In the chaos of protests, the federal army was called upon to occupy the city and governor Zárate Aquino took what would be a permanent leave of absence.<sup>26</sup> "The presence of groups of intellectuals, of leftist organizations, such as independent media organizations, made possible the wide diffusion and support for the movement of Oaxaca."<sup>27</sup> In other words, prior to state repression, the diffusion of alternative sources of media and information allowed the formation and maintenance of a cross-class mobilization.

In the case of Zárate Aquino, his attempted alliances with elites rather than the union and political bosses that made up the PRI's corporatist structure would have dire consequences for his political career. The governor was unable to maintain stability and respond to demands of civil society and groups with interests in state resources. The failure to maintain the corporatist structure that defined the centralized PRI, and thus ensuring votes for the hegemonic party, forced President López Portillo to quietly order Zárate Aquino to step aside.

But it was after his fall from power that Oaxaca began to see the mobilizations that laid the groundwork for the events of 2006. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Oaxaca, alongside Chiapas, saw the first mass movements within the national teachers union, Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación (SNTE), to both obtain greater economic rewards as well as break the corporatist alliance between the national union and the state and democratize the union from below. Beginning in Chiapas in 1978, economic demands were at the forefront of the first

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 120.

<sup>27</sup> Miguel Lozano, "Oaxaca: Una Experiencia de Lucha," in *Oaxaca, Una Lucha Reciente: 1960-1983*, ed. René Bustamante (Mexico City: Ediciones Nueva Sociología, 1984), 124.

protest actions by teachers. In neighboring Oaxaca, the movement quickly spread as "wages for some 2000 teachers in Oaxaca had not been paid for more than two and sometimes three years, and wages were paid irregularly and late throughout the south."<sup>28</sup> By 1979, protesting teachers, facing a choice between remaining in the SNTE or organizing an illegal and independent union, opted for neither and continued the struggle from within, forming a democratic committee within the SNTE known as the National Coordinating Committee of Workers in Education (CNTE).<sup>29</sup> Using protest techniques that would continue for years, the teachers organized *plantones* (occupations of public space while striking), and marches on Mexico City to advance their demands against centralized power and the links between undemocratic union leadership and the federal regime. While the issues and mobilization techniques varied from state to state and municipality to municipality, Oaxaca's mobilization saw significant victories from the beginning. Back pay, wages increases, and other economic demands were complemented by recognition of democratic organizing from below. Oaxacan teachers joined the Coordinating Committee of the SNTE for the first time "because of extensive grass-roots organization and widespread solidarity."<sup>30</sup>

The gains won by Oaxacan teachers would transform their Sección 22 into one of the most powerful and most organized state chapters of the SNTE and the CNTE. One teacher who had participated in some of the initial meetings with teachers from Chiapas remembered that when the national SNTE attempted to impose Fernando Maldonado Robles as the secretary general of Sección 22 in April 1980, "we decided to organize a big march on May 1st. It wasn't

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<sup>28</sup> Joe Foweraker, *Popular Mobilization in Mexico: The Teachers' Movement, 1977-1987* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 33.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, 77-80.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, 113.



just the teachers...and we began to change the structures of the union."<sup>31</sup> Following the march, on May 2, 1980, the Oaxacan teachers convoked a statewide strike and installed their first *plantón* in central Oaxaca de Juárez. Two weeks later the striking teachers formed La Asamblea de Representantes Sindicales (Assembly of Union Representatives) that would later be formalized as the State Assembly of the CNTE.<sup>32</sup> From victory achieved in May 1980 by the Oaxacan teachers formalized the use of the *plantón* as their primary protest repertoire that would be used year after year through 2006.

The later years of the twentieth century witnessed further growth in mobilization as student movements, women's movements, and indigenous movements expanded in Oaxaca and across the country. In 1980-81, capitalizing on the political liberalization that occurred under Presidents Echeverría and López Portillo, COCEI, in an alliance with the Mexican Communist Party (PCM), turned Juchitán, Oaxaca into the first municipality under leftist governance in the country. In municipal power, COCEI formed an *Ayuntamiento Popular*, the People's Government, providing a major accomplishment in the process of democratization in a state that was to long remain a stronghold of the PRI.<sup>33</sup>

### **Economic Change and Market Driven Policies: Decentralization and Reorganization**

However, an analysis of organizing, mobilization, and protest in Oaxaca in the late twentieth century is merely one aspect of the changes occurring at the national and international levels, whose ramifications were deeply felt in Oaxaca and across Mexico. The political liberalization began by President Echeverría (1970-1976) and President López Portillo (1976-

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<sup>31</sup> Sergio Vale Jiménez, interview with author, July 27, 2012.

<sup>32</sup> Horacio Gómez Pineda, interview with author, July 15, 2012.

<sup>33</sup> Jeffery Rubin, "COCEI in Juchitan: Grassroots Radicalism and Regional History," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 26.1 (1994): 109-136.

1982), did not fundamentally change the nature of the Mexican economy, marked by state ownership and control over natural resource exploitation as well as targeted subsidies and protectionist policies allotted to national producers and manufacturers. Through the second half of the 1970s, into the early 1980s, the state spending was financed primarily by oil revenues and international loans, riding the wave caused by high oil prices as a result of the OPEC embargo in 1973 and the Iranian Revolution in 1979 (known as the first and second oil crises respectively).<sup>34</sup>

When oil prices began to drop in the early 1980s, Mexico's PRI government faced a crisis of payments, unable to meet their international debt obligations that were being called in. In 1982, Mexico defaulted on its international loans, and the PRI began a shift in generational leadership that would lead the country from state-led economic policy to market-driven economic policy, known the world over as neoliberalism. However, the contentious process of abandoning the legacy of President Cárdenas and the economic policies of the previous half-century caused massive rifts within the PRI and a number of high-ranking PRI politicians abandoned the party to become opposition candidates in local, state, and national elections. While varying from state to state, political liberalization began from the ground up, with municipalities being the first locations open to opposition political victories. State-level elections followed as opposition candidates began to win seats in state legislatures, and the first gubernatorial elections to go to an opposition candidate occurred in 1989 in Baja California.

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<sup>34</sup> See Daniel Yergin, *The Quest: Energy, Security, and the Remaking of the Modern World* (New York: Penguin Press, 2011).

The divisions within the PRI caused national leaders to realize that they would have to reform and strengthen their electoral bases if they were to remain in power.<sup>35</sup> As Richard Snyder explains, reorganization and redistribution of public expenditure was often designed with an electoral component in mind. Thus, as a long bastion of the PRI, despite budget cuts and austerity measures on the federal level, Oaxaca was one of a handful of states that received greater federal resources in the era of neoliberalism than in the era of state-led economic development. "In Oaxaca, federal funds increased so dramatically during the late 1980s that the state government was literally awash in resources."<sup>36</sup> With resources in hand, Heladio Ramírez López, upon assuming gubernatorial duties in 1986, undertook two projects in particular that would serve to maintain the power of the PRI's corporatist structures in Oaxaca. Aside from the state-level projects discussed below, Oaxaca also became the greatest recipient of the targeted anti-poverty program PRONASOL (National Solidarity Program), a program that had clear electoral dimensions.<sup>37</sup>

Responding to the dismantling of the federal coffee exporting agency (INMECAFE), which had subsidized and controlled coffee exports since the 1970s, Ramírez López brought in a former INMECAFE director to oversee the construction of a state-level agency responsible for coffee marketing and interest representation.<sup>38</sup> Realizing that the majority of coffee production was in the hand of smallholders, Ramírez López systematically went about forming and strengthening producer organizations under the aegis of the Unión de Ejidos, an organization

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<sup>35</sup> Edward Gibson, "The Populist Road to Market Reforms: Policy and Electoral Coalitions in Mexico and Argentina." *World Politics* 49.3 (1997), 339-370.

<sup>36</sup> Snyder, *Politics after Neoliberalism*, 63.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, 64.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, 53.

with close ties to the PRI, initially attempting to exclude independent producer unions from state resources. Funneling money and resources through corporatist organizations strengthened smallholders who were then incorporated into the newly created Statewide Coordinating Network of Coffee Producers (CEPCO). However, independent producer organizations had years of mobilization and experience behind them, and they were able to challenge the administration to turn CEPCO into an inclusionary organization, with smallholder representatives on the executive committee, that would supplant the space left by INMECAFE, "taking charge of credit management, harvesting, processing, and national and international marketing."<sup>39</sup> In other words, envisioned as an agency that would strengthen corporatist ties with official unions of small producers, mobilization from below transformed the neocorporatist project into an inclusionary body that served the majority of Oaxacan coffee producers. With no choice but to respond to popular pressure from below, Ramírez López conceded participation to previously excluded organizations in order to stabilize the state economy and incorporate independent organizations into the fold of the Oaxacan PRI.

Similarly, during the same administration, the second major neocorporatist project involved negotiations and institution building with the teachers' union. The union, as mentioned above, had engaged in widespread and destabilizing mobilizations beginning in the late 1970s in an effort to increase wages as benefits as well as break free from the control of the national SNTE leaders and to democratize on the state level. Successful to a degree, Section 22 of the SNTE and CNTE did succeed in removing a great deal of power and control over Oaxacan educational resource allocation from the hands of the national union leaders, allowing Oaxacan

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 79.

teachers to participate in free elections and elect their chosen representatives to state and national assemblies of the union. However, they were also a major political force in Oaxaca, able to pressure the state for better contracts and increased management over the day-to-day operations of public education. Ceding some managerial control to the teachers union was a process solidified under Governor Ramírez López in an effort to maintain the corporatist ties between the state government and the union. In 1992, the governor decreed the creation of the Instituto Estatal de Educación Pública de Oaxaca. This body responded to two conflicting demands: first, the federal government was undertaking decentralization of public education, placing more power and responsibility in state hands; and second, the teachers' union's discontent with federal reforms as it weakened their ability to pressure the federal government for resources. In neocorporatist fashion, the state gubernatorial administration incorporated union leaders into the new institution, sharing management responsibilities and handing to union control "a good part of the substantive administration for the functioning of educational services in the state."<sup>40</sup> As an effort to subdue the teacher mobilizations, the compromise improved union contracts, but most importantly, incorporated the union into the functioning of the educational administration. As a result, although the teachers union had been protesting the close ties between the federal PRI government and the national SNTE, they reconstructed ties on the state level that brought the state PRI and Sección 22 into a mutually beneficial relationship, promising electoral power to the PRI in return for resources and increased control over state-level public education management. In this manner, the neocorporatist projects, even in the face of neoliberalism on the federal level,

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<sup>40</sup> Cuauhtémoc Blas López, "Oaxaca: Política Educativa, Herencia Desastrosa," in *Oaxaca: Ínsula de rezagos: Crítica a sus gobiernos de razón y costumbre*, ed. Cuauhtémoc Blas López (Oaxaca: Editorial Siembra, 2007), 16.

served to maintain the power of the PRI in Oaxaca years past the democratization of national elections.

Thus Oaxaca moved into the 2000s, with a history of subaltern organization, in both the rural and urban settings that a variety of organizations would draw upon for collective memory and movement tactics. Furthermore, the neocorporatist structures placed a premium on subaltern mobilization, providing the lesson that popular pressure could be successful both in removing elected officials and in obtaining state resources.

For the 2006 movement, the past is certainly important. Recalling dates and events, marches to remember victims and tragedies played major roles in the mobilization. During the movement, graffiti covered the city with phrases such as "nos vemos en 2010"<sup>41</sup> and "nunca olvida Oct 1968."<sup>42</sup> Marches were called on anniversaries of events, both tragic and successful, placing the past firmly in the discourse of the present. However, while the actions and mobilizations that encompassed all arenas of public and political life at various times of the twentieth century certainly provided models and predecessors for the 2006 mobilization, the greater political, economic and social context prevents an explanation based solely on lineage and inheritance. To advance such an explanation would amount to cultural determinism, in effect claiming that Oaxacans are predisposed to insurgency and rebellion. Rather, to grasp the dynamics of the 2006 mobilization, we must first understand the limited progress of

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<sup>41</sup> "We'll see each other in 2010," invoking the wars for independence that began in 1810 and the Mexican Revolution that began in 1910, hinting at upcoming social upheaval in 2010. Seen by the author numerous times in 2008-2009.

<sup>42</sup> "Never forget October 1968," recalling state repression of the nationwide student movement that culminated in a massacre in Tlatelolco, Mexico City on October 2nd, 1968. Seen by the author in 2008-2009. On Tlatelolco, see Elena Poniatowska, *Massacre in Mexico*, trans. Helen Lane (Columbia, MO, University of Missouri Press, 1991).

democratization, the multiple forms of local nationalism, and the operation of hegemony in twenty-first century Oaxaca.

### **Democratization, Nationalism, and Hegemony**

*In the synchronized rituals surrounding such events, local newspapers displayed advertisements by Oaxacan unions, business groups, political luminaries, and even restaurants and shoe stores, paying homage to the governor's heir designate and wishing him well. Governor Murat had just pulled off a dedazo, a practice officially dropped in much of the country by the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) during Mexico's slow passage to democratization in the 1990s.<sup>43</sup>*

The electoral victory of Vicente Fox in 2000 unseated the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) from the presidency for the first time in over seventy years. To many it seemed as though electoral democracy had finally succeeded in Mexico. In a sense, it had. Gradual political liberalization over the preceding 30 years had allowed for multiple state governorships under the two main opposition parties, the right-wing PAN, and the leftist Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD). By 2000, twenty-one governorships still belonged to the PRI while the PAN controlled seven and the PRD controlled four.<sup>44</sup>

Oaxaca, however, remained strongly within the grasp of the PRI. Relying on the techniques practiced and perfected by the PRI over the majority of the twentieth century, Oaxaca's elections remained marred by accusations of vote buying, intimidation, and the implied tying of votes to the continuation of social programs. As one author noted when examining political conflicts in Oaxaca and Nuevo Leon, "electoral exclusion in [Oaxaca] is part of a wider institutional problem that has to do with the PRI's authoritarian practices, as they have existed for

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<sup>43</sup> Edward Gibson, "Boundary Control: Subnational Authoritarianism in Democratic Countries," *World Politics* 58.1 (2005), 101.

<sup>44</sup> Martínez Vásquez, *Autoritarismo*, 14.

decades, cacique-style social structures, and high degrees of corruption."<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, Lynn Stephen found that some communities in Oaxaca expressed both pro-PRI and pro-opposition ideologies, but that "where a significant number of people depend on government antipoverty programs and have few options, the threats of the PRI were taken seriously,"<sup>46</sup> resulting in the PRI's continued electoral domination.

Edward Gibson argues that these voting patterns and practices suggest that, "democratic transitions, while transforming politics at the national level, create little pressure for subnational democratization. In fact, they often hinder it."<sup>47</sup> Gibson further explains that in localities such as Oaxaca, dominated by a subnational hegemonic party, "democratically elected central governments may find that the costs of challenging peripheral authoritarians outweigh the benefits because the authoritarian periphery serves the democratic center in tasks vital to national political governance."<sup>48</sup> Thus, democratization on the federal level, often resulting in a fragile coalition hesitant to challenge the lasting influence of past regimes, must rely on undemocratic state government in order to function. As a result, according to Martínez Vásquez, "it is evident that in some regions like Oaxaca, in recent years not only have they not seen the changes observed at the national level, but that the traits of old authoritarian regimes have intensified."<sup>49</sup>

The election of Vicente Fox in 2000 broke the hierarchical ties between the presidency and state governments that had remained strong under the PRI for much of the twentieth century. While the 1980s and 1990s had seen political and economic decentralization, to the greatest

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<sup>45</sup> Guadalupe Correa-Cabrera, *Democracy in "Two Mexicos": Political Institutions in Oaxaca and Nuevo León* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 149.

<sup>46</sup> Stephen, *Zapata Lives!*, 311.

<sup>47</sup> Gibson, "Boundary Control: Subnational Authoritarianism in Democratic Countries," 107.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 107-108.

<sup>49</sup> Martínez Vásquez, *Autoritarismo*, 16.



degree under President Ernesto Zedillo (1994-2000), the election of an opposition candidate removed the oversight that the federal executive had long maintained over state governors. One of the primary reasons that public pressure succeeded in removing state governors prior to the 1980s was the hierarchical nature of the PRI, with the final decision resting in the office of the President. In such a manner, the executive served to limit abuses by local elected and appointed officials, who were subject to replacement in the name of stability.

Because of a combination of political decentralization and the demands of political alliances as an opposition executive in a majority PRI country, President Fox "was not capable of limiting goverors' abuses during his *sexenio* [six-year term], specifically those of the PRI governors José Murat (1998-2004) and Ulises Ruíz (2004-2010), who absolutely controlled the Oaxacan legislature, judiciary, the local human rights commission, communication media, and several other state institutions."<sup>50</sup> Thus unwilling or unable to push for further democratic reforms at the state level, President Fox and his executive office found it far more politically expedient to permit Murat and Ruiz Ortiz to engage in the old style of PRI governance.

Having been anointed by Murat, Ulises Ruiz began his campaign with the slogan "Neither Marches, Nor Encampments," looking to stifle the marches, blockades, and occupations that had long characterized the Oaxacan repertoire of protest and contention.<sup>51</sup> Upon assuming office in 2004 after a contested election,<sup>52</sup> Governor Ruiz immediately removed the state

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<sup>50</sup> Correa-Cabrera, *Democracy in "Two Mexicos"*, 58.

<sup>51</sup> Diana Denham and C.A.S.A. Collective, *Teaching Rebellion: Stories from the Grassroots Mobilization in Oaxaca* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2008), 29.

<sup>52</sup> On protest and contestation of the elections, see Victor Ruiz Arrazola, Ciro Perez, and Renato Davalos, "Surge la violencia en Juchitán e Ixtepepec," *La Jornada*, August 5, 2004. In the midst of widespread accusations of fraud in which the expected charges of vote buying and intimidation were leveled at the Ruiz campaign, there were also a number of election related assassinations including that of the PRD candidate for the municipal presidency in San José Estancia Grande. See also Martínez Vásquez, *Autoritarismo*, 29-35.

government offices from central Oaxaca and relocated to the outskirts of the city in a further effort to remove the element of public protest from the central city.<sup>53</sup>

In practice, this was an attempt at top-down change to the nature of local hegemony. However, if we conceive of hegemony using Roseberry's proposition that hegemony is best used to understand struggle rather than consent, then we can begin to understand that nature of contention in Oaxaca does not rely solely on top-down actions. Rather, "the ways in which the words, images, symbols, forms, organizations, institutions, and movements used by subordinate populations to talk about, understand, confront, accommodate themselves to, or resist their domination are shaped by the process of domination itself."<sup>54</sup>

The protest repertoires of Oaxacan movements and organizations had been shaped into a hegemonic process over years both by pushing to expand the boundaries of what protest the state would allow and incorporating the ideologies and language of the state (particularly the revolutionary rhetoric of the PRI) into protest.<sup>55</sup> Furthermore, according to Gibson, the power struggles that play out on the subnational level always have links to national politics. Governors, like Murat and Ruíz of Oaxaca, who consistently deliver votes for the national party, "are players on the national stage."<sup>56</sup> Thus challengers, in the form of opposition parties or civil society organizations, to be successful must create relationships with national political powers and work to shape and articulate a discourse of resistance within the bounds of what resonates in national collective identity and memory. Thus, "in authoritarian provinces, incumbents have an interest

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<sup>53</sup> Martínez Vásquez, *Autoritarismo*, 38-39.

<sup>54</sup> William Roseberry, "Hegemony and the Language of Convention," in *Everyday Forms of State Formation: Revolution and Negotiation of Rule in Modern Mexico*, eds. Gilbert Joseph and Daniel Nugent (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994), 360-361.

<sup>55</sup> Charles Tilly, *The Politics of Collective Violence* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 44-50.

<sup>56</sup> Gibson, "Boundary Control," 110.

in keeping conflicts localized, whereas oppositions have an interest in nationalizing local conflict."<sup>57</sup>

However, the structures of government had changed somewhat since the neocorporatist framework constructed under Ramírez López. Since the presidency was not longer in the hands of the PRI, the Oaxacan state governor had been freed from some of the accountability toward national party leaders. No longer so easily replaceable by the President, Ulises Ruiz was able to systematically construct a network of patronage and corruption while simultaneously attempting to weaken the corporatist political powers of the past. In essence, the new freedom to operate on the state level, with a weak democratic federal regime reliant upon stability on the subnational level, governors such as Ruiz were able to take on some of the characteristics of sultanistic regimes. Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan explain, "in Sultanism, there may be extensive social and economic pluralism, but almost never political pluralism...The essential reality in a Sultanistic regime is that all individuals, groups, and institutions are permanently subject to the unpredictable and despotic intervention of the sultan, and thus pluralism is precarious."<sup>58</sup> In Oaxaca, as will be detailed below, the consolidation of power and institutional manipulation to preserve power were the characteristics that defined the Murat and Ruiz governorships. "Since it is at the local level that state policies are carried out, contested, reshaped, resisted, or revised, the spreading of sultanistic practices at the local level bodes ill for the emerging democracies."<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid, 108.

<sup>58</sup> Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 52-53.

<sup>59</sup> H.E. Chehabi and Juan Linz, eds., *Sultanistic Regimes* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 47.

In addition to engaging in targeted harassment and repression of political and media opposition, as will be discussed in Chapter 2, the governor also began to engage in significant public works projects, including the modification of the Zócalo, a UNESCO designated heritage site. Contracts to build roads and reconstruct plazas were handed to friends and family members, including to his brother Victor Hugo Ruiz Ortiz. Perhaps the most damning accusation of corruption, still not brought to court, is that the public works, including "the remodeling of the Zócalo that cost 700 million pesos, was to channel resources to the campaign of the man to who [Ruiz] owes his political career," Roberto Madrazo, the PRI's candidate in the 2006 presidential elections.<sup>60</sup>

As the presidential elections were approaching, the Oaxacan teachers once again went on strike, but this time refused to deal with Ruiz, who had made it known that his goal was to break the power of the union. On a national scale, Guillermo de la Peña notes that the definition of political actors has changed in Mexico to move beyond traditional political agents such as labor unions and *campesinos*. In their place are "organizations and groups that simultaneously, or alternatives, defend specific economic or political interests, open spaces for new types of collective identities, propose new forms of citizen participation, and demand new democratic definitions not only of the state but of daily life."<sup>61</sup> Thus, as discussed above, Oaxaca had seen an impressive array of subaltern political agency throughout the twentieth century that further expanded in the years leading up to 2006 to include identity based politics and various civil society organizations making new political claims. In this manner, contention in Oaxaca is both

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<sup>60</sup> Alejandro Suverza, "Las vicisitudes de Ulises Ruiz en Oaxaca" *El Universal*, June 15, 2006.

<sup>61</sup> Guillermo de la Peña, "Civil Society and Popular Resistance: Mexico at the End of the Twentieth Century," in *Cycles of Conflict, Centuries of Change: Crisis, Reform, and Revolution in Mexico*, eds. Elisa Servín, Leticia Reina, and John Tutino (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 306.

influenced and is influenced by the changing nature of hegemony, as well as influencing the boundaries of protest acceptable to state and society.

Within broader conceptions of political actors are the conceptions of nationalism and identity and how these change the dynamic between citizens and the state. On January 1, 1994, indigenous villagers and *campesinos* from the mountains in Chiapas engaged in an armed uprising against the Mexican state. However, while the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) placed themselves in opposition to the PRI state, they identified themselves as firmly within the Mexican nation. Invoking Article 39 of the Mexican Constitution regarding national sovereignty, the Zapatistas claimed: "We have the power of the Mexican people on our side, we have the beloved tri-colored flag highly respected by our insurgent fighters."<sup>62</sup> Pledging allegiance to the documents and symbols that often represent the nation as the imagined community, the Constitution and the flag respectively, the Zapatistas sought to "conquer the streets, the countryside, and the factories and from there struggle through legal and peaceful means to achieve the objectives of the poor."<sup>63</sup>

The Zapatistas, much like the communities that Lynn Stephen writes about, engaged multiple identities. On one hand, there is the identification with Mexico as a nation, the greater imagined community of which all are part. On the other hand, Zapatistas and Stephen's Oaxacan communities also articulate "what we might call local nationalisms (imagined communities in the plural)... that is, differential views of nationalism based on local history and experience, or

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<sup>62</sup> General Command of the EZLN, "First Declaration of the Lacondon Jungle," in *¡Ya Basta!: Ten Years of the Zapatista Uprising*, ed. Ziga Vodovnik (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2004), 644.

<sup>63</sup> Enrique Semo, "The Left in the Neoliberal Era," in *Cycles of Conflict, Centuries of Change: Crisis, Reform, and Revolution in Mexico*, eds. Elisa Servín, Leticia Reina, and John Tutino (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 359.

what Prasenjit Duara calls multiple 'nation views' informed by local identities and histories."<sup>64</sup> Thus we see not only identification with the Mexican but also the identification with Oaxacan, indigenous (as a whole or more particularly as Zapoteco, Mixteco, Mixe, etc...), or any number of labels that can be used to advance political agency. Thus we see organizations pushing for the "right to have rights,"<sup>65</sup> identifying themselves with subnational labels. As one example among many, the Union of Indigenous Women Against the Crisis, Civil Association, was founded by female indigenous migrants to the city of Oaxaca in 1997 to advance indigenous rights and preservation of cultural identity in an urban setting while also advancing claims of gender equality and female indigenous empowerment at the same time.<sup>66</sup> As will be discussed below, these organizations, while complicating Anderson's conception of the national "imagined community" by invoking further local nationalisms and identities, played major roles in the 2006 movement, advancing claims on citizenship and participation beyond the overarching demand of Governor Ruiz's resignation.

Key to understanding the 2006 movement in Oaxaca is first understanding the changing nature of hegemony, contention, and identity. Gradual democratization on the federal level cannot be separated from the advancement of social claims for subnational democratization and identity politics. In their contradictions arise the social conditions for cross-class, broad-based social movements. Thus, federal democratization, while relying upon subnational authoritarianism, also promotes struggle for subnational electoral and civic democratization. New forms of political agents, advancing multiple notions of identities and nationalisms, make

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<sup>64</sup> Stephen, *Zapata Lives!*, 286.

<sup>65</sup> de la Peña, "Civil Society and Popular Resistance," 307.

<sup>66</sup> Eugenia Pizarro García, interview with author, July 1, 2012.

new claims on old political systems, bringing to the surface the contradictions that can erupt into political contention and collective violence (instigated either from the state, from social movements, or both at the same time).

## **Conclusion**

Within this framework, this paper examines the rise of the 2006 movement in Oaxaca, from its beginnings as a labor movement to its transformation into a cross-class, broad-based movement calling for the resignation of the governor. While fundamentally a local issue revolving around a subnational authoritarian state government and the powerful corporatist bodies of labor unions, agricultural organizations, and civil society organizations that vied for power on the state level, the conflict cannot be divorced from the changes in national and international politics and economics.

While everyone in Oaxaca expected the teachers union to place their *plantón* in central Oaxaca de Juárez in May 2006, very few expected Governor Ruíz's response to be such visible repression in lieu of negotiation. And to those in power, on both the state and national levels, the response of civil society rallying around the teachers union was anything but expected. In the chapters that follow, I will examine the process of transformation and mobilization, attempting to understand how disparate, and sometimes clashing, political agents were able to mobilize and remain mobilized in the face of state repression. I will look at the nature of the movement coalition, the variety of actors, and the negotiation of movement demands as mobilizing factors. Additionally, and perhaps most importantly, I will examine the role of formal and informal networks in the process of mobilization as well as how such networks were activated for mobilization. What follows aims to both understand the trajectory of the 2006 social movement

as well as illuminate the changing nature of social movements and state power in the first years of the twenty-first century. While the events that occurred are bound by time and place, unique to their reality of uneven regional development and living standards, they speak to pressing needs within both southern Mexico in particular and Latin America more generally. That Oaxaca erupted in protest in 2006 should both be and not be surprising to contemporary analysts.

Chapter Two will focus exclusively on the teachers union. As the central body in the 2006 conflict, with more than 70,000 members across the state of Oaxaca, the teachers union is the largest corporatist body in the state. The teachers and the teachers union, since its inception in the 1930s, further plays the role of the face of the state, providing the daily interactions with citizens across the nation, particularly in indigenous villages that dot the Oaxacan landscape, that other state organizations fail to achieve. Thus a teachers union in opposition to the state government has long been seen as a dangerous proposition for stable governance. However, this chapter will also discuss the fact that the teachers union is hardly a monolithic body, but rather is rife with its own internal factionalism and power conflicts, complicating protest participation and coordinated action across the state.

Chapter Three will examine the other types of organizations that made up the APPO. Ranging from student groups to indigenous organizations, women's organizations to human rights activists, and far-left political parties to allied labor unions, the APPO took on a monumental task of practicing horizontal representative democracy. While providing an umbrella organization whose primary goal was the unseating of Governor Ruíz, each organization that joined the APPO obviously did so for its own particular reasons and motivations. To uncover and examine the nature of participation, idiosyncratic to each allied



organization, is also to illuminate the networks and alliances that determined and encouraged participation in 2006.

Chapters Four and Five look at the various forms of media and the participants involved who created the media. From the graffiti artists who painted city walls to the hundreds, if not thousands, of volunteers that came out to help operate occupied radio stations, these were the individuals in the movement who played a sustaining role without necessarily being part of any individual organization. They were neighbors manning the barricades together on a nightly basis, they were the people who took over and operated radio and television stations that were so crucial to movement communication and information dissemination, they were artists and activists who painted Oaxaca's walls with slogans, images, and demands that went far beyond merely deposing the governor, they were the hundreds of thousands who attended marches and protests, in Oaxaca and elsewhere, attempting to nationalize a local conflict. Often ignoring or exceeding directives issued from APPO meetings and deliberations, the unorganized and recently organized, as if such a varied group could be lumped under one title, played a crucial role in shaping the movement and ensuring its longevity. This chapter then fundamentally gets to the question of how a movement remained mobilized and committed for the six months by creating communication networks for dissemination of information and counterhegemonic discourses of resistance, struggle, and revolution.

While there are certainly other ways of analyzing the 2006 Oaxacan movement, the structure of this project is aimed at disaggregating participation to more thoroughly interrogate not just a social movement, but also the Oaxacan society of the twenty-first century, which, along with much of Mexico, is still in the process of democratization. Furthermore, an analysis

of the Oaxacan movement may be able to illuminate the nature of horizontalism as practiced in many social movements around the world, as well as the contradictions and fragmentations that horizontalism may entail. I argue that while the Oaxacan social movement was interesting just in terms of what the protestors accomplished over the course of six months, the most relevant issues that the movement illuminates are precisely what it did not accomplish, but what it imagined: a more participatory democracy, horizontalism in organization and society, and a restructuring of political and social values in Oaxaca and Mexico. It is easy to call these imagined futures utopian, but the fact that they have remained in Oaxaca's collective memory since the social movement also speaks to the processes of politicization that the movement entailed for many participants. Thus, as I argue in the following chapters, the 2006 movement resonated beyond its six-month lifespan in ways that have altered the political and social discourses in Oaxaca in addition to achieving real, albeit limited, gains for movement participants.

### **A Note on Sources and Methodology**

This essay does not seek to provide a chronology of what happened in Oaxaca in 2006. Rather, while a chronological account may be incidental to my argument, this essay draws upon a range of sources to better understand the experience of Oaxaca 2006 from below. A number of works, some better than others, have already been published in both English and Spanish documenting the chronology of events of 2006. Diego Osorno's chronicle of the movement, compiled from his time in Oaxaca while a reporter for *Milenio*, is an excellent journalistic account of the movement. The English equivalent is a collection of articles written by Nancy Davies, an ex-pat retiree living in Oaxaca, for NarcoNews, a bilingual Mexican alternative online media source. Furthermore, Diana Denham and the C.A.S.A. Collective have released a

translated oral history volume about 2006, and a number of movement participants have published in Spanish regarding their experiences.

Thus far, the vast majority of academic literature on the Oaxacan movement has been in Spanish, and of those, the majority have been written by social scientists at the *Universidad Autónoma Benito Juárez de Oaxaca*. As a whole, they primarily deal with the institutional and political aspects of 2006, examining the history of the teachers' movement and the political changes in the functioning of state government in the context of federal-level democratization. In English, the primary authors that have published on the movement have been political scientists and anthropologists. Edward Gibson has created a model of subnational authoritarianism in democratizing countries that draws upon Oaxaca as a case study and Guadalupe Correa-Cabrera has done a cross-regional comparative study that looks at political conflict in Nuevo León and Oaxaca. Both are instrumental in understanding the greater institutional and political context that connected Oaxaca to the national and international political and economic spheres, explaining the 2006 movement as a product of political conflict and contradictions. In Anthropology, Lynn Stephens has written prolifically on Oaxaca, and has a recently published monograph on the movement, while others have published journal articles on various aspects of movement participation.

To complement the existing literature, this essay further draws upon a collection of participant interviews, completed in July, 2012. To hear the voices of the participants themselves, the primary requirement for the interviewing was that the subjects were present and participated in some capacity in the events of 2006. To gather diverse voices, fifteen interviews were conducted with teachers, both young and old, artists, human rights workers, journalists, a

member of a women's organization, anarchists, indigenous activists, and students. Subjects were chosen via the snowball method, with each interviewee being asked to suggest others who might wish to participate. While these voices are few among the thousands that participated in the movement, they add nuance, complexity, and the quotidian experiences of a city in conflict when attempting to understand Oaxacan society and how the events of 2006 unfolded.

## Chapter 2: Bargaining in Good Faith: The Transformation of the Annual Teachers' Strike

*Obviously the police were seizing the opportunity to smash the workers' organization once and for all. The net result, as so often, was to increase its strength.* - C.L.R. James<sup>67</sup>

It is of no surprise to anyone in Oaxaca when the unionized teachers go on strike in May and occupy the city center. The *plantón* has been erected every May since 1980, and 2006 was no exception. In the twenty-six previous years, with few deviations, the teachers' encampment had followed the same script of routinized political theater: once the encampment went up, the teachers union and the governor would engage in bargaining, both going back and forth and making public statements regarding the intractability of the other side until, a few days or weeks later, an agreement would be reached, meeting a percentage of what the union demanded and everyone would return to work.<sup>68</sup> During the annual process, the teachers would engage in marches and demonstrations, disrupting traffic and commerce downtown, but everyone knew that it would be over shortly. Over the years of agitation and mobilization, the teachers union indeed had accomplished much for their members as well as for the rest of Oaxacan society, from improved salaries and benefits for the teachers to greater social expenditures for students and families in the forms of breakfasts, lunches, uniforms, textbooks, and infrastructure. Musing on the methods and strength of the union in advocating for societal needs, one teacher asked: "So who is going to protest? We are - the teachers union - the only ones who protest. In the state, the

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<sup>67</sup> C.L.R. James, *A History of Pan-African Revolt* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2012), 84.

<sup>68</sup> Horacio Gómez Pineda, interview with author, July 15, 2012. On the strikes and bargaining as political theater, see José Sotelo Marbán, *Oaxaca: insurgencia civil y terrorismo del estado* (Mexico City: Ediciones Era, 2008), 69; and Louis E.V. Nevaer and Elaine Sendyk, *Protest Graffiti Mexico: Oaxaca* (New York: Mark Batty, 2009), 30.

union is the one that rises up, that yells, the union is the one that mobilizes. And if it isn't the union, who will?"<sup>69</sup>

The annual teachers' strike had become an accepted protest repertoire, predictable in its occurrence and its outcome. In Tilly's conception, protest repertoires, or more generally, repertoires of contention "provide approximate scenarios - and choices among scenarios - for political interactions...Participants on all sides can generally coordinate their actions more effectively, anticipate likely consequences of various responses, and construct agreed-upon meanings for contentious episodes."<sup>70</sup>

Tilly emphasizes that repertoires of contention apply to all sides in political conflicts. Thus, if the standard repertoire of the teachers union was the occupation of the city center accompanied by marches, the standard repertoire on the side of the government was generally one of negotiation and co-optation, accompanied by targeted repression when negotiations were not working. During the Cárdenas presidency (1934-1940), the *sexenio* that would consolidate the post-Revolutionary regime,

the political hegemony of the PRM-PRI can be explained by its strategy...of incorporating urban and rural workers into the official party, making the party a mass organization capable of processing, managing, and controlling social demands through selective responses and patronage mechanisms.<sup>71</sup>

Such government practices would define the Mexican state over the course of the twentieth century, enveloping dissent within the folds of the PRI in order to maintain stability and loyalty. However, political action outside the corporatist structures of the PRI that could not or would not be co-opted was often met with force: dissolved public meetings, jail terms, and even targeted

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<sup>69</sup> Hilda Acevedo Reyes, interview with author, July 25, 2012.

<sup>70</sup> Tilly, *The Politics of Collective Violence*, 46.

<sup>71</sup> de la Peña, "Civil Society and Popular Resistance," 308.

assassinations of opposition leaders. Despite the possibilities of repression, mobilization to press for social demands (often more successful than pressing for political demands) was widespread during the reign of the PRI, and succeeded in crafting a state that functioned on patronage in return for political loyalty.

The struggles to democratize the teachers union in the 1970s and 80s occurred within the corporatist union organization already sanctioned by the regime, known to be loyal in delivering political support for the PRI in return for material benefits and job security. Thus, despite police repression against widespread teacher mobilization in Oaxaca, Chiapas, and Mexico City during the early 1980s, negotiations with the regime maintained the hegemonic status of the PRI and its labor institutions by increasing salaries and benefits for the rank and file, granting greater democratic practices to the union on the local and state levels, and replacing the top leadership of the national SNTE with individuals more amenable to the rank and file. By the end of the 1980s, three Sections of the SNTE (Federal District, Oaxaca, and Chiapas) had succeeded in removing all elected officials associated with the pre-1980 leadership, and Carlos Jongitud Barrios, the SNTE's "leader-for-life," had been forced to resign to make way for the *chiapaneca* political operative Elba Ester Gordilla, also known as *La Maestra*.<sup>72</sup>

The time-tested practices of the PRI were shaken but not broken by the outbreak of teachers' protests in the late 1970s and through the 1980s. Rather, the changes forced by the popular mobilizations, were "in response to concrete and immediate demands for the satisfaction

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<sup>72</sup> Foweraker, *Popular Mobilization in Mexico*, 182-185; Elba Esther Gordillo was arrested in February, 2013 and charged with embezzling over \$150 million USD from the SNTE, Randal Archibold, "Powerful Leader of Mexican Teachers' Union is Arrested," *The New York Times*, February 26, 2013.

of material needs and for respect for professional and legal rights."<sup>73</sup> That the teachers' mobilizations temporarily upset the traditional relationship between the national SNTE and the PRI is no surprise. Yet the demands granted, albeit through struggle, have served to recreate the linkages between popular movements and the state in mutually beneficial relationships that survived largely intact through political and economic reforms in Mexico.

Although Oaxaca had seen some of the greatest teacher mobilizations in the early 1980s, relations between the state government and the union stabilized in the late 1980s. Sección 22, the Oaxacan branch of the SNTE, had joined the other dissident sections of the SNTE in forming the parallel body of the CNTE, a democratic current of the SNTE that comprised initially the Federal District, Oaxaca, and Chiapas. Thus, Sección 22 is both still part of the SNTE, but also part of the CNTE.

Notwithstanding yearly variations of the annual political ritual of the teachers' strike, Sección 22 and the Oaxacan state government recreated a mutually beneficial relationship. In this way, although operating in opposition to the corporatist structures that defined the national SNTE, Sección 22 SNTE/CNTE was enveloped into the confines of the Oaxacan State in such a way that it did not pose a threat to corporatist labor structures nor the state government. While both the union and the government remained within the boundaries of accepted political theater, the ties between Sección 22 and the state government became closer than ever. For example, while the teachers union leadership remained committed to three-year elected positions of power without possibility of re-election,<sup>74</sup> "from the government of Heladio Ramírez, a number of

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<sup>73</sup> Foweraker, *Popular Mobilization in Mexico*, 181.

<sup>74</sup> Horacio Gómez Pineda, interview with author, July 15, 2012.



leaders of Sección 22 - upon completing their elected term - moved to occupy positions within the state government."<sup>75</sup>

Furthermore, rather than posing any sort of threat to the authorities, "the decentralization of public education in the state of Oaxaca, signed in 1992, explains the magnitude of power concentrated in the teachers union, and the respect - or fear - that previous governors had [for the teachers]."<sup>76</sup> Indeed, the 1990s, in the words of one teacher and union officer, were a decade of cooperation between the union and the state government, a period in which the union became actively involved in the administration and functioning of the entire public education apparatus.<sup>77</sup> As explained in the introduction, the neocorporatist alliance between the teachers union and the state ran contrary to the rhetoric of market reforms that was and still is prevalent in public political discourse. Such negotiation of power, however, made the yearly protests by the teachers predictable and containable, transforming a destabilizing act into recognized and accepted political theater that served the interests of both the state government and the teachers union.

The strength of the teachers union in Oaxaca made itself felt in nearly all aspects of public politics. As one of the few institutions to traverse both urban and rural life, the teachers union had long been on the front lines of both implementation of and resistance to government policy.<sup>78</sup> Since the creation of the Secretariat of Public Education (SEP) in the immediate post-revolutionary era, public education and the teachers union had been used across rural

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<sup>75</sup> Cuauhtémoc Blas López, "Oaxaca: Política Educativa, Herencia Desastrosa," 19.

<sup>76</sup> Diego Enrique Osorno, *Oaxaca sitiada: la primera insurrección del siglo XXI* (Mexico: Random House Mondadori, 2007), 35.

<sup>77</sup> Horacio Gómez Pineda, interview with author, July 15, 2012.

<sup>78</sup> See Mary Kay Vaughan, *Cultural Politics in Revolution: Teachers, Peasants, and Schools in Mexico, 1930-1940* (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 1997).

communities to interpret and implement land reform, to promote and protect indigenous language education, and engage in community politics regarding land tenure, infrastructure, and public finances.<sup>79</sup> On the urban side, the wage increases and benefits won by the union in the past had placed the teachers firmly within Oaxaca's growing middle class, providing opportunities for home ownership in developing neighborhoods and participation by the union and union members in other neighborhood organizations.<sup>80</sup> In rural communities, teachers have been looked upon in many cases as village leaders, as the individuals who serve as the interlocutors between the state and communities.<sup>81</sup>

With around 76,000 union members in 2006,<sup>82</sup> the Sección 22 was the largest union in the state of Oaxaca. In a state of 3.8 million people,<sup>83</sup> the reach of the teachers union and its membership is wide, touching at one point or another just about every citizen in every village and neighborhood in the state. And with the ability to mobilize the majority of its membership, the union possesses significant numbers and strength to not only install itself in the center of the city of Oaxaca and disrupt commerce and transportation, but also block highways, take over municipal buildings, and disrupt the everyday functioning of government and commerce across

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<sup>79</sup> Nestor González Pizarro, interview with author, July 5, 2012; Horacio Gómez Pineda, interview with author, July 15, 2012; on the actions of the SNTE in Oaxaca in the 1930s and 40s in rural villages, see Stephen, *Zapata Lives!*, 51-54.

<sup>80</sup> There is even an aptly named Colonia del Maestro (Neighborhood of the Teacher) in the northwest section of the city. See Murphy and Stepick, *Social Inequality in Oaxaca*; Horacio Gómez Pineda, interview with author, July 15, 2012; Hilda Acevedo Reyes, interview with author, July 25, 2012; and Sergio Vale Jiménez, interview with author, July 27, 2012.

<sup>81</sup> Horacia Gómez Pineda, interview with author, July 15, 2012.

<sup>82</sup> Cuauhtémoc Blas López, "Gobierno-Magisterio, Historia Interrumpida de Acuerdos Políticos," in *Oaxaca: Ínsula de rezagos: Crítica a sus gobiernos de razón y costumbre*, ed. Cuauhtémoc Blas López (Oaxaca: Editorial Siembra, 2007), 40.

<sup>83</sup> "Population data," Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía, accessed September 18, 2012, [www.inegi.gob.mx](http://www.inegi.gob.mx).

the state. That the function of its membership is to interact with citizens on a daily basis only increases the ability of the union to leverage civil society as an ally against the state government.

### **2006 as Political Rupture**

Sección 22 attempted to loyally deliver votes to the PRI in 2004 so to guarantee the electoral victory of Ulises Ruiz Ortiz.<sup>84</sup> His challenger in the election was a PRI dissident, Gabino Cué, who had defected to the Convergence Party (Partido Convergencia) and had been elected mayor of the city of Oaxaca in 2001. With an official victory by Ulises Ruiz, who received 47 percent to Cué's 44 percent in the announced results, the election was marred by accusations of fraud and intimidation as well as voter abstention reaching 48 percent of the voting eligible citizens.<sup>85</sup> Such a low turnout suggests that not only is it unlikely that the teachers union turned out en masse for Ruiz, but also that the Oaxacan voting populace felt that elections were not sufficient to achieve substantive changes in state governance.<sup>86</sup>

Under the prior governor, José Murat, the state executive office had become the ultimate executor of power in the state following the defeat of the federal PRI in the 2000 presidential elections. As Gibson explains, to maintain the hegemony of the PRI on the state level, Murat shifted from a position of subservience to a federal PRI executive to relatively autonomous subnational authoritarianism that discouraged substantive democratization on the state level. As was seen in other states across the country, political decentralization forced the PRI to shift party power to state level executive offices that were now freed from the federal executive authority of

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<sup>84</sup> Horacio Gómez Pineda, interview with author, July 15, 2012.

<sup>85</sup> Gabino Cué took accusations of fraud to the Federal Electoral Tribunal, which found electoral misconduct but ruled against Cué on the grounds that there was inconclusive evidence that the amount of misconduct was sufficient to sway the electoral outcome. Edward Gibson, *Boundary Control: Subnational Authoritarianism in Federal Democracies* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 140-141.

<sup>86</sup> Martínez Vásquez, *Autoritarismo*, 29-35.

the past.<sup>87</sup> In Oaxaca's case, Murat strengthened the corporatist relationships that defined the rule of the PRI over the twentieth century, maintaining the mutually beneficial relationship between Sección 22 leaders and the state government, and moving a number of former elected union leaders into his administration. In the words of one commentator, "inefficiency, corruption, and clientelism were linchpins of his politics."<sup>88</sup>

Governor Murat protected the teachers union from proposed labor and education reforms emanating from the federal level, continuing the accepted repertoires of contention that had prevailed in Oaxaca since the early 1980s, while at the same time increasing open repression against opponents to his state regime. From the replacement of opposition elected officials with PRI loyalists on the municipal level to physical violence and intimidation ranging from the detention and arrest of FPR (Frente Popular Revolucionario) and UTE (Unión de Trabajadores de la Educación) activists<sup>89</sup> to the assassination of outspoken opponents such as the union teacher Efraín García from Huautleco, among others, the Murat regime distinguished itself by escalating the strong-arm tactics that characterized the *cacicazgos* of the past.<sup>90</sup>

In addition to escalating repression across the state, Governor Murat and his successor, Governor Ruiz, further sought to silence critics by attacking the sole major opposition media in Oaxaca, the daily newspaper *Noticias*. When a first attempt by Governor Murat to purchase the opposition newspaper outright was rebuffed, the state executive office responded by calling upon union enforcers associated with the Confederación Revolucionaria de Obreros y Campesinos

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<sup>87</sup> Gibson, *Boundary Control*, 136.

<sup>88</sup> Víctor Leonel Juan Martínez, "Oaxaca: *Colapso del sistema político*," in *Oaxaca 2006: Autoritarismo, mitos y daños (crítica al gobierno y magisterio)*, eds. Cuauhtémoc Blas López, Víctor Leonel Juan Martínez, and Juan Manuel López Alegria (Oaxaca: Editorial Siembre, 2010). 28.

<sup>89</sup> Osorno, *Oaxaca sitiada*, 28.

<sup>90</sup> Martínez Vásquez, *Autoritarismo*, 30.

(Revolutionary Confederation of Workers and Peasants, CROC), to occupy the offices and printing warehouse of the paper to take it out of circulation.<sup>91</sup> This would be repeated again in 2006 in the midst of the confrontations between the government and APPO protesters, signifying the importance the state executive office placed upon unquestioned media support.<sup>92</sup>

Replicating the *dedazo* that had long been practiced by the PRI federal executive office, Governor Murat anointed Ulises Ruiz as his handpicked successor. The official labor and business organizations that maintained ties to Murat's executive office, including the teachers union, rushed to sponsor advertisements in support of Ruiz's candidacy despite the fact that he began his campaign with a hardly concealed threat to union mobilizations. Under the slogan "*Ni Marchas, Ni Plantones*,"<sup>93</sup> Ruiz indicated that he would cease to tolerate the long-practiced protest repertoire of the teachers. He further escalated a media campaign "to discredit the teachers, that is to say that the teacher corps was responsible for education disaster [in Oaxaca]."<sup>94</sup> While it is certain that the practices of selling and inheriting teaching positions, and a near absence of teacher evaluations and assessments had contributed to Oaxaca's position as nearly last in the nation in student literacy and educational achievement, the political expediency of placing blame upon the teachers union trumped any recognition of the correlation between widespread poverty and low educational achievement. Any media outlet or journalist within the state that refused to conform to the official line emanating from the executive office suffered

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<sup>91</sup> Osorno, *Oaxaca sitiada*, 29; and James C. McKinley Jr., "Besieged But Not Silenced, A Newspaper Keeps Publishing," *The New York Times*, July 18, 2005.

<sup>92</sup> Pedro Matías, interview with author, July 26, 2012.

<sup>93</sup> Denham and C.A.S.A. Collective, *Teaching Rebellion*, 29.

<sup>94</sup> Horacio Gómez Pineda, interview with author, July 15, 2012.

threats and detentions, including threats to journalists in California writing for local newsletters in the Oaxacan migrant communities.<sup>95</sup>

Governor Ruiz's election, was accompanied by complete control over the remaining government institutions. Following the 2004 election, "the PRI controlled 62 percent of the seats of the Oaxacan legislature and the lion's share of the state's national congressional delegation."<sup>96</sup> With such control over the mechanisms of government, Ruiz further continued to solidify control by appointing loyalists to the judiciary as well as the state human rights monitoring institution, while at the same time persecuting opposition activists, politicians, and critics. In such an atmosphere, under a federal government without the means or willpower to censure or castigate a PRI state governor, the standoff between Governor Ruiz and the traditionally pro-PRI teachers union began in May 2006.

On May 1, 2006, the teachers union submitted its *pliego petitorio* (list of demands) to the state government. The same day, accompanied by the Frente de Sindicatos y Organizaciones Democráticas (Front of Democratic Unions and Organizations, FSODO) and the Promotora por la Unidad Nacional Contra el Neoliberalismo (Promoter of National Unity Against Neoliberalism, PUNCN), Sección 22 mounted the first megamarch of the year, with more than 60,000 union members and supporters crowding the streets of downtown Oaxaca. From this date, which had long been the submission date of the annual *pliego petitorio*, timed to coincide with the international celebration of May Day, so began "a process of mobilizations that were neglected

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<sup>95</sup> Sotelo Marbán, *Oaxaca: insurgencia civil*, 48-50.

<sup>96</sup> Gibson, *Boundary Control*, 141.

(or underestimated) by the government and little by little were accumulating force and generating sympathy among the population."<sup>97</sup>

Among salary, benefit, and infrastructural demands, Sección 22 further included a demand for *rezonificación* (rezoning) of Oaxaca within the federal wage guidelines. First put forward as a demand in 1997, the rezoning of Oaxaca's wage scale would have extended beyond the teachers union to include all formal employees within the state by raising the minimum wage and thus the benchmark by which many salaries are calculated.<sup>98</sup> Sitting in Zone C at the time, Oaxaca was subject to the lowest minimum wages in the country.<sup>99</sup> As such, the teachers union had amassed a number of allies within trade unions and laborers organizations who also stood to benefit from rezoning. Thus, with demands that were designed as ally building and side by side participation of other unions and civic organizations in the megamarch, Sección 22 initiated a string of events that nobody expected, least of all the teachers union.

### **Union and Movement Become One**

Following the megamarch and the delivery of bargaining demands on May 1, the teachers union eagerly awaited a response from the government to initiate bargaining. Rather than bargain, the government detained seven union members from the FPR, an action denounced as arbitrary and unnecessary by human rights organizations in the area. By May 10, "due to the

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<sup>97</sup> Joel Ortega, "La Crisis de la Hegemonía en Oaxaca: El Conflicto Político de 2006," in *La APPO ¿rebelión o movimiento social? (nuevas formas de expresión ante la crisis)*, ed. Víctor Raúl Martínez Vásquez (Oaxaca: UABJO, 2009), 15.

<sup>98</sup> "Proceso de Rezonificación Salarial," SNTE/CNTE Sección 22, accessed August 11, 2012, <http://www.seccion22.org.mx/2011/11/08/proceso-de-rezonificacion-salarial>.

<sup>99</sup> Zone A includes many major metropolitan areas and industrial centers as well as wealthier states such as Nuevo Leon, Zone B includes some municipalities and middle-income states, while Zone C includes much of southern Mexico and the poorest states in the nation. See <http://www.inegi.org.mx> for information and statistics on cost of living and minimum wage scales. In 2012, the system was changed to include only Zone A and Zone B, with the old Zone B moving into Zone A and the old Zone C moving to Zone B.

lack of responses, the *Comisión Negociadora Ampliada* [Broad Negotiating Committee], the collegial body designated by Sección 22 to attend to negotiations, decided to declare a recess in the negotiations and reinstate them when the state government had concrete responses with respect to rezoning."<sup>100</sup>

In a related action, Oaxacan union members of the *Sindicato de Trabajadores de la Secretaría de Salud* (Union of Workers of the Secretary of Health, SNTSA) began a hunger strike demanding democracy in their national union. As public sector allies with the teachers union, the SNTSA coordinated their action with the FSODO, the umbrella organization of local democratic unions. As such, "the PUNCN and the FSODO were spaces in which [the public sector unions and civil society organizations] were generating a broad based popular alliance."<sup>101</sup> Side by side with allied unions and civil society organizations, Sección 22 mounted its second megamarch on May 15, in which it announced the placement of the *plantón* on May 22. The leader of Sección 22, Enrique Rueda Pacheco, explained in his announcement to the union's state assembly that he "called the work stoppage because the negotiations with the state government had not advanced, particularly the response to the rezoning demand because of the cost of living."<sup>102</sup>

In response to the teachers' strike, which had shut down public schools across the state and had installed the encampment in downtown Oaxaca, the state government went on the offensive. First, allies of the state government increased the media campaign against the teachers, creating an organization called the *Asociación de Padres de Familia* (Association of

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<sup>100</sup> Comisión Nacional de los Derechos Humanos, "Informe Especial sobre los Hechos Sucedidos en la Ciudad de Oaxaca del 2 de junio de 2006 al 31 de enero de 2007," 2007, 6.

<sup>101</sup> Ortega, "La Crisis de la Hegemonía en Oaxaca," 15.

<sup>102</sup> Octavio Vélez Ascenio, "Inician paro 70 mil maestros de Oaxaca," *La Jornada*, May 22, 2006.



Heads of Family), which bought advertisements and organized protests and marches that paled in size to those mounted by the teachers union. As one observer described, "in one television spot, a group of children challenged the teachers by chanting at them: '*Maestro al salón/no al plantón* [Teacher to the classroom/not to the encampment];' in another, the children accused [the teachers] of being unruly."<sup>103</sup> The yearly teachers' strike had indeed, in all likelihood, caused massive inconvenience for parents across the state, and the Ruiz administration sought to capitalize on any discontent by funneling money for media time through the recently created organization.

Second, to challenge Sección 22's claim that the government had not given a response to the bargaining demands, the Ruiz administration offered approximately ten percent of the expenditure demanded by the teachers, accompanied by the threat that the state would cease paying teacher salaries if they did not immediately lift the strike. Such a paltry offer, which was claimed as the best offer the state could make, Ruiz threatened to break contractual obligations to force the teachers to go back to work.<sup>104</sup>

Finally, working through thugs and enforcers closely aligned with local police forces, the Ruiz administration increased repression against the teachers. In addition to arbitrary detentions that had already been condemned by human rights organizations, local police forces in Santa Cruz Amilpas, a small suburb of Oaxaca, fired on members of the teachers union who were distributing electoral propaganda for an opposition political party three days after the strike had been called. Rueda Pacheco immediately denounced the action, proclaiming that "it is not

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<sup>103</sup> Martínez Vásquez, *Autoritarismo*, 61.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 61-62.

isolated, but a repressive act ordered directly by the Secretary General of the [state] government."<sup>105</sup>

The situation in Oaxaca was rapidly spiraling out of control, both from the hands of the state government and from the hands of union leaders. As will be discussed below, Sección 22 cannot be viewed as a homogenous body of union members, but rather has many factions that vie for power and influence within the structure of the union. As such, ranging from loyal followers of Rueda Pacheco to radical leftists to *PRIistas*, Sección 22 is a diverse body. While nominally under the leadership of the elected union officials, radical and revolutionary union factions increased actions against the government without the consent of the union leadership: "taking out all the parking meters in the center [of Oaxaca] and taking over the Casa de Gobierno, the local Congress and other government offices."<sup>106</sup> Furthermore, a number of union members were accused of attacking reporters from media outlets allied with the governor and taking their equipment.<sup>107</sup>

On June 7, the teachers mounted yet another megamarch, with an estimated 200 thousand participants. The march concluded with a "popular court" against Governor Ruiz, accusing him of, among other things, "heading an authoritarian government, repressive and violent against social movements." It resolved "unanimously, that Ulises Ruiz Ortiz should be removed from

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<sup>105</sup> Octavio Vélez Ascencio and Sergio Ocampo, "Balean policías de Oaxaca a maestros en un mitin," *La Jornada*, May 25, 2006.

<sup>106</sup> Joel Ortega, "La Crisis de la Hegemonía en Oaxaca," 16-17; the Casa de Gobierno was formerly the office of the state government, whose operations had been moved to the suburbs of the city by Governor Ruiz following his election. At the moment, the space was being used as a museum, meeting hall, and rental space for events and weddings.

<sup>107</sup> Octavio Vélez Ascencio and Sergio Ocampo, "Balean policías de Oaxaca a maestros en un mitin," *La Jornada*, May 25, 2006.

his post as the governor of the state of Oaxaca."<sup>108</sup> In an attempt to circumvent a state government that the union had denounced as illegitimate, the negotiating committee of Sección 22 traveled to Mexico City to request a meeting with the Secretario de Gobernación, the federal executive office's most important cabinet secretary, Carlos Abascal Carranza. The negotiating committee hoped that Abascal Carranza would intervene and mediate a solution to the growing conflict between the union and Governor Ruiz. Although he was reportedly in his office while the committee waited outside, his office announced that the conflict "is a matter of state purview, and they should be able to find proper channels with the governor and the state Congress."<sup>109</sup>

Rebuffed by the federal government, the negotiating committee returned to Oaxaca to find an emboldened Governor Ruiz, sure of his autonomy from the federal government. The 2006 presidential and congressional elections were approaching, scheduled for the first weekend in July, and Governor Ruiz was confident that the PAN, caught in a tight presidential race against PRD, would not risk upsetting their alliance with the PRI. As such, he increased his incendiary rhetoric against the teachers, claiming that he was going to arrest the body of elected union leaders and charge them with vandalism and destruction of property in the city center in addition to removing them from the *plantón*.<sup>110</sup>

With accusations and counteraccusations flying back and forth between the teachers and the state executive office, it would be an understatement to describe the situation as tense. Both sides refused to back down, the teachers confident that their protest repertoire would repeat its victories of the past twenty-six years while Governor Ruiz sought solutions to crush the power of

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<sup>108</sup> *Noticias. Voz e Imagen de Oaxaca*, June 8, 2006.

<sup>109</sup> Fabiola Martínez, Enrique Mendez, and Octavio Vélez Ascencio, "Se polariza el conflicto en Oaxaca; el gobernador aplicará mano dura," *La Jornada*, June 9, 2006.

<sup>110</sup> Martínez Vásquez, *Autoritarismo*, 64.

a corporatist body that had turned against him and his party. The teachers feared that the government would resort to violence, but remained optimistic in the face of a likely eviction from their encampment.<sup>111</sup> Thus Oaxaca arrived at a turning point, the early morning of June 14, 2006, when Governor Ruiz ordered security forces to attack and evict the encamped teachers before dawn.

### *El Desalojo*

In recent collective memory, June 14, 2006 is to residents of the Oaxacan capital what September 11, 2001 is to New Yorkers. Everyone has a memory of where they were when they heard that the police moved in and what it meant to them. From those who expressed joy that the unruly and bothersome teachers would be removed, to others that were shocked that the Ruiz government would resort to open violence, the events of June 14 were polarizing for Oaxacan society, and one's sentiments in the aftermath determined social relations for the rest of the year, if not beyond. The smoke and tear gas filled the air for blocks and blocks of the central city, family members, friends, and supporters of the encamped teachers streamed into the center to find out where their loved ones were or what they could do to help. For the teachers who were in the encampment, many of whom had brought small children along with them, the events of the day were surprising and terrifying, shocking that the government would attack sleeping teachers, mothers, fathers, and children.

One teacher, when asked what remained strongest in her memory of the 2006 movement, responded precisely that it was the attempted *desalojo* on June 14. As an active participant in the teachers' movement going back to the early 1980s following her graduation from *La Normal* (the

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<sup>111</sup> Enrique Mendez and Octavio Vélez Ascencio, "Maestros de Oaxaca se preparan para resistir eventual desalojo de la PFP," *La Jornada*, June 5, 2006.

teachers' college), Hilda had participated every year in the *plantones* in Oaxaca. On June 13, she remembered that she had been in meetings and accompanying her fellow teachers at the *plantón* until almost midnight, when she went home to grab a few hours of sleep before returning in the morning.

At around four in the morning, my *compañeros* called me to say that the PFP (the *Policia Federal Preventiva*) had come in to evict us...So I went, and I told my husband to accompany me, because I didn't want to go alone. I knew that we had to be there because I was very uncomfortable and fearful...I arrived at the Iglesia de la Soledad and right in front of me were a group of *granaderos* [riot police] or soldiers, that came from one side, and there was another group on the other street. And I was right in front of them and I had so much fear, you know? Fear of what was going to happen to the people. So I continued up Calle Independencia, just shaking because I had so much fear.

That was when I saw a group of teachers, they had captured a policeman or a soldier, and they had him in the middle of the group. They took off his uniform and were hitting him, and that was controversial, and so I told them that he also is part of the *pueblo*...I don't know why I said it, but I didn't want them to hurt him....

Well then when I continued down the street, one of the helicopters appeared, very, very close, just above, very close. So I went running and started knocking on the door of a *señora*, knocking hard and she saw us and I was frantic, 'let us enter! Let us enter!' And the woman said 'No! I can't let you enter because you are with the teachers.' She shut the door on us and left us outside...The groups of soldiers were still around, one on this side and another on that side, and they were passing by and I was in the doorway. My husband had left to get the car and I was so angry with him, how could he have left me here? I thought that they were going to arrest me because they were arresting everybody. I don't know how, but the truth is that I was saved that day.<sup>112</sup>

Hilda attributes her safety that day to luck. One teacher estimated that there were close to 35,000 people, union members and their families, at the *plantón* when the police attempted to evict them.<sup>113</sup> What is more likely is that the teachers who lived in Oaxaca spent the days at the *plantón* and in meetings and went home each night, while those who remained camped in the

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<sup>112</sup> Hilda Acevedo Reyes, interview with author, July 25, 2012.

<sup>113</sup> Horacio Gómez Pineda, interview with author, July 15, 2012.

Zócalo were the teachers who had traveled from across the state to participate in the yearly *plantón*. Regardless where they slept, such a large number, nearly half the union membership, meant that when an estimated 1000 policemen and special forces moved in to evict the teachers, the authorities were vastly outnumbered. While Hilda was mistaken when she recalled federal police forces that participated in the *desalojo*, it was a coordinated attack carried out under the direction of the state Police Minister, Manuel Moreno Rivas, commanding a varied coalition of state, municipal and special police forces.<sup>114</sup> Hilda was far from the only individual to rush into central Oaxaca to either see what was happening or actively resist the incursion of police forces. In the hours that followed, the union members who had feared such a police maneuver, along with the thousands of friends and family members who streamed downtown to help, together fought back against the police incursion and drove them back out of the central city.

Another teacher, who, like Hilda, had once served as an elected representative in the state assembly of the union, spent his nights sleeping in a downtown public school that was being used for supply storage and meeting space, about four blocks from the encampment in the *Zócalo*.

That day, that dawn of June 14...we were on Rayón Street...There is a school there, and that is where we were, sleeping. It was two or three in the morning, and we were resting when they told us that they [the police] were advancing. I said that I knew that there were some police stationed up the Alameda. But really, most of the *compañeros* didn't believe it - these were rumors, surely it was just the street cleaners, or something else. I never thought that they would try to kick us out. Within about fifteen minutes, we heard their path, the noise, the beatings, that they were burning things. Well, then the *compañeros* believed it.

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<sup>114</sup> Osorno, *Oaxaca sitiada*, 33; Osorno lists the police units that participated in the *desalojo*: la Unidad Policial de Operaciones (UPOE), la Unidad Canina, el Grupo de Operaciones Especiales del Ayuntamiento de Oaxaca (GOE), la Policía Auxiliar Bancaria (PABIC), la Policía Municipal and la Policía Juvenil.

So we quickly went out into the street and began to gather our things. We had tables, chairs, some tents, food, so we put it all inside the school...It was certain that the police were now advancing, burning, breaking, destroying [the *plantón*]. We didn't leave, we said 'we are going to confront them here.' But we weren't armed, we had nothing more than sticks and poles and surely they were arriving armed...At that moment, [the police] had already entered the union headquarters, and they were destroying it, they were destroying the radio station, which had been informing us...

...We were listening, and we saw that further up on Rayón, they were starting to burn things. Burning, shooting, just complete destruction. Really, none of us were injured, because the police were kept further up on the Alameda. But other *compañeros* came away injured and burned, because they had been sleeping. They had been sleeping outside [when the police attacked]! We were lucky to have been in the school...

...So we decided that we would meet some other *compañeros* in the Morelos Garden [*Jardín Morelos*, one block off the Zócalo], and figure out what to do from there...Well, at about 11 AM, give or take, the *compañeros* from the university, along with other *compañeros* from across the state, were still fighting the police on the Alameda, and all along Independencia Street. They were throwing rocks, using sticks, nothing more. I told my *compañera*, my wife, 'look, I'm going to go help the *compañeros*. I'm going to get a hat [to disguise myself from the police], and defend, I'm going to help...'

...And so we went. Throughout the day we were all over the place. By the afternoon the battle had slowed, and things were calming down a little. So we went to the Technical Secondary School 6, we went there for refuge and to regroup, because there were still some skirmishes continuing.<sup>115</sup>

While Sergio Vale surely captured in his memory the chaos of June 14, he also speaks of the quick response from people outside the teachers union that came out to assist the teachers against the surprise attack from the government. University students, which included a large block of students that were members of the youth wing of the local Stalinist Party, the FPR, were particularly quick to respond.<sup>116</sup> They rushed into the city center to assist the teachers in battling back the coalition of police forces and, as will be discussed in Chapter 4, occupied the university

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<sup>115</sup> Sergio Vale Jiménez, interview with author, July 27, 2012.

<sup>116</sup> Sotelo Marbán, *Insurgencia civil*, 82.

radio station and immediately began using it for the movement to make up for the destruction of the radio equipment in the union headquarters.

To view the perspective of the state government, a reporter from *Milenio*, Diego Osorno was able to reconstruct the decision-making process that resulted in the attempted *desalojo*. He reported that only hours before the *desalojo*, Governor Ruiz had called together his cabinet, businessmen, politicians, and directors of major media outlets. In this meeting he announced what was going to be done and how it would be done. Governor Ruiz's Secretary General, Jorge "El Chucky" Franco Vargas, related: "The *granaderos* [riot police] will evict the Zócalo while [the municipal police] detain the leaders."<sup>117</sup> The secretary of *Protección Ciudadana* (Public Safety) repeated that the entrance into the union building and detention of union leaders would be over and done with nine minutes,<sup>118</sup> sure of the efficiency and speed of the surprise attack.

Within hours following the late-night meeting, the coalition of police forces began their task, advancing simultaneously up the major streets that led into the Zócalo, attempting to surround the *plantón* and "give them a forceful message, a complete strike that would get rid of those racketeers [the teachers union],"<sup>119</sup> once and for all. While Governor Ruiz remained in his mansion in the northern suburbs of the city, the police marched on the *plantón* shooting tear gas. Smaller groups of special forces immediately broke into the union headquarters looking for the union elected officials, who had managed to escape almost as soon as the invasion began. "Looking to reinforce the police, minutes after 7:00 AM, a commercial helicopter - call name

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<sup>117</sup> Quoted in Osorno, *Oaxaca sitiada*, 33.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid*, 32.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid*, 33.



XA-UCJ - began to shoot tear gas grenades [into the crowd of teachers.]"<sup>120</sup> Following the frantic call on the radio that the police had invaded the headquarters, as well as hundreds if not thousands of cell phone calls and text messages, reinforcements soon arrived that stopped the police in their advance.

Not only did the teachers repel the attempted eviction after their initial surprise, the teachers in other parts of the state "occupied the municipal buildings of Huautla de Jiménez, Jalapa del Marqués, Pinotepa Nacional, Tehuantepec, Salina Cruz, Ciudad Ixtepec, Juchitán de Zaragoza, San Blas Atempa, Matías Romero, Zanatepec, Tapanatepec, Chahuites, and Santiago Justlahuaca."<sup>121</sup> As the teachers leveraged the spontaneous outpouring of support to retake the Zócalo by 9:30 AM,<sup>122</sup> Ruiz's defeat extended beyond the confines of the capital city and reverberated across the state. In the aftermath of June 14, there were over 100 reported injuries as a result of the battle, one elected union official captured by the police, and the vice director of operations of the state police captured by the teachers.<sup>123</sup>

In the days following June 14, the movement that had coalesced around the teachers only continued to grow. The union called for a third megamarch on June 16, at which an estimated 250 to 500 thousand participated,<sup>124</sup> far surpassing the expectations of the union and signaling to union leaders that structure was needed if they planned on using the outpouring of support to further their cause against Governor Ruiz. Thus, channeling the anger and motivation of the population, following numerous meetings in the *plantón* and across the city between union

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid, 34.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid, 34.

<sup>122</sup> Sotelo Marbán, *Insurgencia civil*, 79.

<sup>123</sup> On injured, see Comisión Nacional de Derechos Humanos, "Informe especial sobre los hechos sucedidos en la Ciudad de Oaxaca del 2 de Junio de 2006 al 31 de Enero de 2007," 2007; on the captured individuals, see Osorno, *Oaxaca sitiada*, 34.

<sup>124</sup> Sotelo Marbán, *Insurgencia civil*, 84.

leaders and other organizations, Sección 22 brought everyone together on June 17 in a school auditorium for the first of what would be many general assemblies of 2006.

In an effort to impose a degree of discipline and order on the general assembly, the requirement for participation was association with an organization of some type. The diversity within the assembly astounded even the teachers union as representatives of more than 300 organizations attended in order to express their willingness to work alongside the teachers union in achieving the single demand that would unite such a varied crowd: Governor Ruiz must go. Named the *Asamblea Popular del Pueblo de Oaxaca* (Popular Assembly of the People of Oaxaca), later changed to the *Asamblea Popular de los Pueblos de Oaxaca* (Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca), the umbrella social movement organization took shape, comprised of representatives from Sección 22, other unions, political parties, activist organization, human rights organizations, indigenous organizations and cooperatives, commercial organizations that were against the governor, women's organizations, student organizations, religious organizations and others.<sup>125</sup>

As the striking union that defeated the government forces in the attempted eviction, Sección 22 remained the most heavily represented organization within the APPO. As one author characterized it, the APPO "was made in an instant of joint and unanimous decisions by the movement, as a permanent space shared by Sección 22 and the other organizations."<sup>126</sup> As such, APPO's first order of business was to constitute itself as a decision making body and figure out how it was to function. Drawing upon the political tradition of community assembly used in

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<sup>125</sup> Horacio Gómez Pineda, interview with author, July 15, 2012; Eugenia Pizarro García, interview with author, July 1, 2012; and Osorno, *Oaxaca sitiada*, 39-41.

<sup>126</sup> Sotelo Marbán, *Insurgencia civil*, 84.

many of Oaxaca's indigenous villages, the representatives within the APPO sought to place discussion and consensus above hierarchy, creating both a nominally egalitarian space as well as the recipe for endless meetings.<sup>127</sup> As the umbrella organization for a multitude of voices and movements, the APPO also ensured incorporation of the variety of grievances expressed by different sectors of the populace:

Facing the ascent of a climate of ungovernability and authoritarianism that characterizes the current situation of our state, the increase in political crimes, the increase in arbitrary detentions against social movement leaders, the discretionary use of public resources, the *de facto* interruption of constitutional guarantees, the systemic violation of human rights, the destruction of historic, natural, and cultural patrimony of the state, and the use of public force and repression as the only forms to resolve social problems in our state; and facing the necessity for the people to exercise their sovereign power, and the necessity to strengthen the struggle of the people of Oaxaca, yesterday, June 17, with the participation of 365 representatives of diverse popular sectors and of the seven regions of the State, the *Asamblea Popular del Pueblo de Oaxaca* was formally constituted, which shall be recognized as a space for decision making and the struggle of the peoples, further constituted as a space for the exercise of power.<sup>128</sup>

As the paragraph above demonstrates, each sector of the populace brought to the APPO their own reasons and motivations for opposing Governor Ruiz. With the Governor and the Congress absent from the city of Oaxaca, having fled in the face of occupied city streets and public buildings, the creation of the APPO also recognized the possibility of a power vacuum in the political landscape. Not only did the organization representatives create a body meant to direct a movement, they also built into their program the first attempts at constructing an alternative form of governance. To accomplish more efficiently the perceived needs of leadership within the APPO, the delegates elected a 30 member *Coordinadora Provisional*

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<sup>127</sup> Eugenia Pizarro García, interview with author, July 1, 2012.

<sup>128</sup>"Declaración Política de la Constitución Formal de la APPO, June 18, 2006" APPO, accessed August 18, 2012, <http://codepappo.wordpress.com/2006/06/21/declaracion-politica-de-la-constitucion-formal-de-la-asamblea-popular-del-pueblo-de-oaxaca>.

(Provisional Coordinating Committee), roughly half of which was made up of representatives from the teachers union.

The APPO and the *Coordinadora Provisional* were thus constructed as bodies representative of the participants in the rapidly growing movement against the governor. Yet it was clear from the developments over the course of the summer that they only controlled a particular segment of the direction of the movement. Sección 22 "continued to sponsor marches and all sorts of initiatives and spearheaded negotiations with the government. Their vertical structure gave efficiency to the innumerable actions."<sup>129</sup> However, dissident factions within the teachers union continued to challenge and surpass the union leadership in the radicalism of their actions and smaller scale initiatives. From the occupation of municipal halls in towns and villages across the state to the fierce autonomy of neighborhood barricades and organizations defending their homes and neighborhoods against government incursions, from the spontaneous occupation of radio stations to the graffiti artists articulating a visual discourse of rebellion and revolution, Sección 22 and the APPO at once gave form to the movement while clearly struggling to maintain control over the multitude of participants in the movement to force out the Governor.

### **Factionalism and Politics in Sección 22**

As mentioned above, to view the union as a homogenous block papers over the political currents that vie for power within Sección 22. From *priistas* to *stalinistas*, and everything in between, the more than 70,000 members of Sección 22 have long engaged in political struggles within the union that both highlight and complicate the democratic nature of the state-level body.

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<sup>129</sup> Gustavo Esteva, "Appologia," *Bajo el Volcán* 7.12 (2008): 94.

The events of 2006 brought to the surface, clearer than ever, the fragmented nature of politics within the union as the political currents that defined the union body also mobilized as factions within the APPO.

The three largest factions of Sección 22 are, first, the *Unión de Trabajadores de la Educación* (Union of Education Workers, UTE), the labor organization aligned with Stalinist political party, the *Frente Popular Revolucionario* (Revolutionary Popular Front, FPR). Second, and comprising a more moderate position is a socialist current, is the *Coordinadora Democrática del Magisterio de Oaxaca* (Democratic Coordinator of the Teachers of Oaxaca, CODEMO), of which the Sección 22 president, Enrique Rueda Pacheco was a member. Finally, Praxis is a faction that defines itself as socialist allies of the PRI, generally in favor of the ruling party while at times taking slightly more radical positions. Under these three factions are a multitude of smaller factions that come and go, Zapatistas, anarchists, dissident factions within the three largest currents, and regional power blocs allied with various *caciques*.<sup>130</sup>

In the years prior to 2006, the internal politics of the teachers union had been in turmoil, creating the divisions that would blossom within the APPO and the movement. In 2001, *La Coordinadora Magisterial de Oaxaca* (The Teachers Coordinating Committee of Oaxaca, COMAO) had been elected to union leadership positions. COMAO, despite the increase in political repression and subnational authoritarianism under Governor José Murat, had closely aligned itself with the Governor in order to maintain the corporatist power that had been reinforced in the 1990s through education decentralization. In a complicated web of political alliances, both Governor Murat and Sección 22 leadership were opposed to the national SNTE

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<sup>130</sup> Horacio Gómez Pineda, interview with author, July 15, 2012.

president, Elba Ester Gordillo. Thus, he and the leadership of Sección 22 were able to maneuver to gain more autonomy for Sección 22 from national SNTE leadership and protected the state union from education reforms jointly created by President Fox and the national SNTE.<sup>131</sup>

At the end of 2004, following the election of Governor Ulises Ruiz, opposing factions within the union united to win the Sección 22 elections. CODEMO and UTE came together to elect Enrique Rueda Pacheco (CODEMO) as Sección 22 president, and a mix of members of both factions to the Executive Committee of the union. As such, the combination of the two leftist factions realigned the political orientation of the union in the direction of leftist syndicalism, opposed to Governor Ruiz and the heavy-handed repressive tactics that now characterized the state-level PRI. For his part, Governor Ruiz funneled resources to opposition factions within the union, sponsoring an investigation of corruption among the union leadership, and attempting to render the union's state assembly ungovernable by having opposition members resign from the assembly in protest.<sup>132</sup>

In October 2005, an investigation into corruption of union leadership found that Rueda Pacheco and Technical Secretary of Sección 22, Alma Delia Santiago Díaz, had received nearly five hundred thousand pesos (roughly \$50,000 USD) from the Instituto Estatal de Educación Pública de Oaxaca (State Institute of Public Education of Oaxaca, IEEPO) for the purchase of two Volkswagens made in the names of family members of the accused.<sup>133</sup> With near complete control over the mechanisms of justice within the union, the allies of union leadership absolved

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<sup>131</sup> Julián Gindin, "Movimiento Sindical no México, o Caso de Oaxaca," *Revista Múltiplas Leituras* 2.1 (2009): 173.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 173-174.

<sup>133</sup> Cuauhtémoc Blas López, "Oaxaca Dañada en su Columna Vertebral: La Economía," in *Oaxaca: Ínsula de rezagos: Crítica a sus gobiernos de razón y costumbre*, ed. Cuauhtémoc Blas López (Oaxaca: Editorial Siembra, 2007), 52-53.

them of any wrongdoing, thus sparking the opposition protest resignation. The faction that resigned formed a parallel assembly named the *Comité Central de Lucha* (Central Committee of Struggle, CCL), which would split from Sección 22 in October 2006 to form a new Sección 59 with the blessing of La Maestra.<sup>134</sup> The events deeply divided Sección 22, yet it resulted in a "consolidation of a more radical union Executive Committee."<sup>135</sup>

By the time the union arrived at the moment to launch its annual strike, the antagonism between the Governor and the radicalized union leadership had blossomed into full-fledged opposition. As discussed above, the teachers union was prepared to refuse to recognize the Governor as a legitimate authority, just as the Governor publicly lambasted the teachers union for corruption, poor educational achievement in Oaxaca, and general incompetence and mismanagement that had created a situation of overpaid teachers and underperforming schools. Within the union, the Governor continued to foment dissent, sponsoring the advertisements discussed above, and fortifying the dissident CCL, which kept open a handful of schools across the state despite the fact that Sección 22 had called a strike.

The Sección 22 leadership attempted to present a united front, announcing to the press that Sección 22 is united and "ready to confront whatever act of repression or thuggery. If we are in an unfavorable position, it is because we are not trained for war, but we will confront any situation."<sup>136</sup> Following the government actions on June 14, the union, with the notable exception of the CCL, was indeed united. However, the peace between union factions within the state assembly and within the APPO was short-lived. As one author commented on the

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid, 57.

<sup>135</sup> Gindin, "Movimiento Sindical," 174.

<sup>136</sup> Enrique Rueda Pacheco quoted in Enrique Mendez and Octavio Vélez Ascencio, "Maestros de Oaxaca se preparan para resistir eventual desalojo de la PFP," *La Jornada*, June 5, 2006.

factionalism that arose in the weeks following the creation of the APPO, "these leaders united against the governor and created the Provisional Coordinating Committee of 30 persons, which, since its creation, dedicated the greater part of its time to settling its large internal contradictions."<sup>137</sup>

Gibson argues that under conditions of subnational authoritarianism, it is in the subnational government's interest to keep political conflict localized, while opponents of the subnational regime seek to nationalize political conflict.<sup>138</sup> As opposition to Governor Ruiz crystallized in the form of the APPO, factionalized as it may have been, Governor Ruiz countered with an attempt at countermobilization rather than negotiation, refusing to involve federal authorities in the negotiations, attempting to keep negotiations and confrontations on the local level. The standard practice of the PRI had long been to negotiate with social movement leaders, offer a settlement that ensured personal gain for the leader in negotiation in return for an end to mobilization. The previous Oaxacan Governor, José Murat "confronted an average of three marches per week, various of which were convoked by leaders that now formed part of the APPO. These protests were attended to with money."<sup>139</sup> In such a fashion, Governor Murat succeeded in keeping protest and opposition within the confines of the state, shielded from potential allies, national and international, that may have undermined his state regime.

In 2006 however, the factionalism of the teachers union, which had only grown with the intervention by Governor Ruiz into the internal politics of Sección 22, prevented such negotiations from taking place. The Interior Secretary, Jorge "El Chucky" Franco Vargas,

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<sup>137</sup> Esteva, "Appologia," 93.

<sup>138</sup> Gibson, *Boundary Control*, 30-33.

<sup>139</sup> Osorno, *Oaxaca sitiada*, 49.



commented to Diego Osorno that the competition among factions within the union rendered such tactics useless: "Negotiate with Rueda in secret? He is always watched by his *compañeros*, but from different currents. It's impossible!"<sup>140</sup> The tenuous alliance between radical factions within the union initially strengthened Sección 22's position against the government as leaders could not so easily be isolated and co-opted. Because of this factionalism, not only was the state government frustrated in its attempts to isolate leaders to negotiate with, the teachers union leadership was held to task to continue to demand negotiations with the federal government. While this gave strength to the teachers union in the short term, later in the summer, however, divisions within the teachers union and the APPO would flourish over major issues as ending the strike.

With the inability to co-opt teachers union leaders in order to bring the strike to an end, the government resorted to countermobilization as a tactic for keeping political conflict confined to Oaxacan streets. On June 20, the Ruiz government and allied business organizations called a protest march demanding that the teachers return to the classroom. Accompanied by Governor Ruiz, who flew above the march in a helicopter, it was reported that the 20,000 participants, who "were employees of the state government and the private sector that were obligated to participate by their bosses,"<sup>141</sup> marched around the northern edge of the central city calling for an end to the strike.

In a climate of mutual hostility, other sectors of civil society seeking a negotiated solution to the political stalemate offered their intervention. On June 22 the *Comisión de Intermediación* (Intermediation Commission) was formed by the painter Francisco Toledo and

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<sup>140</sup> Quoted in Osorno, *Oaxaca sitiada*, 51.

<sup>141</sup> Sotelo Marbán, *Insurgencia civil*, 87.

the Oaxacan Catholic Church as a call to dialogue between the APPO and the Governor. On one hand, the state government refused to negotiate with its vocal opposition, yet it increased its offer to the teachers union to 85 million pesos, communicated completely through the news media rather than in negotiations.<sup>142</sup> On the other hand, the teachers union rejected dialogue with the state government: "We submit, after such aggression, that we will only have the federal government as an interlocutor."<sup>143</sup> After a stumbling start in which neither side agreed to negotiations, the Commission succeeded in bringing together leaders from the teachers union and Ismael Urzúa Camel, a representative from the Secretary of the Interior's office, for a meeting on June 27.

The lack of productive dialogue, the result of a teachers union in extreme opposition to the government and a government representative who refused to cede any ground to union leaders that he characterized as radical and irresponsible, prompted the Intermediation Commission to retire from its attempts to mediate the situation on July 1.<sup>144</sup> Furthermore, the federal government refused to intervene, repeatedly stating that the conflict was a state matter that must be solved on the state level.

### **Elections and Occupations: The Battle for the Oaxacan Streets**

It must be remembered that the closely fought presidential election between Felipe Calderón of the PAN, Andrés Manuel López Obrador of the PRD, and Roberto Madrazo of the PRI (in distant third), was scheduled for the July 2, 2006. With polling results predicting a close

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<sup>142</sup> Martínez Vásquez, *Autoritarismo*, 88.

<sup>143</sup> Enrique Mendez and Octavio Vélez Ascencio, "Instalan en Oaxaca la comisión para resolver conflicto magisterial," *La Jornada*, June 24, 2006.

<sup>144</sup> Octavio Vélez Ascencio, "Los mediadores en Oaxaca se levantan de la mesa de diálogo," *La Jornada*, July 2, 2006.

race between Calderón and Lopez Obrador, the PAN government under Vicente Fox would do nothing to intervene in Oaxaca until it knew the results from July 2. The ability of the PAN to rule for the previous six years had relied upon an alliance in the legislature between the PAN and the PRI, neither of which held a simple majority. President Fox knew that a victory by his fellow PAN member Felipe Calderón would require a continued alliance with the PRI, predisposing him to work for the maintenance of PRI power in Oaxaca. However, if there had been a PRD presidential victory, then it would be the onus of the incoming party to forge legislative alliances, determining what direction the outgoing Fox government would take.

As the elections approached, the aims of the teachers union to bring their grievances to the federal level took on increasing tactical importance as the results from July 2 offered the potential to change the balance of power in the Oaxacan conflict. Within the APPO, the issue of the elections was one that sparked significant debate over the role of electoral politics in the movement and whether or not the movement should boycott the elections altogether. As a teachers union that was so powerful precisely because of its ability to deliver votes for the PRI, the leadership had to balance the potential outcomes of realigning political support. One faction argued for boycotting the elections and that greater gains could be won in the streets than in the ballot box. Another faction argued that the APPO should throw its support behind Andrés Manuel López Obrador as the moderately leftist opposition to the PRI and the PAN. Still a third faction argued that supporting any one candidate would fundamentally change the nature of the movement from horizontal to vertical, affiliating the movement with a particular political party would reduce the freedom and creativity of the ongoing movement.<sup>145</sup> As a result of hours of

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<sup>145</sup> Horacio Gómez Pineda, interview with author, July 15, 2012.

discussion, "on June 30 it was decided by consensus to express repudiation of Ulises Ruiz by means of a protest vote against his party."<sup>146</sup>

The practical realities were such that the teachers union and the APPO gave de facto support to López Obrador, delivering him the majority of presidential votes in the state, as well as handing nine of the state's eleven congressional districts to candidates affiliated with López Obrador coalition and the other two districts to PAN candidates. The results were unprecedented as only two legislative districts had previously gone to opposition candidates, one in 1994 and the other in 2000.<sup>147</sup> The results showed the mobilizing power of the teachers union, instructing their members to turn out voters across the state to engage in the protest vote and continuously broadcasting on Radio Universidad "anonymous voices that called out to the citizenry to leave their homes and cast the punishment vote against the candidates of the PRI and the PAN."<sup>148</sup>

Although negotiations had stalled, the electoral power of the teachers union and their allies in the APPO had extended the conflict beyond the confines of the state. In doing so, although the official count of the presidential election declared Felipe Calderón the victor, the federal government was put on notice that it could no longer ignore the Oaxacan mobilization. As such, in the months that followed, the teachers union would indeed receive its opportunity to negotiate with federal authorities, and the APPO would bring a case before the federal legislature that Governor Ruiz's inability to govern the state constituted dissolution of powers and that he should be removed from office. In effect, the protests and the electoral clout of the APPO demonstrated the legitimacy of the Oaxacan streets as a political and social force.

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<sup>146</sup> Gustavo Esteva, "Oaxaca: The Path of Radical Democracy," *Socialism and Democracy* 21.2 (2007): 92.

<sup>147</sup> Fausto Díaz Montes, "Elecciones y protesta social en Oaxaca," in *La APPO ¿rebelión o movimiento social? (nuevas formas de expresión ante la crisis)*, ed. Víctor Raúl Martínez Vásquez (Oaxaca: UABJO, 2009), 262.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid*, 259.

Despite Calderón's declared victory, the López Obrador campaign immediately claimed fraud and challenged the electoral results. Calderón's slim margin of victory, declared on July 6, was with 35.88% of the popular vote to López Obrador's 35.31%.<sup>149</sup> While López Obrador continued to challenge the results, the near certainty of the PAN victory emboldened Governor Ruiz. Although the Oaxacan PRI had lost federal legislative representation for the state, the political reality of PAN-PRI cooperation on the federal level buttressed Governor Ruiz against federal action demanding his resignation. As such, the state government resumed the offensive against the striking teachers. The following day, July 7, at the petition of the state attorney general, the Oaxacan Justice Department (*Poder Judicial de Oaxaca*) gave orders of detention for thirty Sección 22 leaders for "the crimes of conspiracy, coup, or mutiny, derived from the confrontation between teachers and police that occurred during the failed attempt to evict the encampment installed in the historic center of the city, the past 14 of June."<sup>150</sup>

As a response of good will designed to win the support of the Oaxacan populace as well as the support of federal officials who were closely watching the situation in Oaxaca, the teachers union announced that it would return to the classrooms in order to finish the school year. On July 9, Rueda Pacheco said to the press, "we are obligated to return to the classrooms because of the commitment that we have with the people and for the support that they have given us."<sup>151</sup> Directly challenging the propaganda campaign emanating from the governor's office that painted the teachers as indifferent to student needs, the leaders of Sección 22 recognized that finishing the school year would provide families with a much needed reprieve from the strike

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<sup>149</sup> El Universal Staff, "Contabiliza IFE 100% de casillas; confirma ventaja de Calderón," *El Universal*, July 6, 2006.

<sup>150</sup> Octavio Vélez Ascencio, "Giran órdenes de aprehensión contra dirigentes de la sección 22 en Oaxaca," *La Jornada*, July 7, 2006.

<sup>151</sup> Genaro Altamirano, "Maestros combinarán enseñanza y labor política," *El Universal*, July 11, 2006.

that had surely disrupted thousands of schedules and childcare arrangements. In the same statements to the press, Rueda Pacheco further affirmed that upon the end of the school year, scheduled for July 21, the teachers would return to the *plantón* to continue their struggle against Governor Ruiz.

While the majority of the Oaxacan teachers returned to the classrooms, in order to forestall the possibility of authorities evicting the *plantón*, Sección 22 called upon union members in administrative capacities to maintain the occupation of the city center. One newspaper estimated that nearly 10,000 union members remained camped in downtown Oaxaca, ensuring that the struggle would continue even while teachers were back in their respective schools.<sup>152</sup>

While the teachers returned to the classrooms, giving many parents across the state a much-needed reprieve from the demands of childcare, the disagreements and contradictions within the movement continued to build. In response to the union's overture for greater public support, the state government replaced the widely disliked Secretary General and Secretary of Citizen Protection (Public Safety) with more amenable officials, indicating that future negotiations would yield more productive results.<sup>153</sup> Anticipating better future negotiations, the union leadership called for calm and order within the movement, an appeal widely ignored by the radicalized rank and file of movement participants, particularly university students.

Oaxaca's annual indigenous festival, called the Guelagueta, was scheduled to begin on July 17th. As tourism had become a significant part of Oaxaca's economy over the previous decades, the festival too had become a tourist attraction, with ticket prices that excluded the vast

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<sup>152</sup> Genaro Altamirano, "Maestros combinarán enseñanza y labor política," *El Universal*, July 11, 2006.

<sup>153</sup> Martínez Vasquez, *Autoritarismo*, 87.

majority of the Oaxacan population, precisely the citizens whose heritage was celebrated in the massive production of indigenous song, dance, and music. While Sección 22 leaders called a general assembly to discuss the future actions of the teachers union, which included a proposed boycott of the festival, other participants took direct action to block the production. Students, many affiliated with the youth wing of the FPR, took over buses in the city center and blocked major thoroughfares leading to the Guelaguetza auditorium as well as the largest tourist hotels in the city. A smaller group performed sabotage in the amphitheater, burning part of the stage, while others spray-painted in large letters, "*Fuera Ulises*," across the entrance to the amphitheater. Not wishing to upset the tentative negotiations with new state officials, "Daniel Rosas Romero, spokesperson of Sección 22 of SNTE, lamented the plan of action of the APPO."<sup>154</sup> That Rosas Romero named the APPO as the responsible party rather than the small faction of saboteurs was an early indication of Sección 22 distancing itself from the horizontally organized movement body.

Governor Ruiz, on July 17th, announced that the Guelaguetza would be suspended, prompting further dialogue within the teachers union as to the course to take. However, while the union assembly debated, it was clear that union leaders had little control over the actions of the varied movement participants that acted under the banner of the APPO. Such divisions would continue to mark the movement in the months that followed. Following the suspension of the official Guelaguetza, the teachers union continued to present itself as the legitimate representative of Oaxaca, an integral part of the state's heritage and culture. On July 18th, Sección 22 announced that it would host the Alternative Guelaguetza (also known to many as the

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<sup>154</sup> Octavio Vélez Ascencio, "Nuevos actos contra la Guelaguetza para exigir dimisión de Ulises Ruiz," *La Jornada*, July 16, 2006.

Popular Guelaguetza) on July 24th, free to all spectators, and featuring volunteer performers from across the state.

Offering a hand to the state government, the Rueda Pacheco further announced: "Next Monday we will not block access to Cerro Fortín [the location of the amphitheater] so that if the government wants to hold its Guelaguetza, it can do so."<sup>155</sup> Although the state government declined the offer, claiming that Rueda Pacheco's statement was pure propaganda rather than constructive dialogue, the announcement was clearly meant to present the teachers union as a responsible actor as well as consolidate popular support by claiming the mantle of cultural legitimacy.

However, while the leaders of the teachers union were riding high on popular support following their return to the classroom and the announced Alternative Guelaguetza, clear splits were developing within the movement between Sección 22 and APPO as well as within Sección 22. While Rueda Pacheco and the Executive Committee of Sección 22 was organizing marches, occupations of government buildings, the functioning and provision of the *plantón*, they further continued to call publicly for moderation among civil society. Knowing that they, as leaders of Sección 22, had already been named as targets for judicial punishment by the state government, Rueda Pacheco sought to distance himself and those around him from the increasingly radical and disruptive events taking place on the ground level. As evidenced by the sabotage of the Guelaguetza amphitheater on Cerro Fortín, it was clear that the Sección 22 Executive Committee had only nominal control over the actions of the allied populace.

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<sup>155</sup> Octavio Vélez Ascencio and Victor Ballinas, "Otra vez se reunirán en Oaxaca los 70 mil maestros de la Sección 22," *La Jornada*, July 19, 2006.



Furthermore, the state government, since it had replaced the Secretary General, was on the defensive. It announced publicly that it was ready and willing to meet 16 of the union's 17 demands, only unwilling to bargain on changing Oaxaca's wage classification. In any other year, Sección 22 most likely would have accepted the terms of the government's offer, declared victory, and gone back to work. As one teacher explained, in years past, responding to the second or third offer from the government: "We accept it, but it is insufficient. We know that, of what we ask for, we will never receive 100%, but 60% or 70% we believe is always acceptable."<sup>156</sup> Yet the presence of an increasingly radical coalition of allies calling for Governor Ruiz's resignation, in conjunction with the government's increasing use of thugs and paramilitary members to terrorize the rebellion, prevented such a negotiated solution. As events would unfold in the following months, and as the violence and confrontations only intensified, the possibility of Sección 22 declaring victory without the resignation of Governor Ruiz would only further diminish. Rather, on July 25, in a plenary session of the Executive Committee, the teachers union voted on a resolution to continue the strike until all bargaining demands were met as well as Governor Ruiz's resignation.<sup>157</sup>

In response, the state government increasingly undertook a clandestine approach to disciplining the rebelling populace. Roving bands of PRI thugs and paramilitaries operated under the cover of darkness, intimidating and sometimes attacking occupied buildings and the *plantón*. In one of the first instances of covert aggression, the night of July 21, unknown thugs in

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<sup>156</sup> Sergio Vale Jiménez, interview with author, July 27, 2012.

<sup>157</sup> Octavio Vélez Ascencio, "Maestros de Oaxaca descartan cesar su lucha contra Ulises Ruiz," *La Jornada*, July 26, 2006.

a pick-up truck fired assault weapons at Radio Universidad.<sup>158</sup> Rosas Romero, the spokesperson for Sección 22 immediately spoke to the press, placing blame on Governor Ruiz and Secretary General Díaz Escárraga, "for the control and operation of groups of thugs and shocktroops of the government to attack the people of Oaxaca."<sup>159</sup> Although the state government disputed their involvement in the actions, the violence against the teachers union continued to increase. Further actions included bombing the homes of union leaders and other prominent individuals associated with the APPO. By early August, the movement recorded its first death, as municipal police fired upon protesters, killing a professor of dentistry from UABJO.

It must be remembered that since the failed *desalojo*, the state government had been effectively forced out of the capital city. Although Governor Ruiz had moved his offices to the outskirts of the city in 2004 in an effort to render protests invisible to the center city, the strength and numbers of the teachers union and their allies within APPO had rendered the Governor's office unusable. Oaxaca de Juarez was a city with neither a government nor a police force. The legislative and executive branches of the state government had been reduced to meeting in hotels, private homes, and even airport hangars. As such, the existence of public authority and day-to-day public services relied on the protesters themselves, who organized to restore a sense of normalcy and security to a city that was in turmoil. For instance, according to Gustavo Esteva, "unionized workers belonging to the APPO performed basic services like garbage collection."<sup>160</sup> Under the auspices of the APPO, citizens further organized themselves into security brigades, many of whom were teachers guarding the *plantón* and maintaining order in

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<sup>158</sup> Octavio Vélez Ascencio, "Balean instalaciones de Radio Universidad, en Oaxaca," *La Jornada*, July 22, 2006.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> Esteva, "Radical Democracy," 74.

the city center. Thus, not only was Sección 22 involved in a media battle and negotiations with the state government, it began to use its mobilizing and organizing abilities to give order to a city without authority.

### **Contradictions Between Negotiations and Radicalization**

By early August, the number of Sección 22 members occupying the city of Oaxaca had declined dramatically. Government violence, fear of reprisals, responsibilities at home, and exhaustion had driven, over the course of July, many of the rural teachers back to their villages.<sup>161</sup> Thus the manpower of Sección 22 was declining while the relative strength and visibility of more radical elements associated with the APPO increased. Therefore, the use of media outlets, as will be discussed further in Chapter 4, to disseminate the words and statements of Sección 22 was crucial to maintaining their position as leaders in the movement against Governor Ruiz. The circle of union leaders around Enrique Rueda Pacheco continued to call for moderation in order to increase their bargaining position in what were still stalled negotiations with the state, using occupied media outlets and communications networks to spread their message and mobilize people for actions and marches.

Yet, as the protestors and the union controlled the streets and the airwaves, the covert terrorism of the state increased day by day over the months of August. From physical attacks carried out by masked gunmen to threatened judicial penalties once leaders were caught, the antagonism between the state and the movement intensified. To demonstrate peace and moderation in the face of government repression, the teachers union and the APPO jointly staged a silent march on August 13 to protest the recent assassinations and deaths of movement

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<sup>161</sup> Horacio Gómez Pineda, interview with author, July 15, 2012; Sergio Vale Jiménez, interview with author, July 27, 2012; and Hilda Acevedo Reyes, interview with author, July 25, 2012.

participants. In the previous week, there had been four deaths at the hands of unknown gunmen. On August 9, members of an indigenous organization associated with the APPO were attacked while walking on the highway between Putla and Juxtlahuaca. Andrés Santiago Cruz, Pedro Martínez Martínez, and Pablo Martínez Martínez, ages 35, 70, and 11 respectively, were gunned down by unknown assailants. The following day, on August 10, José Jiménez Colmenares, the husband of a teacher, was killed during a march when paramilitaries stationed in a building nearby opened fire on the marchers.<sup>162</sup> With the increasing violence, the teachers union realized that not only did it need to show popular support, but that it also needed to contrast its actions with the covert terrorism of the state.

As such, the silent march traversed the center of Oaxaca de Juarez, and marchers were instructed to wear all black and carry a white flower to mourn the losses in recent days and condemn the actions of the government. A reported 5,000 to 10,000 marchers attended, carrying posters and banners to make their point while they remained silent. According to one witness, the most popular placard of the day read: "*Oaxaca está en luto, por un gobierno bruto* (Oaxaca is in mourning, because of a brutal/stupid government)." At the end of the march, union and APPO leaders spoke to the assembled crowd to condemn Ulises Ruiz for the increasing violence and issue further calls for negotiation with the federal government, the only body that movement leaders recognized as capable of bringing a negotiated solution to the violence.<sup>163</sup>

Also on August 13, perhaps in response to the silent march, a webpage named Oaxaca en Paz (Oaxaca in Peace) launched. The website gave names, photos, addresses, and generally invented or exaggerated political histories of movement leaders, calling viewers to help detain

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<sup>162</sup> Martínez Vasquez, *Autoritarismo*, 105.

<sup>163</sup> Nurit Martínez, "En 'marcha del silencio' piden justicia por muerte de mecánico," *El Universal*, August 14, 2006.

and eliminate the identified leaders. While the state government never claimed responsibility for advocating vigilante actions against movement leaders, the teachers union and APPO spokespersons denounced the website as project undertaken by "the group in power that is the bad government of Oaxaca."<sup>164</sup> Furthermore, the website included a photo of the slain mechanic, José Jiménez Colmenares, with a red x over the photo and a caption that read: "This one has already fallen."<sup>165</sup>

The intensifying violence strengthened the arguments publicly made by the Sección 22 leaders that Oaxaca was living under the grip of an authoritarian governor who resorted to repression and terrorism when challenged from below. However, the continuing stalemate also strengthened the arguments of those who advocated fighting violence with violence. Within the APPO, as well as within the Executive Committee of Sección 22, the principal challengers to the leadership of Rueda Pacheco were members of the Marxist-Leninist Communist Party of Mexico and of the FPR, both parties that advocated revolution to overthrow the state.<sup>166</sup> Furthermore, reading Oaxaca as the nucleus of revolutionary potential in Mexico, activists and self-styled revolutionaries poured into the state from across the country, and even from across the world to help in the battle against the Ruiz government.<sup>167</sup> Among the newcomers were "students from UNAM, who began to distribute copies of what was titled "Lessons for Combatants."<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> Octavio Vélez Ascencio, "Por Internet inducen a oaxaqueños a detener a diembros de la APPO," *La Jornada*, August 14, 2006.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

<sup>166</sup> Osorno, *Oaxaca Sitiada*, 123.

<sup>167</sup> David Venegas, interview with author, July 17, 2012.

<sup>168</sup> Osorno, *Oaxaca sitiada*, 81.

When masked gunmen attacked the transmitting tower of the occupied television station on August 21,<sup>169</sup> the teachers union denounced the actions as illegitimate acts of terrorism, and the city began to defend itself. In the nights that followed, to prevent the circulation of armed forces, citizens and movement participants began to erect barricades, blocking the routes into and around the city. The barricades, as will be discussed further in chapters 3 and 4, symbolized the horizontal nature of the movement, bringing together teachers, families, radicals, and revolutionaries, tying the informal neighborhood networks together to defend themselves from the incursions of paramilitaries. If Sección 22 had succeeded in bringing together the various sectors of Oaxacan society that opposed Governor Ruiz, the barricades actively strengthened the networks of the movement.

Yet the leaders of the Sección 22 never had control over the barricades. While the Sección 22 leadership could call on people to allow daytime traffic, thus making barricade construction and dismantling a daily occurrence, they could never control the barricades as sites of "armed" resistance. The popular use of fireworks, molotov cocktails, and rocks to defend the barricades was not the aim of a teachers union publicly calling for moderation on the part of the movement.<sup>170</sup> If the teachers union had nominally controlled the direction of the movement thus far, the popular reaction to government violence marked the loss of control for the Sección 22 leadership.

### **Teachers Back to Work, and the Rebellion Continues**

As the recounts from the presidential election came in and affirmed Felipe Calderón as the president-elect, Rueda Pacheco and other Sección 22 leaders realized that the federal

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<sup>169</sup> Sergio Vale Jiménez, interview with author, July 27, 2012.

<sup>170</sup> Eugenia Pizarro García, interview with author, July 1, 2012.

government would not intervene on the side of the protestors in their demands for the resignation of Governor Ruiz. Functionally, Sección 22 began to increasingly use legal mechanisms in order to remove Governor Ruiz from power. On August 1, the union submitted demands to the state legislature to declare dissolution of powers in the state. Such an action would remove Governor Ruiz and have the Oaxacan legislature name an interim governor. However, knowing that Oaxaca's PRI dominated legislature would refrain from taking action against Governor Ruiz, by submitting this demand to the state legislature, Sección 22 was preparing to take the same demand to the national legislature following anticipated state-level inaction.

With no response from the state legislature, Sección 22 and the APPO sent a delegation to Mexico City in order to lobby the federal government to intervene in the conflict. Made up of representatives from Sección 22, the coordinating committee of the APPO, the FPR, and the Indigenous Organization for Human Rights, among others, the delegation arrived in Mexico City in mid-August. Telling of the differences between union leadership and the growing autonomy of rank and file protestors, the delegation emphasized that the movement was not attempting to create a form of radical and popular self-governance. Rather, they announced that such a demand "only exists in the imagination of the [movement] radio and television operators. What we want is the installation of a government that responds to the popular interests and needs, something that Governor Ruiz has not done in the year and half of his term."<sup>171</sup>

As the violence increased against the protestors over the months of August and September, Sección 22 succeeded in beginning negotiations with the federal government. On August 29, Interior Minister Carlos Abascal sat down with the Oaxacan representatives for the

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<sup>171</sup> Blanche Petrich, "La crisis institucional en Oaxaca ya se convirtió en problema nacional," *La Jornada*, August 16, 2006.

first time since the beginning of the conflict, and they seemed to quickly work together to chart a solution. On the part of the teachers union, respecting the codified democratic practices of Sección 22, Rueda Pacheco submitted to the Union Assembly the proposal to negotiate with Minister Abascal. The vote quickly passed on September 6, and Rueda Pacheco announced to the press that he would submit to the Mexican Senate a request for the legislative body to declare dissolution of power in Oaxaca and a replacement of the governor.<sup>172</sup> Following the vote in the assembly, Minister Abascal and the negotiating delegation agreed to begin in earnest a dialogue the following day, September 7.<sup>173</sup>

The first two days of dialogue between the Interior Minister and twenty-eight member *Comisión Unica de Diálogo* (fourteen members from Sección 22 and fourteen from different sectors of civil society) were remarkably productive given the stalemate of the previous three months.<sup>174</sup> Minister Abascal opened his side of negotiations with the offer to call on the Senate to form the commission to judge the dissolution of power in Oaxaca, remove the orders of detention against movement leaders, and to involve the incoming federal government in efforts to attend to the union demand for rezoning Oaxaca's wage classification. It appears that Rueda Pacheco and the teachers union immediately received more from the federal government than they originally thought and they took the offer back to Oaxaca for a union assembly vote. According to one human rights defender, these negotiations were only the third time in Mexican history that the government formally sat down with representatives of a movement, rather than with leaders the government was trying to co-opt. "It was interesting how it was reported in the

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<sup>172</sup> Martínez Vásquez, *Autoritarismo*, 220.

<sup>173</sup> Centro de Investigación y Seguridad Nacional, "Problemática Político Social en Oaxaca," December 2006, [http://www.cisen.gob.mx/actas/09\\_PROBLEMATICA\\_PS\\_OAXACA.pdf](http://www.cisen.gob.mx/actas/09_PROBLEMATICA_PS_OAXACA.pdf).

<sup>174</sup> Yésica Sánchez Maya, interview with author, July 27, 2012.



media, alternative media from around the country swarmed in, and it began impacting several other states, to reverberate far beyond Oaxaca."<sup>175</sup>

However, since the government's offer said nothing about accountability for Governor Ruiz and his authoritarian apparatus, the statewide assembly voted down the proposal and sent the commission back to Mexico City to continue negotiations with Minister Abascal. Voices over the occupied radio waves were already beginning to call Rueda Pacheco a traitor for presenting such an offer to Oaxacan society.<sup>176</sup> Once again, as seen in the weeks leading up to the negotiations, the split between the leadership of the teachers union and the wider movement were becoming clearer; the union leaders were resolutely bargaining for their original list of demands, while the representatives of civil society organizations, including radical groups like the FPR, were bargaining for justice and the removal of the governor.

While the teachers union concentrated its efforts on negotiation, the APPO put its hopes in the possibility of the Senate declaring as ungovernable the state in Oaxaca and replacing Governor Ruiz without sending federal police or military forces. The barricades went up every night, the two largest being near the university and near Santa Rosa, the two major roads out of the city to the south and north respectively. Marches and occupations continued to take place, and the confrontations between APPO protesters and authorities and paramilitaries became ever more violent. One participant recalled how "we spent hours preparing, collecting rocks, fireworks, whatever we could. They were shooting at us."<sup>177</sup> Yet for Rueda Pacheco, the end of negotiations was in sight, the state government had already agreed to all of the union demands

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<sup>175</sup> Yésica Sánchez Maya, interview with author, July 27, 2012.

<sup>176</sup> Martínez Vásquez, *Autoritarismo*, 221.

<sup>177</sup> David Venegas, interview with author, July 17, 2012.

save rezoning, and the Interior Minister was willing to consider the rezoning if the teachers union would go back to work.

In mid-September, although nearly all of the original union demands had been satisfied, the union leadership felt as though there was still a possibility of removing Governor Ruiz. In a bid to regain control over the movement, Rueda Pacheco publicly announced, "The teachers will return to classes five days after Ruiz resigns."<sup>178</sup> Rueda Pacheco consulted with the union assembly, and the majority, in mid-September, called for their president to maintain the demand for Governor Ruiz's resignation. By repositioning the teachers at the head of the demand for the governor's resignation, Sección 22 and the other civil society representatives presented a briefly united front in the negotiations with Minister Abascal. However, Rueda Pacheco's tone would change by early October, when he announced that the teachers would be back in the classrooms by the end of the month.

Following the vote in the teachers' assembly rejecting the offer from Minister Abascal, with the Senate still debating on sending a fact-finding commission to Oaxaca to determine the dissolution of powers, Rueda Pacheco and the rest of the negotiating commission announced that the previous offer was insufficient. In response, President Fox and Minister Abascal convened a meeting among other PRI governors from around the country to craft a strategy to resolve the conflict that would ideally satisfy all parties without forcing Governor Ruiz to resign. On September 26, they announced the results of the meeting to the press: "a new economic proposal for the teachers of the SNTE Sección 22, and an offer for the allied organizations in the APPO,

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<sup>178</sup> Octavio Vélez Ascencio, "Condicionan maestros clases a renuncia de Ulises," *La Jornada*, September 19, 2006.

making reforms to diverse laws and local institutions and solving specific political conflicts, such as freeing prisoners."<sup>179</sup>

Yet the teachers union, for the moment, remained steadfast in its refusal to end the strike until Governor Ruiz was removed from office. While negotiations had been ongoing, the APPO and the teachers union had jointly mounted a march from Oaxaca to Mexico City, stopping in cities and towns along the way. They arrived in Mexico City on October 2 and set up a *plantón* in front of the Senate in an effort to pressure the Senate into declaring a dissolution of powers in the state.<sup>180</sup> While the Senate was reluctant to act, with legislators from the PRI and PAN continuing to argue that the conflict must be resolved within the confines of the state, the Interior Minister Abascal made another offer to the negotiating delegation on October 5: a stop to prosecutions against the union and the APPO, the resignation of top security officials in the state, temporarily sending in the federal police to ensure security in the city, additional resources for the public education system, reform to state law, and 40 million pesos for rezoning wage classifications in the entire country. The negotiating commission was given until the 9th of October to respond.

However, following the democratic practices of Sección 22, the acceptance or denial of proposals made during negotiations relied upon a decision by the state assembly of the union. In a number of consultations, which continued parallel to negotiations with the Interior Ministry, the atmosphere within the teachers union began to shift toward accepting the offer from the federal government and ending the strike. Concurrently, the federal Senate sent a delegation

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<sup>179</sup> Rosa Elvira Vargas, "Acuerdan Fox y gobernadores priístas nueva estrategia política para Oaxaca," *La Jornada*, September 26, 2006.

<sup>180</sup> Martínez Vásquez, *Autoritarismo*, 230.

with representatives from all three major political parties to Oaxaca to analyze the Governor's ability to return Oaxaca to stability. When the Senate announced their findings on October 19, that they would not intervene and force the resignation of Governor Ruiz, Sección 22 leaders recognized that the best outcome for Sección 22 would be gained only through the negotiations with Minister Abascal.

On October 30th, the same day that the American independent journalist Bradley Will filmed his own assassination at the hands of PRI loyalists, Enrique Rueda Pacheco announced the results of dialogue and negotiations: the state dropped orders for detention against 20 movement leaders, a fund was created for the families of slain teachers, the union radio station, Radio Plantón, was granted preliminary approval for broadcasting, and 35 thousand teachers would immediately return to the classroom.<sup>181</sup> When the proposal to return to the classroom was put in front of the Sección 22 state assembly, the tensions between internal factions rose to the surface. The vote was close, 31,078 in favor of returning to work and 20,387 against, and expressed itself along factional lines. The more radical factions within the union, namely UTE/FPR, overwhelmingly voted to continue the strike until Governor Ruiz resigned. However, the voices of CODEMO and Praxis and their regional allies carried the day and Rueda Pacheco announced that the teachers would be returning to the classroom.<sup>182</sup> The teachers union had achieved, through negotiations on the federal level, much of what it had originally asked for nearly six months earlier. Yet it left the rest of the APPO and the other movement organizations to face the deployment of the federal police forces without the support and numbers of a united teachers union. As the state assembly concluded its vote, and people amassed in the street to

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<sup>181</sup> Martínez Vasquez, *Autoritarismo*, 246.

<sup>182</sup> Gindin, "Movimiento Sindical," 182.

voice their commitment to continuing the movement, the crowd chanted, "Con Rueda o sin Rueda, Ulises Ruiz va para afuera" (With Rueda or without Rueda, Ulises Ruiz will leave).

In the voice of one teacher who had been a part of the teachers movement since its inception in 1979:

Hundreds of thousands came together to help, and great, the government of Ulises Ruiz almost fell. It fled across the region, going hiding in many parts. We saw that it had gotten sick, that this man, Ulises Ruiz Ortiz was sick...so much repression. But the worst was that the compañero Secretary General Enrique Rueda Pacheco...he sold us out. We know it, he didn't tell us, and we can't prove it, but we know that he received some amount, I don't know if it was 80 million pesos or what. And that man, he went to live in Canada, he abandoned us. So another compañero Secretary of the organization was the one that took control of Sección 22 along with the state section. But they don't lead by themselves, it is the state assembly that leads the compañeros.<sup>183</sup>

## **Conclusion**

What Sergio expressed above was the great feeling of betrayal that followed the vote to return to school. Embedded in the collective memory of struggle over decades was the experience of leaders being co-opted by the government and settling for less than their movement could have achieved in return for personal gain. For many within the teachers union, the tangible feeling that the movement was on the verge of toppling the state executive trumped the ability of the union leaders to negotiate union demands with the federal government. Furthermore, Sergio expressed great faith in the democratic practices consolidated over years of struggle. As seen within the teachers movement as well as within APPO, a large part of what the movements advocated for was a different conception of the practice of democracy, one in which leaders are bound by the decisions of the collective. Yet contrary to the revolutionary (or even democratic) romanticism that depicted the Oaxacan movement as a unified struggle against a

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<sup>183</sup> Sergio Vale Jiménez, interview with author, July 27, 2012.

despotic governor, Sección 22 leadership always had its own interests in mind during the course of the movement. The union displayed the remarkable leverage and power that it had cultivated over its nearly three-decade history struggling for democracy within the union. With members in every village in the state, the unionized teachers were far more than a body of unionized laborers, but rather were often the intermediaries between communities and the state, advocates for the rural indigenous communities, and the backbone of urban neighborhoods throughout the state.

The negotiating successes of Sección 22 that included bilingual education, school supplies, resources, and infrastructure for villages and schools across Oaxaca made it so that a teachers' movement touched the lives of the majority of the state population. Thus in addition to its mobilizing power as an institution, Sección 22 had created an inclusive atmosphere of solidarity within the state that invited participation from formal and informal networks that existed on every level of society - from official alliances with other unions through organizations such as FSODO to the personal networks of family and friends that were touched by the teachers union. Eugenia, an indigenous migrant into the city of Oaxaca who started an indigenous women's organization in the mid-1990s, noted that while one of her sons was in the teachers college during the 2006 movement, she and her organization were accustomed to bringing food and drinks out the *plantón* to support friends and family members.<sup>184</sup> Other longtime teachers noted that many of their brothers and sisters, children, nieces, and nephews were also part of the teachers union, and they would bring the whole family out to the *plantón*.<sup>185</sup> Finally, two young men who were high school students in 2006 remembered going out to the *plantón* every year

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<sup>184</sup> Eugenia Pizarro García, interview with author, July 1, 2012.

<sup>185</sup> Hilda Acevedo Reyes, interview with author, July 25, 2012; and Sergio Vale Jiménez, interview with author, July 27, 2012.

with their parents who were members of the teachers union. Both of them point to their parents for their political education and the reason that they decided to participate in the 2006 movement.<sup>186</sup>

The inclusion of families and friends multiplies the numbers available for mobilization. These are the informal networks of support that, in activation, not only provide a boost in numbers for demonstrations, but also supply sustenance and material support for strikers living in the *plantón*. Similarly, formal links between the union and other labor unions and associations provided material support as well as numbers for mobilizations. Sotelo Marbán points to more widespread participation when he notes that even in the first installation of the *plantón* on May 22, 2006, there "had already united indigenous, labor, social, *campesino*, and student organizations." With that support, the teachers union incorporated some of the "popular demands specific to the participating organizations" in their dealings at the negotiating table.<sup>187</sup> Furthermore, in addition to food and material support provided by family and friends, market vendors supported the striking teachers by "bringing crates of fruit and diverse goods as donations."<sup>188</sup>

On one hand, these networks of participation help illuminate the sustained mobilization in 2006. On the other hand, when examining the movement more closely, it becomes clear that the internal contradictions, both within the union and within the greater movement, prevented the unity necessary to overcome political reforms that strengthened the autonomy of state governments. The unseating of a governor in 2006 was far more difficult than it was in 1976 as

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<sup>186</sup> Ramón Núñez Castro, interview with author, July 17, 2012; and "Vaín," interview with author, July 17, 2012.

<sup>187</sup> Both quotations from Sotelo Marbán, *Insurgencia Civil*, 71.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid*, 82.

the centralized rule of the PRI had been dismantled during the previous decades. The consolidation of the governor's office as the ultimate authority on the state level, no longer responsive to the federal executive, frustrated the alliance that took the form of the APPO in their demands for Governor Ruiz's resignation.

Sección 22 was left with a difficult decision after the federal Senate declined to act against Governor Ruiz: continue the movement and likely be forced back to work when federal police and military forces were sent into the state, or negotiate the best possible deal for the union and return to work. Sección 22 leaders opted for the second choice, fracturing the alliance between the union and other social movement actors. As this chapter has proposed, repertoires of contention rely on all sides of a conflict to reasonably anticipate the likely actions and consequences in a conflict. For Sección 22 and the Oaxacan state government, the repertoires consolidated over the previous 25 years of annual political theater were ruptured on June 14, unleashing a sequence of events that neither side could anticipate or control. While Sección 22 has a unique ability among Oaxacan organizations to sustain mobilization by leveraging networks built and consolidated over years of political and social struggle, this chapter has also demonstrated that Sección 22 acted in its own best interests, exposing the contradictions within a horizontally organized movement. In a similar manner of analysis, the following chapter examines the participation, experiences, and methods of other organized actors that allied with the APPO.



### Chapter 3: The APPO in Fragments

Following the attempted *desalojo* of the *plantón*, much of Oaxacan civil society surged forth to support the teachers union. To many, the government's actions on June 14 were not just a rupture in the Oaxacan repertoires of protest and contention that had been constructed over the previous 26 years of teacher mobilization, but also a further affirmation for Governor Ruiz's opposition that he was seeking to consolidate power and wipe away any vestiges of dissent. The response from civil society, bringing together disparate elements and sectors of the population, was a surprise to nearly all actors involved in the realm of Oaxacan politics. For Sección 22, the outpouring of support brought new life into a movement that was increasingly the subject of a media onslaught and was besieged by accusations of corruption. On the opposing side, the Governor surely never expected such popular support for the teachers, popular support that was, in many ways, a repudiation of his first two years in office. And for civil society, if such a varied group can be aggregated together, the formation of the APPO brought new opportunities to push for social and political reforms that many had organized for years to obtain.

On June 17, 2006, responding to the call from Sección 22, representatives from over 350 organizations poured into a school gymnasium to hold the first meeting of what would be the *Asamblea Popular de los Pueblos de Oaxaca* (the Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca).<sup>189</sup> The formation of the body brought together disparate sectors of civil society, many of whom had been active and organized for years, if not decades, before the events of 2006. Víctor Raúl Martínez Vásquez comments: "In the decades of the 1970s-1980s, the teachers

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<sup>189</sup> The Assembly was first named the *Asamblea Popular del Pueblo de Oaxaca* (The Popular Assembly of the People of Oaxaca), and was later pluralized at the behest of indigenous organizations to more accurately reflect the diversity of the Oaxacan populace.

movement, the indigenous movement, the feminist movement, that environmentalist movement, the Christian base communities, among others, grew and/or developed."<sup>190</sup> To see such organization as a spontaneous reaction to government repression misses the diversity and depth of mobilization and organization that permeated Oaxacan society prior to the *desalojo*.

For the organizations that poured into the APPO, the new mobilization was an opportunity to challenge not just the developments of Governor Ruiz's first term, but also the continued authoritarianism of the PRI at the state level. Among their grievances: an increase in human rights violations in the state, elimination of millions of Mexican Pesos of community subsidies, public works projects that often involved the use of eminent domain against small landowners and farmers, modernization and renovation of the historic plazas in the old city center, and measures to forbid marches and protests in the Zocalo. Flavio Sosa, one of the individuals that emerged as a figurehead for the APPO, commented, "[Governor Ruiz] didn't realize it, but he was closing the escape valves that let the pressure off."<sup>191</sup> Stymied by Governor Ruiz's one-sided attempts to change protest repertoire in the state, the organizations that composed the APPO were, in many ways, attempting to rebalance the dynamics of political power and protest in the state.

Before delving into the various sectors that composed the APPO, the structure of the assembly itself must be noted as a deliberate construction of an alternative form of government. Although the majority of the initial participants can be characterized as urban, the choice to structure the APPO as a horizontal body committed to decision-making by consensus drew upon

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<sup>190</sup> Víctor Raúl Martínez Vásquez, "Antinomias y perspectivas del movimiento popular en Oaxaca," in *La APPO ¿rebelión o movimiento social? (nuevas formas de expresión ante la crisis)*, ed. Víctor Raúl Martínez Vásquez (Oaxaca: UABJO, 2009), 329.

<sup>191</sup> Quoted in, Marc Lacey, "Mexican Forces Move to Retake Oaxaca," *The New York Times*, October 30, 2006.

the widely practiced indigenous forms of community governance that had also long been championed by a group of Oaxacan intellectuals.<sup>192</sup> Although the APPO was not without its contradictions, first and foremost that of restricting formal membership to existing organizations, the structure itself was a repudiation of the concentration of power in the hierarchy of the state government.

Such a structure in a social movement was far from novel. Not only did it draw upon the forms of community governance that the 1995 state constitution recognized for indigenous communities, it also drew upon Oaxacan social movement history. COCEO and COCEI are two bodies in Oaxaca that brought together campesinos, students, and workers to actively fight for electoral representation, better living conditions, and a more responsive state government. The structure of COCEO, in a strikingly similar manner to what the APPO would erect, brought together representatives and leaders of the component organizations into an assembly that charted the course of their movement and struggle. Most active in the 1970s and 1980s, although still in existence today, the movement in the Istmus, under COCEI, succeeded in winning political power through an alliance with the Communist Party, the first municipality in the country since the consolidation of the PRI to be government by the Mexican Communist Party. The successes and structures of collaborative assembly of the COCEI and COCEO remained strong in the Oaxacan collective memory of struggle and activism, strongly influencing the formation of the APPO. Furthermore, the links between COCEO, COCEI, and the movement to democratize Sección 22 ensured that neither struggled in isolation, but rather educated and

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<sup>192</sup> Gustavo Esteva and Madhu Suri Prakash, *Grassroots Post-Modernism: Remaking the Soil of Cultures* (London: Zed Books, 1998).

informed, influenced and directed the respective movements, a pattern that was replicated in 2006.

The APPO, while similar to its Oaxacan social movement predecessors, was also unique in its rapid formation and in the diversity of interests that sustained it. This chapter will examine the variety of organizations and interests that composed the APPO, what brought these strands of participation into the movement, and what working within the APPO and the movement meant for ground-level participants. Although the APPO brought together over 300 organizations in what was designed to be a non-hierarchical assembly operating on the basis of consensus, its organizational model also quickly exposed the contradictions and difficulties with the practice of radical democracy.

Gustavo Esteva, the Oaxacan intellectual that runs the Oaxaca campus of the *Universidad de la Tierra*, championed the organization of the APPO in that "it seeks to establish new types of relationships between the people and those currently coordinating their collective endeavors, to strengthen the social networks of Oaxacans and reinforce their dignity and autonomy."<sup>193</sup> In his conception of the APPO, the organized protestors were constructing and practicing a form of government in which power would be inverted, that government officials, or even the APPO coordinating committee, would necessarily be subject to oversight and accountable to the mass of the population below. He clarifies that "while this is an appeal to both the sociological and political imaginations, it is also firmly based on historical experience with autonomous self-government."<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>193</sup> Gustavo Esteva, "The Asamblea Popular De Los Pueblos De Oaxaca: A Chronicle of Radical Democracy," *Latin American Perspectives* 34.1 (2007), 136.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid*, 134.

While nearly four-fifths of Oaxacan municipalities are now governed by some form of community assembly, the fact that community assembly exists is not nearly enough to claim that it functions smoothly. In Oaxacan villages and municipalities across the state, a number of these assemblies have been captured by local power holders, *caciques*, and can hardly be said to be fully democratic, particularly when they are still subject to oversight by the Oaxacan Governor.<sup>195</sup> However, as a model for social movement organizing, the deliberate choice to draw upon the practices and ideals of indigenous community self-governance speaks to a desire for more democracy and, more specifically, participatory democracy in everyday life. The structure of the APPO, like many recent horizontally organized social movements around the world, was deliberately designed "as a way to give people a sense of ownership of, and therefore commitment to, the enterprise [of democracy], and to prefigure an alternative to a world in which bureaucratic structures stifle creativity, autonomy, and equality."<sup>196</sup>

As such, the APPO can best be described as an imperfect experiment that appealed to Oaxacan indigenous governance practices, the desires to oust Governor Ruiz, and the desire by some to rebuild the institutions of democracy in Oaxaca. While some saw it as a culmination of decades of organizing and political imagination, others saw the opportunity to make the movement their own. Within the APPO existed many different actors and forms of participation. Even though movement leaders attempted to give the APPO some structure by electing a coordinating committee of thirty individuals, "there were [also] many moments in which those

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<sup>195</sup> Todd Eisenstadt, *Politics, Identity, and Mexico's Indigenous Rights Movements* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

<sup>196</sup> Francesca Polletta, "Participatory Democracy in the New Millennium," *Contemporary Sociology* 42.1 (2013), 46.

known as 'the bases' rebelled against some of the decisions passed down by the coordinating committee."<sup>197</sup>

It is precisely "the bases" that this chapter seeks to examine. To fully capture the diversity of participation in the APPO and the movement requires a disaggregation of movement components. While certainly not exhaustive, this chapter will examine some of the largest and most important strands of movement participation, analyzing the roles of the Catholic Church, human rights organizations, women's organizations, and student organizations. Much could also be said about the participation of indigenous organizations in the movement. However, Lynn Stephen's recent monograph on the movement exhaustively examines indigenous participation in the movement, and this author would only be repeating what Stephen has already written.<sup>198</sup> These different strands of civil society, while united under the banner of the APPO and the demand for Governor Ruiz's resignation, never abandoned their respective missions or principles to fully submit themselves to the needs of the APPO and Sección 22.

Rather, within the diverse body of the APPO, each sector continued to engage in their work in dialogue with the work and trajectory of the movement. For example, women's organizations engaged in education campaigns to combat sexism in Oaxacan society as well as within the movement, and human rights organizations not only documented abuses against the protestors but also sought to ensure that police officers and opponents were not abused when detained by protestors. While they all struggled and fought as a movement body to unseat Governor Ruiz, the various strands within the movement served to complicate the utopian vision

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<sup>197</sup> Valencia and Venegas, "Conversaciones con Rubén Valencia y David Venegas," 94.

<sup>198</sup> Lynn Stephen, *We Are the Face of Oaxaca: Testimony and Social Movements* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013), particularly Chapters 5, 7, and 8.

of participatory democracy that was the APPO. As we will see in the following sections, each sector of participation brought its own unique vision and practices to the movement. We shall begin with the Catholic Church, an institution that has permeated Mexican society and that has largely, since the Medellín Bishop's Conference in 1968, embraced liberation theology in rural, indigenous, and impoverished Mexican regions such as Oaxaca and Chiapas.

## **The Catholic Church**

Thus far, the role of the Catholic Church has been one of the least studied aspects of the 2006 movement. A single scholar, Kristin Norget, has been the only one to systematically look at the church, Catholic social teachings, and the place of Catholicism in what, to most observers, was a decidedly secular movement. But religion, both in its popular and hierarchical aspects, cannot be discounted when looking at participation in the APPO.

Much has been written on Catholicism in Mexican popular life, particularly the upheaval and guerrilla warfare of the Cristeros during the 1930s and other millenarian movements across the country.<sup>199</sup> In Oaxaca, Edward Wright-Rios focused his study on the dynamics between official and popular Catholicism, and found that subaltern laypersons often succeeded in shaping the practices of popular Catholicism in spite of official church reforms mandated by the Vatican.<sup>200</sup> Through personal experiences of miracles and revelations, popular actors claimed the practice of faith as their own rather than something to be experienced through pastors and priests. The sometimes-uneasy relationship between popular Catholicism and the orthodox

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<sup>199</sup> See for example, Paul Vanderwood, *The Power of God Against the Guns of the Government: Religious Upheaval in Mexico at the Turn of the Nineteenth Century* (Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998); and Luis González, *San José de Gracia: Mexican Village in Transition*, trans. John Upton (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1982).

<sup>200</sup> Edward Wright-Rios, *Revolutions in Mexican Catholicism: Reform and Revelation in Oaxaca, 1887-1934* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009).

hierarchy of the Catholic Church takes on further importance in places like Oaxaca where large indigenous populations have appropriated Catholic social teachings to "celebrate traditional values and positive sociality related to collectivism, communalism, and social equilibrium, thereby affirming the virtues of poverty and the world the autochthonous and traditional."<sup>201</sup>

The amalgamation of official Catholicism and indigenous religious practices gave rise to a unique form of Catholicism that venerates popular religious figures such as the Virgin of Guadalupe, the Santo Niño, and Oaxaca's own Virgin of Juquila, often to the frustration of the Church hierarchy. In Oaxaca, as Kristin Norget has amply documented, "Oaxacan popular religion symbolically permeates popular culture, resulting in the appearance of official religious icons or rites in settings where the official does not formally dictate (for example in the context of folk curing, or in many secular fiestas)."<sup>202</sup> As will be discussed in Chapter 4, graffiti artists in the movement appropriated religious symbols for movement use, creating the Virgen de las Barricadas (Virgin of the Barricades) to watch over and protect the movement participants. The use of images and saintly figures as caretakers and protectors of the movement, a fundamental component of popular Catholicism in Mexico, speaks to the practice of popular religiosity as a dynamic force in the state of Oaxaca.

Furthermore, the existence of such strong popular religiosity in the state has meant that Church officials are often forced to incorporate (or at least condone) the dynamics, beliefs, and practices of popular Catholicism. Within the official Church however, the practice of popular religiosity is often defined by the socio-economic class of the congregation. In many of the poorer, more indigenous parishes of the capital city, "such [popular] practices and beliefs

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<sup>201</sup> Kristin Norget, "Progressive Theology and Popular Religiosity in Oaxaca, Mexico," *Ethnology* 36.1 (1997), 78.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.



continue to thrive...but are often unknown, or pointedly ignored, by upper-class, more mestizo Catholics, who tend more toward orthodoxy, and who often make a strong effort to distinguish themselves from 'inferior,' indigenous ways of life."<sup>203</sup> Consistent with the socio-economic divide in religious practice, Norget argues that popular Catholicism has been strongest in the rural indigenous communities while confined to the margins of the capital city.

The contemporary practice of popular Catholicism has also been infused with the tenets of liberation theology, the call to the Church to provide the "preferential option for the poor," that arose from the Medellín Conference in 1968. In the 1970s, a number of progressive bishops rose in the church hierarchy in the pastoral region Pacífico Sur (Pacific South), including both Oaxaca and Chiapas, to make the region one of the most radical of Mexico's eighteen pastoral regions. Alongside Bishop Samuel Ruiz of Chiapas, Oaxaca's Archbishop Bartolomé Carrasco (Archdiocese of Oaxaca) and Bishop Arturo Lona Reyes (Diocese of Tehuantepec), guided the Church in Oaxaca to take on the best practices of liberation theology and meaningfully engage with the social and economic problems that plague the region.

Through 1992, when Archbishop Carrasco was replaced with the conservative theologian Bishop Héctor González, the Oaxacan church laid the groundwork for the movement participation that was seen in 2006. Through the creation of economic cooperatives, communal savings banks, and integral personal and ecclesiastical development programs in rural indigenous communities, and the widespread formation of Christian base communities across Oaxaca, the liberationist clergy have integrated Catholicism into indigenous and autonomous identities.<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> Ibid, 70.

<sup>204</sup> Kristin Norget, "The Politics of Liberation: The Popular Church, Indigenous Theology, and Grassroots Mobilization in Oaxaca, Mexico," *Latin American Perspectives* 24.5 (1997), 108-9.

Following the 1992 appointment of the conservative Archbishop González, the liberationist projects in Oaxaca came under scrutiny, and in many cases were shut down by church hierarchy. Notwithstanding, the discourse and practice of indigenous autonomy that permeates the liberationist base communities and local projects managed to often survive the opposition of church hierarchy. As described by Norget, "the ethnic basis of Oaxacan liberationist discourse, however, allows it to serve as a rallying cry for an attack on 'nonreligious' social problems and as an expression of social and cultural particularisms derived from a sacred and idealized ('transcendental') past that are depicted as being opposed to the dominant Mexican society and forces aligned with the state."<sup>205</sup> Therefore, with only nominal support from the Oaxacan church leadership, a number of clergy and laymembers continued the liberationist work by maintaining base communities, human rights offices, and other community projects that were often framed in an ethnic discourse of indigenous autonomy.

In 2006, these longstanding liberationist projects, under the leadership of both clergy and laypersons, were integral in shaping movement participation for a reasonably large portion of movement participants. However, the conservative orientation of the church hierarchy also demonstrated the rift between the leadership and the base. On one hand, the church hierarchy attempted to display neutrality and offer its services as a mediator between the protestors and Governor Ruiz. On the other hand, given the organization and liberationist orientation of much of Oaxaca's Catholicism, "certain progressive clerics and Catholic laypersons saw, in response to

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<sup>205</sup> Ibid, 112.

the magnitude of the repression of the government, a struggle that obligated them to take action."<sup>206</sup>

Pedro Matías, a Oaxacan journalist who covered the movement for *Noticias de Oaxaca* and *Proceso*, commented on the role of the church in 2006:

Many said 'well the Church didn't participate, but the Church participated a lot, because none of the churches closed. All of them were operating and when there was an alert or any question of risk, people took refuge in the churches, at whatever hour. Well, there were claims against the Archbishop: 'he is not on the side of the people,' they said. But he could not come out and say that he was with them, against the people, he had to play the role of dialoguer and conciliator. In the end, the churches never closed, and that is how we can say that they were on the side of the movement...

Furthermore, the dialogue table was formed with the Bishop Arturo Lona, with Padre Uvi, [two renowned liberationists in Oaxaca]. So there was [official] participation, but it was more the Christian base communities...those who had been working with the people...There were also many civil organizations, founded by ex-seminarians or people who were related to the Church, which after the other Archbishop [González] came and tried to break with these groups, they maintained themselves, and now, with the movement, there they were.<sup>207</sup>

What Matías described in his brief mention of the church were the multiple roles that different Church actors played in the movement. The churches in the city of Oaxaca came to play a crucial role in the movement, as sanctuaries and providers, shelter and organizational space. In particular, the base communities associated with the handful of progressive churches in Oaxaca de Juárez immediately sprung into action. In the immediate aftermath of the *desalojo*,

they immediately came to the city center carrying food and provisions for the wounded. In certain central temples - La Merced, Siete Principes, in the Iglesia de la Compañía (of the Jesuits) - they organized brigades and handed out water to the activists. La Compañía rapidly transformed into a type of supply center, it also established a "popular kitchen," from which, in rotating shifts, members of the

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<sup>206</sup> Kristin Norget, "La Virgen a las Barricadas," in *La APPO ¿rebelión o movimiento social? (nuevas formas de expresión ante la crisis)*, ed. Víctor Raúl Martínez Vásquez (Oaxaca: UABJO, 2009), 308.

<sup>207</sup> Pedro Matías, interview with author, July 26, 2012.

base communities provided nourishment day and night to the participants in the movement, feeding the communal body of the protestors.<sup>208</sup>

On the ground level, the base communities and the liberationist clergy, were essential to the maintenance of the movement, providing food, medical attention, and in creating a moral space through which Catholic social teachings justified movement participation against a repressive State. José Rentería, a priest in San Bartolo Coyotepec, described the work of the clergy as such: "it goes beyond assistance, beyond charity. We try to ensure that the voice of what is happening reaches the international level, disseminating denunciations. We did not seek the role of protagonists, but it behooves us to form a kind of umbrella to give shelter to the people."<sup>209</sup>

Such participation, concretely in the spirit and practice of liberation theology, served to divide the church. Priests such as Padre Rentería and the well-known Padre Uvi (Wilfredo Mayrén Peláez), who ran a human rights organization in addition to his parish in San Pablo Huixtepec, were often chastised and punished by Archbishop Chávez Botello, a conservative who had replaced Archbishop González, and others higher up in the Mexican Church hierarchy.<sup>210</sup> As such, clerics who became too involved in the movement were subject to transfers and reprisals from the church hierarchy.

Archbishop Chávez Botello, from the beginning of the movement, always sought to preserve the role of the Church as neutral. In the first press statement released by the Archbishop's office, he urged both sides to refrain from violence and to return to the negotiating

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<sup>208</sup> Norget, "La Virgen a las Barricadas," 312.

<sup>209</sup> Quoted in Blanche Petrich, "El ambiente de violencia en Oaxaca amenaza ya a un sector de la Iglesia," *La Jornada*, November 15, 2006.

<sup>210</sup> Norget, "La Virgen a las Barricadas," 315.

table to work out a peaceful solution and to "not give oneself over to provocations, nor fall for them."<sup>211</sup> While the Archbishop recognized the discontent of the Oaxacan movement participants that poured out to the streets, there was no strong condemnation of the illegitimate use of force by the government - only a call to peace and dialogue.

Following the first press release, the Archbishop, along with the painter Francisco Toledo, and the Bishop Emeritus Arturo Lona from Tehuantepec, immediately formed a mediation commission, hoping to play the role that Bishop Samuel Ruiz has played in Chiapas during the confrontations between the Government and the Zapatistas in the mid-1990s. However, after little success, in no small part because of the contradictions between different factions of the APPO, the mediation commission disbanded and was left to seek other modes of facilitating an end to the conflict in Oaxaca.

The next project that involved the church hierarchy was a meeting between clerics, base communities, and the Archbishop in September 2006, "which created a commission composed of various clerics and nuns favorable to the movement and other representatives from the Oaxacan Archdiocese to make a 'monitoring' of the conflict."<sup>212</sup> This group began to create spaces for dialogue among civil society, holding meetings under the title of *la Iniciativa Ciudadana de Diálogo para la Paz, la Justicia, y la Democracia en Oaxaca* (Citizen Initiative of Dialogue for Peace, Justice, and Democracy in Oaxaca). The first meeting, held on October 9, 2006 included representatives from the movement as well as non-affiliated NGOs, academics, business leaders, and a notable appearance by Bishop Samuel Ruiz from Chiapas.<sup>213</sup> Although these forums

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<sup>211</sup> Quoted in Genaro Altamirano, "Iglesia católica reprueba el uso de la violencia," *El Universal*, June 19, 2006.

<sup>212</sup> Norget, "La Virgen a las Barricadas," 322.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid*, 322.

played only a small role in reaching a negotiated solution to the conflict, they were, nonetheless, an important space for dialogue within and amongst civil society. The conclusions reached from these forums, which continued in the months following the end of the movement, were submitted for consideration to municipal and state authorities as calls for legislative reforms.<sup>214</sup>

While many of the participants in these dialogues were also members of the APPO, the Church was able to create a critical distance between these discussions and those that occurred within the APPO, at once providing an important space for dialogue while still keeping neutrality. This neutrality would have other consequences for movement participants however in November 2006 after the teachers had returned to work and the rest of the APPO was left to face the federal police forces by themselves. With the arrival of the federal police forces in the state at the end of October, state authorities, emboldened by reinforcements, issued arrest warrants for many prominent individuals within the APPO. As the violence against the protestors had been increasing, with a number of deaths and many wounded over the last month, all in addition to the death threats that were being broadcast over Radio Ciudadana and the website Oaxaca en Paz (see Chapter 4), visible members of the APPO leadership had every reason to fear for their physical integrity.

In response to a request for the Oaxacan Church to provide refuge and sanctuary to a number of the persecuted members of the APPO, the Archbishop's office released a press statement on November 11, 2006 that attempted to make clear the Church's role in the conflict. The release stated: "The specific mission of the Church is not a political nor social field; its field is religious which has on the horizon the Kingdom of God...The Church, in fidelity to its

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<sup>214</sup> Notimex, "Reanudar APPO mesas de dilogo en Oaxaca," *El Universal*, February 14, 2007.

mission, will never take sides in favor of any of the parts of the conflict; we are aware that only in our service as facilitators will [the Church] be trustworthy and effective."<sup>215</sup>

This statement can only be understood in the context of the Archbishop's failure to mediate a solution to the conflict. Caught between two groups who refused to negotiate, and who, in turn, accused the Church of siding with the other, made such negotiation near impossible. The actions of the liberationist current within the Church in providing shelter, food, and a moral economy of righteous poverty and resistance lent credence to the state government's claim that the Church was with the APPO. However, the Archbishop's repeated refusals to make any statements beyond condemning violence on both sides of the conflict, painting the state government and the movement as equal actors in using violence, gave the APPO the justification to claim that the Archbishop was with the government.

Furthermore, the statement went on to deny refuge based on the precepts outlined above. The press statement read, "We consider that we do not have the resources nor the infrastructure to guarantee the physical integrity of the persons [who asked for refuge], which is a grave responsibility. To ensure the physical integrity of persons is the responsibility of the Government; which we have expressed to the *Secretaría de Gobernación* so that they attend to this urgency shown by some of the leaders, which is in agreement with the current situation and the common understanding with the APPO."<sup>216</sup> Many within the APPO considered the Church

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<sup>215</sup> Archbishop José Luis Chávez Botello Contreras, and Bishop Oscar A. Campos, "La Iglesia, un Espacio de Verdad y de Reconciliación para todos," accessed September 29, 2013, [http://www.diocesisdematehuala.com/pages2/documentos/la\\_iglesia\\_un\\_espacio\\_de\\_reconciliacion.htm](http://www.diocesisdematehuala.com/pages2/documentos/la_iglesia_un_espacio_de_reconciliacion.htm).

<sup>216</sup> Ibid.

to be abandoning them in their time of need, confirming the views that the Oaxacan church hierarchy was never on the side of the movement.<sup>217</sup>

However, even if the church hierarchy was not allied with the movement and only sought to be a neutral mediator, the evidence remains that there was significant participation in the movement by parts of the Oaxacan Church. The liberationist current of the Church that had been in operation and had been organizing communities since the 1970s is still a strong current in southern Mexico. These sectors of the Church, which included a number of priests and nuns, as well as Christian base communities and other lay volunteers, served an important role in providing shelter, food, and first aid. In the churches around the city, they set up popular kitchens, serving thousands of meals a day, and first aid stations to attend to the wounded after confrontations. Furthermore, "the focus on the moral ecology, representing reciprocity, sacrifice, and communal life, also served as a way to localize the movement, a way to underline its true nature, significantly and essentially just in the battle against a malignant and intolerable government."<sup>218</sup> The indigenist popular Catholicism that permeates the state, in conjunction with the tenets of liberation theology, helped create an ethos of righteous poverty and resistance, a call to Catholics to challenge the structures of politics and society that perpetuate violence and inequality, even if these are "nonreligious" issues. This moral economy of resistance made participation in the movement consistent with the values of popular Catholicism and religiosity. Given that members of the Church played multiple roles in the movement, we now turn to the participation of human rights defenders, who, like Padre Uvi and his human rights office, inserted themselves into the movement as documenters, facilitators, and educators.

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<sup>217</sup> Pedro Matías, interview with author, July 26, 2012.

<sup>218</sup> Norget, "La Virgen a las Barricadas," 325.



## Human Rights Defenders

The world of human rights organizations is a large one, ranging from the well-known organizations that operate around the world to the local institutions that engage in daily advocacy and engagement to improve the human rights situation in their respective location. In Oaxaca, during the 2006 movement, the reality of government repression caught the attention of institutions such as Amnesty International, while local human rights organizations involved themselves in the movement to unseat Governor Ruiz. Although many of these local organizations, both faith-based and secular, were involved in the movement as members of the APPO, they played very distinct roles that differentiated themselves from other sectors of the social movement. In particular, they were crucial to incorporating the discourse of human rights into the demands and goals of the movement. While a condemnation of government repression was always present across sectors of movement participation, the human rights organizations extended the concept to include other rights not necessarily covered by the demands put forth by the teachers union. As such, these actors facilitated dialogue around the rights of women, the rights of indigenous peoples, and the rights to a life free from violence, whether perpetrated by the state or individuals. Furthermore, through forums and discussions, they advanced concrete proposals for state reforms to address systematic violations of human rights.

Yésica Sánchez, now with the organization *Consortio Para el Diálogo Parlamentario y la Equidad Oaxaca, A.C.* (Consortium for the Parliamentary Dialogue and Equity, Oaxaca - referred to hereafter as *Consortio*) was on staff with the *Liga Mexicana por la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos* (Mexican League for the Defense of Human Rights - LIMEDDH) in 2006. During the movement, she continued to play her role as a human rights defender by not only

documenting the violations committed by the State and its allies, but also running education programs within the movement to educate participants about human rights, their individual responsibilities, and the rights of women in the movement and in society. Her frequent work with other organizations in Oaxaca and her high profile status as a committed human rights activist earned her a position of leadership within the APPO and served as one of APPO's representatives in the negotiations with the Secretary Abascal in September and October.

Within the movement, Yésica explained that their role was not the same as that of many of the other organizations that composed the APPO, but rather "we got close to the movement, we tied ourselves to the movement, because the social movement was civil space, and the role that we played in that moment was that of facilitators."<sup>219</sup> As facilitators, what Yésica meant was that local human rights organizations such as LIMEDDH and Consorcio not only had the obligation to report on what was happening, but also to facilitate discussion around the meaning and essence of civil society. As such, Yésica was also careful to distinguish her work from that of technocrats and intellectuals, which can also be a type of facilitation, but without the hands-on involvement that the local human rights organizations engaged in.

So we discussed and discussed, and it was really interesting what we were able to do with the APPO, and not just in the spaces where we were building barricades. But it was in the spaces where we brought coffee, in the space where we all helped protect our own security, in the space where we held marches - and we all went to the marches, we went to the political discussions, within the assemblies of the APPO. Well, what we did was like a series of inputs, or rather fundamental inputs so that we could put together a national forum, which was called *Construyendo la Democracia y la Gobernabilidad en Oaxaca* [Constructing Democracy and Governability in Oaxaca].

In the middle of the conflict, at the beginning of August,...we held the forum *Construyendo la Democracia y Gobernabilidad*. We came to a moment in which we saw, and chose to see, the hundred problems that were Ulises Ruiz, and

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<sup>219</sup> Yésica Sánchez Maya, interview with author, July 27, 2012.

that if Ulises goes, which problems would get resolved. In these internal discussions that we had, Ulises was clearly the image of authoritarianism, and what we had to do was imagine and construct a proposed alternative. This is not the same as constructing consensus within a movement so broad-based, where there are Trotskyites, Leninists, Marxists, feminists, indigenous peoples, the teachers movement. There were diverse ideologies that, in this moment, were all operating in a space that was making a proposal for ending the authoritarian regime, which had expressed its authoritarianism in the *desalojo* of June 14, 2006.

But as we said, [the *desalojo*] was just a drop in the glass, because really there is much more history behind it. It was not just Ulises, but Ulises was that which crystallized the authoritarianism...We were facing an anger that was emanating from the people, an anger with the historic authoritarianism...an anger that was provoked by the State with its illegal deprivations of liberty, with torture, with persecution, with shadowy actions. And this was not just spontaneous anger, but an anger that had been building over time.<sup>220</sup>

Within the movement, as Yésica explained, the human rights organizations proposed and held the above-mentioned forum in order to articulate concrete proposals that would more adequately address the needs of Oaxaca. While they maintained the demand for Governor Ruiz's resignation, their critical analysis realized that the removal of a governor would only scratch the surface of the reforms needed in the state to fortify human rights and dismantle the institutionalization of subnational authoritarianism. Within the forum, held on August 16 and 17, 2006, participants divided into three working groups to address making a new Oaxacan State Constitution, building a political program to articulate concrete legislative reforms, and third, the politics of inclusion and respect of diversity in Oaxaca.

The conclusions reached in the forum were sweeping, condemning the state government. In addition to the proposals that were aimed at building participatory democracy and respect for human rights in all aspects of Oaxacan public life and politics, the forum released a declaration that spoke to the reasons behind the forum and the movement:

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<sup>220</sup> Yésica Sánchez Maya, interview with author, July 27, 2012

We rebel against the government of Ulises Ruiz Ortiz because we do not want a government that directs the resources of the people to the benefit of a privileged sector of society. We do not want institutions that do not meet their missions and are employed to silence the voice of the people, to the benefit of political parties. We do not want any more discussion with empty words, supported by cynicism and lies.<sup>221</sup>

In other words, the forum, organized and operated primarily by the local human rights organizations, proposed massive reform for Oaxaca to more adequately deal with the everyday issues of land, health, education, natural resources, political representation and participation, drug trafficking, public security, and the institutions of government that, in the forum's conception, need to serve the people rather than the powerful. Recognizing the need to replace the institutions of authoritarianism, it called "to create a new state of law, democracy and governability, with the establishment of a New Constitution for our state, which includes the voices of the Oaxacan people."<sup>222</sup> To follow through on these proposals, the forum participants articulated the failure of the Oaxaca state government to adequately deal with the issues of basic human rights and democracy, and therefore, it sought to bring these proposals to the national government. With this in mind, when the federal government agreed to meet with Sección 22 and the APPO, the representatives like Yésica and Marcos Leyva from EDUCA brought precisely these issues to the negotiating table.

But Yésica and others hardly limited themselves to the organizational and political forms of work during the movement. The requirements for her organization and her work kept her running around for months. When asked what took up the majority of her time, she responded:

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<sup>221</sup> APPO, *Foro Nacional: Construyendo la Democracia y la Gobernabilidad en Oaxaca* (Oaxaca: APPO, 2007), pamphlet, 38.

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

I was there in the streets caring for the people. We went up, we went down, we were checking on those who had been repressed because, well it was like what we talked about with the death squads. So we were going around to see how the people were, what they were doing, because we were documenting everything. And with it all, we always had to be alert to the alarms, the alerts to run...it was a craziness at times...Another part was related to the militancy that we observed, seeing what was happening, getting to know the people, talking with them, drinking coffee with them. So although I hardly slept, always running around, it was nothing along the lines of 'Oh poor lady who hasn't slept in weeks.' No, we had this role to play...

Now we, like many other organizations, published documentation on the movement. Some of them were people sent by the State. In those ones, they didn't include demands against specific state functionaries, but there were people who used the documentation to present their cases. Many people offered their proof and their testimony...so all of the documentation went beyond Oaxaca, into the international sphere, and much of that actually included the demands and complaints.<sup>223</sup>

Among the human rights reports that were released about the events during the movement were ones from Amnesty International, the United Nations, and the Mexican State's National Commission on Human Rights.<sup>224</sup> There is a state-level human rights organization called the State Commission on Human Rights in Oaxaca that was created in 1993 as a sub-level organization to the National Commission. However, as the directors of the State Commission are appointed by the Governor, many argued that it was in the hands of Governor Ruiz loyalists.<sup>225</sup>

Furthermore, organizations such as Consorcio, LIMEDDH, and EDUCA argued that the reports being released by the international and national human rights organizations failed to adequately express the depth of the need for reform in Oaxaca. In response, they compiled a

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<sup>223</sup> Yésica Sánchez Maya, interview with author, July 27, 2012.

<sup>224</sup> Amnesty International, "Oaxaca - Clamour for Justice," July 2007; United Nations Special Rapporteur, "UN Human Rights Expert Reports Human Rights Abuses in Mexican Crackdown in Oaxaca," October 31, 2006, <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp/html/story.asp?NewsID=20428&Cr=human&Cr1=rights>; Comisión Nacional de los Derechos Humanos, "Informe Especial."

<sup>225</sup> Yésica Sánchez Maya, interview with author, July 27, 2012; and Horacio Gomez Piñeda, interview with author, July 15, 2012.

report for submission to the United Nations that argued that the Mexican State had failed to comply with the recommended improvements to the state of human rights in Oaxaca and in the country. They concluded, "with this brief report it has been established that over the course of four years, the Mexican Government has not complied with its promises and the required recommendations material to human rights."<sup>226</sup>

The report represented more than a repeated condemnation of the Mexican government for failing to fully address the issues of human rights and impunity. At the time of Yésica's interview, she noted that those responsible for the abuses against the movement still have not been brought to justice.<sup>227</sup> The report also illuminated the diverse domain of human rights organizations that exist in Oaxaca. On the local level were the organizations such as LIMEDDH, Consorcio, and Padre Uvi's Centro Regional de Derechos Humanos "Bartolomé Carrasco Briseño" (Barca-DH). These organizations, staffed by seemingly tireless individuals, inserted themselves into the depths of the movement not just as documenters of human rights abuses, but also as protagonists in the development of concrete proposals to create a more just Oaxaca. They were responsible for engaging movement participants in discussion that not only focused on the abuses of the state, but also sought to educate individuals on human rights at the familial and community level. In contrast to the international organizations, which did play important roles in documenting the abuses, the deaths, the detentions, and the torture carried out by the state, people like Yésica were far from being mere observers. Their multi-faceted work within the APPO demonstrated that local human rights organizations played a special protagonist role with the APPO, the movement, and greater Oaxacan society.

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<sup>226</sup> Consorcio, et. al., *Los Derechos Humanos en Oaxaca, 2004-2008* (Oaxaca: Consorcio, 2008), Pamphlet, 18.

<sup>227</sup> Yésica Sánchez Maya, interview with author, July 27, 2012.

## Women's Organizations:

*The Oaxacan women call out to hearts of other women, to those that are organized and those that are not; to the Deputies and Senators; and to those, wherever they are, who fight for the validity of women's rights, so that we raise our voice against the abuses of power and the crimes committed against hundreds of women and families in this state; so that there is Justice.*<sup>228</sup>

In a country that is often associated with machismo, gender inequality, and gender violence, the role of women in the 2006 may be surprising. However, when looking at the roles that women played within the movement, three aspects become clear. First, women form the majority of the teaching corps nationwide, making up at least 60 percent of all teachers. Although data is currently unavailable, it appears that the gender proportions in Sección 22 are similar to those across Mexico. Lynn Stephen notes that "this translates into very significant representation in the dissident movement by indigenous women who have been vocal in protesting discrimination, sexual harassment, and racism both in the union and elsewhere."<sup>229</sup> Hilda, when interviewed about her participation in the movement, although she was an elected representative and a community leader within Sección 22, revealed very little about her thoughts on women and gender within the union, suggesting that her leadership position was hardly remarkable.<sup>230</sup>

Second, and closely related to the majority presence of women in the teachers union, women's organizations existed long before the movement began, laying important groundwork for female empowerment and leadership in the community and in the movement. Finally, the 2006 movement may be obscured by the overarching demand for the ouster of Governor Ruiz,

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<sup>228</sup> Consorcio, et. al, *Voces de la valentía en Oaxaca* (Oaxaca: Consorcio et. al, 2007), Pamphlet, 45.

<sup>229</sup> Lynn Stephen, "'We are brown, we are short, we are fat...We are the face of Oaxaca': Women Leaders in the Oaxaca Rebellion," *Socialism and Democracy* 21.2 (2007), 101.

<sup>230</sup> Hilda Acevedo Reyes, interview with author, July 25, 2012.

but behind the unifying demands, the movement served as a vehicle for women to demand their rights as citizens and participants, and the movement allowed for various forms of participation that were able to meet individual needs, skills, and desires. This section examines the greater participation of women in the movement as well as that of previously existing women's organizations who leveraged movement participation to advocate for women's rights and to educate male movement participants about gender issues.

One of the most discussed forms of female participation in the movement was the takeover of public media outlets following a women's march on August 1, 2006. While this will be discussed in further detail in Chapter 4, it bears commenting that the actions of female participants, both from within Sección 22 and from other sectors of civil society, forced open a window into Oaxacan society through which the airwaves broadcast the images of quotidian life. The women that took over the public radio and television stations "provided a lifeline to the APPO in its daily organizing activities as well as literally giving voice to thousands of Oaxacans."<sup>231</sup>

The occupation and operation of public media outlets forced a polyvocality upon the airwaves of Oaxaca, challenging not only mainstream media representations of the protestors, but the fundamental questions of gender equality and the role of women in "public arenas that are not identified with women."<sup>232</sup> Furthermore, out of the media takeover was born another women's organization that explicitly dealt with female participation within the movement against the government, the *Coordinadora de Mujeres de Oaxaca* (Coordination of Women of Oaxaca, COMO). COMO, which still exists today, served to structure the operation of the occupied

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<sup>231</sup> Lynn Stephen, "We are brown, we are short, we are fat...We are the face of Oaxaca," 109.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid, 110.



media outlets, and also give further organizational strength and representation to women within Sección 22 and the greater movement.<sup>233</sup>

From the female union members to women's organizations, to housewives that defied their husbands and partners when they inserted themselves into the movement, female participants forced their presence into the public arena. Their agitation and their demands were prominently displayed in images and declarations, in actions and in leadership. To look at one of the forms that female participation took, we turn to Eugenia, whose community organization was involved in the APPO from the beginning.

### **Eugenia**

Eugenia is originally from the Mixe region of Oaxaca, and moved to Oaxaca de Juárez in 1994. She had graduated from the Teachers College in Tamasuliapan, Oaxaca and worked for a few years as a teacher before her children were born, after which she became a housewife and raised her children. However, she remained involved in political and community work, working at first with the local branch of the PRD. With two other *compañeras*,

we said that we are going to create an organization free of religion, free of political parties, free of anything, just us [women]. From there we arrived at the conclusion to give it the name *Union de Mujeres Indigenas Contra la Crisis, Asociación Civil* [Union of Indigenous Women Against the Crisis, Civil Association]...This was founded in 1997, after the economic crisis...

We started working with purely women. And from there...in 2001, we realized that the work in indigenous education should not only be done by women, but that the men had to participate as well, the kids, the whole world should be in this movement. So we began to work that way. We called the men, the kids, the whole world so that they could be there, so that they could understand [the work that we were doing]. Because many people don't understand, the men less than anyone. Many men don't understand because of machismo...But some understood that we were organizing these projects and they participated. For example, we would do cultural events...because we were

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<sup>233</sup> Consorcio, et. al, *Voces de la valentía en Oaxaca*, 19.

working with indigenous languages, in writing, music, theater, among the many things that we were doing.

After June 14...that was when we entered the movement. So we began participating, bringing food. Later, we were building barricades here in my neighborhood...The truth is, as women, that is how we involved ourselves, beginning by giving food, out on the barricades, but also when there was a lot of action, when we were attacked, when the federal police came...we were there. On the Day of the Dead, November 2, when the federal police attacked the university, it wasn't just students there, we were there with all the people who were against the government, who are against the government.

...Within the organization there was some discussion about participation, but not very strong because we all went out quickly when we heard what was happening, and we said that we had to help because of what the government was doing...And those who were with the government, well, best that they move to the side...We also participated in the APPO as an organization, because you wouldn't get into the meetings without a logo. As a civil association, they let us in, and gave us all the credentials so that the *compañeras* could go if they wanted...Those were difficult meetings...there were a lot of people who belonged to political parties and it was clear that was their reason for going. We could see that right from the beginning, even though the people said it shouldn't be like that [with overt political affiliations]. But we had our own work to do, so much of it was done outside of the meetings with the APPO. When there were things for women, we were always there, like the August 1 march when we took over the television station, of course we were there!...But most of our time was spent working in the neighborhood, on the barricades, with all the other *compañeras* and *compañeros*.<sup>234</sup>

Eugenia's aversion to political parties made participation in the APPO difficult for her, but her organizational work in community, women's, and indigenous empowerment and education had made her and her *compañeras* natural neighborhood leaders. Her two sons were also involved in the movement and their house became an organizing and coordinating point in their neighborhood on the periphery of the city. While her organization's daily work around women's and indigenous education was suspended during the movement, it was precisely that experience that prepared her and her organization to take on the role of community leaders in 2006.

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<sup>234</sup> Eugenia Pizarro García, interview with author, July 1, 2012.

In the years since the movement, their organization has shrunk further, with only sixteen registered members at the time of her interview. Yet they continue to work, continuing to focus on indigenous issues that bridge urban and rural communities, particularly engaging in work in partnership with her birth community, Tlaxcaltepec. Eugenia, like many of her *compañeras*, showed a commitment and persistence to her previous work, while still working within the social movement. Lynn Stephen notes that much of the female participation in the movement, exemplified by Eugenia, "is consistent with other hybrid contemporary social movements that combine the strategic demands of achieving women's equality with the practical demands of access to food, healthcare, housing, democratic representation, respect, and simply the right to speak in public."<sup>235</sup>

While Eugenia and many others were involved in all aspects of organizing and mobilizing the movement from the base, other prominent female actors ensured that women were present and represented in the movement leadership. Yésica Sánchez Maya, who, as a renowned human rights defender, also speaks to the operations of human rights organizations during the movement, commented in her interview about the role of women in the leadership of the movement:

One important thing was this, when we went [to negotiate with Secretary Abascal's office], each group sent one man and one woman. So it was not just two men, and this has to be seen through the feminist presence in civil space. That was one of the first indications of a vision of gender from, well not from the men, but from the feminists that had made incursions into the center of the civil arena, aligning themselves with this movement that intended to eradicate authoritarianism. From the perspective of Consorcio, and myself in LIMEDDH, we saw that it was important to elevate and document this, and illuminate the women that were in the social movement which was largely seen through the

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<sup>235</sup> Lynn Stephen, "We are fat, we are short, we are brown...We are the face of Oaxaca," 110.

[human rights] discourse of the prisoners, the disappeared, the tortured, but all of this had importance for women...

I feel that this part of the movement was very rich because...it was so strong how *compañeros* were forced to see that there were also women in the movement, a representation for women, the way that the voices of women were elevated to a new importance and claimed, 'Yes we are here, we exist, and we have roles as protagonists.'<sup>236</sup>

Yésica pointed to two dynamics that were important within the movement. One was, as we have seen with Eugenia, the role of women in the movement as organizers and leaders on the community and neighborhood level. These female participants demanded and received their positions of leadership and coordination precisely because of their actions as protagonists, advancing the movement by occupying media outlets, by coordinating neighborhood barricades, organizing delivery of provisions, and demanding representation in the forefront of the movement. The second dynamic was internal to the movement, and was the process of educating male participants and bystanders about women's rights and gender equality. Yésica and others spearheaded internal discussions not only amongst leadership but also on the most grassroots levels about "violence against women by *compañeros* within the social movement...and the need to confront this patriarchal form of authoritarianism. There were not many cases of that at the end, but it was super important nonetheless."<sup>237</sup>

One of the first projects that Yésica and other *compañeras* undertook in the immediate aftermath of the movement was the collection of testimony and oral histories of female movement participants. As human rights workers and as women themselves, they felt that it was important to document not only the government abuses against the movement in terms of the number of killed, tortured, illegally detained, but also how the rights of women were violated

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<sup>236</sup> Interview with Yésica Sánchez Maya, July 27, 2012.

<sup>237</sup> Interview with Yésica Sánchez Maya, July 27, 2012.

because of the state of authoritarianism. However, they document not just abuses, but the clear examples of female agency and strength, ensuring that the role of women in the movement was one of power and strength, and a role that has changed the landscape of political and civil society in Oaxaca.<sup>238</sup>

### **Student Organizations:**

Students made up a large number of movement participants in a variety of forms. In examining student participation, it is useful not to think of students as a homogenous group, but rather as a microcosm of the movement as a whole insofar as student organization participation took on multiple forms just as did different sectors of civil society. As mentioned in Chapter 2, far left political parties that have blocs within Sección 22 have also been quite successful in organizing students at the public university, UABJO. These were many of the students that poured forth in the first hours of the *desalojo* to occupy the Radio Universidad and helped the teachers battle back the authorities to retake the Zócalo. However, the body of students in the movement was far more diverse than those associated with leftist parties such as the FPR. From the teachers colleges, *las Normales*, which are spread across the state, to the art college Bellas Artes, to the law school at UABJO, the organized students reflected the nature of participation that can be generalized across the movement: those that participated did so based on their abilities and location.

This section will look at three participants who were university students at the time, one in la Normal, one studying agronomy, and one law student. The students at Bellas Artes will be discussed in Chapter 4 because of their presence in crafting the cultural and artistic elements

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<sup>238</sup> Consorcio et. al, "Voces de la valentía en Oaxaca."

within the movement. In each of these three participants was a desire to involve themselves within the movement, unique to their personal situations, and they each had much to say regarding the role of students in the movement. Prospero was careful to note that as students, they tended to be lumped together as if they were a homogenous group, which he argues was far from the truth.<sup>239</sup> The three speakers in this section demonstrate the range and variety of student action and mobilization within the movement.

**Prospero:**

Prospero is from a Mixe village a few hours outside of Oaxaca de Juárez. His parents are *campesinos*, and he described his village as very religious and as a place where the social struggle is hardly known because of the deeply held beliefs in destiny and fate. He had moved to Oaxaca de Juárez as a teenager to finish his high school education and lived with another family member who was already in the city. Like many villages across Oaxaca, although the Mexican State has been quite successful in providing primary and some secondary education, Prospero's village lacked access to a *preparatoria* (high school). As such, Prospero followed the educational migratory path of many other students whose families wanted them to have an education that would provide him better opportunities. After graduating from high school, Prospero decided to continue his education by studying law at the public university, UABJO:

I was in law school when the movement started. Well, really when the movement started, it was a teachers movement, it wasn't a movement of the people, and it certainly wasn't mine...When we saw the attempted *desalojo*, when the police came in and all of that...well there were a group of us law students who talked about it quickly and the first thing that came to our minds was to go out and fight against the police, because we were seeing them do the same thing they always do, illegal detentions and beating people...

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<sup>239</sup> Prospero Martínez, interview with author, July 17, 2012.

We decided that the best thing for us to do was to stay within the movement; although we had not really thought about what the movement was about, nor which group we would ally ourselves with. But we did know that we had to be organized...There were already organizations that had their student branches, but when we asked to be included, we tried to make sure that we were not subsumed by the teachers union or another social organization, because we were independent of all that...

Within our group of law students, we participated because we thought that by changing the governor we could change the form of government, or at the very least, succeed in having a government that would have more respect for the people. There were some people who went further and wanted to install communist regimes, who wanted a completely different model, but we didn't share these ideas. For us, it was simple: get rid of the governor and put in another...

There were about thirty-five of us, and we decided that we should make our own organization in order to stay independent...We had some hierarchy, but our organization respected those who did the most work. We guided ourselves by the principle of respect, by solid and reasonable arguments, not by violence, not by first impressions, not criminal, always honest with each other...We stayed most of the time on the campus of UABJO, but we would go out in brigades to take streets, to block streets, and sometimes confront the paramilitaries.

I was the leader within our group who was responsible for the political aspects, but I was not chosen because of violence or militancy...Although we were active during the movement, it wasn't until 2007 that we formally constituted ourselves as an organization, an independent organization, not tied to the mechanisms of government, nor a civil association, nor nothing along those lines, we are what we have to be. For our first action we put out a manifesto, in which we made clear our rights: First, that we are indigenous peoples; second, that there still exists the dynamic of racism in which indigenous peoples are discriminated against by those of European origin. Based on those two principles, we then went on to clearly and punctually define our rights. Among the rights we enumerated, the first one, which we saw as most important, is the right to education. We demanded education...

All of us were indigenous students in the law school. Our experiences in the movement in 2006 had forced some of us to flee back to our villages, and others were forced to drop out of school because of our participation. But we remained organized, and that was because of what we had learned in the movement. Well, to make our presence felt in 2007, we decided to take over some of the offices in the law school. Well, it got us our meeting with the Rector of the University, but the police also arrived, and they threatened to arrest us, they told the press that we were armed and ready to die. These things were not true, we weren't that crazy...

Sure we had some setbacks, and I never finished my time in law school, I might go back, but right now I am studying music and working in this collective bar and community space...For us, or for me, what was the most successful about the movement was that we could understand how this government works, we could understand coercion under the law...For the movement, I think the biggest success was that we were able to briefly live in authentic freedom. The movement showed that the people should be able to organize themselves, and in fact that the people did organize themselves. That is also one of the best lessons that our group learned. It also showed us the difference between leaders and followers, and the possibilities of corruption, and leaders selling out their organizations. I am proud to say that our small group was able to stay together after our experiences.<sup>240</sup>

Prospero's experiences in the movement, while representative of a very small group, speak to the process of politicization and education that occurred within the movement. Having grown up in a small indigenous village, Prospero claims that his parents and his neighbors knew nothing about the social struggle. While he may have downplayed the ingenuity and agency that *campesinos* often display in the day-to-day struggle for survival, it is likely true that their village had little experience in the mass mobilizations that Prospero found himself in the midst of.

Furthermore, it was clear that he is proud of his indigenous origin, and that the socio-economic and racial dimensions of social structures make it more difficult for him and his peers to access and leverage educational and economic opportunities. As such, for his cohort of indigenous students in the law school, the movement not only provided an opportunity to participate in the greater social struggle for governmental change, but also gave them self-awareness to their own agency. That they continued and strengthened their small student organization in the years after the movement speaks to the lessons in collective action and identity-based politics that they learned through participation in 2006.

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<sup>240</sup> Prospero Martínez, interview with author, July 17, 2012.



**Nestor:**

In 2006, Nestor was a student at *la Normal*, one of the teachers colleges in Oaxaca. As the son of Eugenia, who spoke about her women's organization, Nestor grew up in an atmosphere of community activism. Thus, by the time he made it to *la Normal*, he was already well versed in the politics of social struggle in Oaxaca.

The interesting thing about being a student at *la Normal* was that we were already members of Sección 22. However, it could be said that we were junior members, not yet full members... Because of the mobilization and organization of the past years that improved the contracts and working conditions for the teachers, everyone who graduates from *la Normal* is guaranteed a job in public education. Well, this guarantee has been threatened by proposed reforms to public education.

Therefore, we participated not only because of the historic struggle of Sección 22 to improve Oaxacan society, but also for our own livelihoods. Within Sección 22, we made up our own bloc of students, because we had our own interests in addition to those that were submitted to the State in the list of demands. As the younger generation, we see that many of the older teachers live comfortably, and that the union provides income and job stability... So that is something that we were fighting to maintain...

Because we were already part of the union, we were involved right from the beginning in the strike, the marches, and the *plantón*... Some of us, including most of my friends, grew up with leftist politics, and consider ourselves activists and radicals. I say this to explain that we weren't only involved only because of our own interests. When the State responded with repression, we saw an opportunity to really organize against the government from within Sección 22 and within the student body. We reached out to other activists and other students, and we stayed involved in many of the political discussions, but more than anything, we were out on the streets and at the barricades participating in everything...I spent almost all of my time back and forth between my house and the *plantón* and the barricades.

The movement brought us closer together and we have continued to work in the social struggle in addition to our teaching responsibilities. I work as a teacher now during the day and at night we run this collective space *Los de Abajo*. It is a meeting space for activists and we have lectures, film screenings, concerts, and all of those elements that are important for sustaining our community of activists and leftists here in Oaxaca. Because of our political orientation and our participation in the movement, we have had lots of problems with the police here, they have raided us a few times and have tried to shut us down...

As I said, what was important for us is that we were part of Sección 22, while at the same time not part of Sección 22. So we, as students, were the younger generation that were fighting to not just maintain the successes of previous struggles, but really organize against this government and change Oaxacan society and politics.<sup>241</sup>

Nestor, as a student at *la Normal*, clearly had a different engagement with Sección 22 than did students at other institutions. As a member of the union, although not with full membership, Nestor and his fellow students had their own issues important to them as a younger generation of aspiring teachers. They knew the gains that the teachers movement had made in the past and they also saw those gains threatened by proposed reforms to public education on both the state and national levels.

Thus, Nestor and his cohort of students were unique among other student participants because they had the most to lose if the state government defeated Sección 22. Without the job security of established teachers, they looked toward an uncertain future that has been increasingly marked by proposals for market-based reforms to public education. As such, their movement participation was driven both by their membership in Sección 22 as well as the need to preserve their future as educators and union members. Furthermore, students like Nestor who had grown up in an atmosphere of activism and community organizing, immediately reached out to others within Oaxaca's young activist community to build their own institutions on the grassroots level. Their activities since the movement speak not only to the mobilizing power of the union among its membership, but a desire among many in the younger generations to create their own futures and opportunities by engaging in collaborative and autonomous projects with other young activists.

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<sup>241</sup> Nestor González Pizarro, interview with author, July 5, 2012.

**David:**

David presents a quite different case from Prospero and Nestor. Although raised in Oaxaca, David had gone to the University of Chapingo in the State of Mexico for agronomy. Although he had been vaguely leftist growing up, David said that the University atmosphere and professors helped shape his political consciousness. Furthermore, he says that the University had a large Oaxacan population because Oaxaca is still an overwhelmingly agricultural state. In the months before the movement in Oaxaca, similar social issues were occurring in the State of Mexico, and this is where David gained his first movement experience.

In 2002, in San Salvador Atenco, in the State of Mexico, residents of the community had been successful in stopping development of a major airport that would have encroached on their land and cut off access to natural resources such as water and wood. This village, renowned among Mexican activists for its victory over the state, became involved in 2006 with a group of flower vendors who had been barred by the police from selling in the central market in Texcoco. In response to the problems in the central market, the vendors and the community began to block the local highway. On May 3 and 4, 2006, 700 members of the federal police and 1,800 members of the state police arrived to remove the highway blockade. The result was two dead protestors, 207 arrests, and twenty-six accusations of sexual assault at the hands of the police.<sup>242</sup>

David, at school not far from the blockade, and with only his thesis to complete, decided to put his schoolwork aside and join the protestors on the highway. When, slightly more than a month later, the Oaxacan government moved against the striking teachers, David decided to return to Oaxaca to participate in the movement.

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<sup>242</sup> Comisión Nacional de los Derechos Humanos, " Sobre el caso de los hechos de violencia suscitados los días 3 y 4 de Mayo de 2006 en los municipios de Texcoco y San Salvador Atenco, Estado de Mexico," October, 2006.

I joined the movement immediately because part of my family was already participating, and friends who are now teachers were participating [referring to Nestor and his cohort from *la Normal*]. I got off the bus and I went straight to the Zócalo, not even stopping at home...I knew that this was too much like what I had seen and experienced in the repression in Atenco, so you could say that I was really pissed off with the government...

Many people, when they think of social movements, identify the big battles and victories as the greatest moments. To me, I think that it was the time between battles that was the best. In those moments, we truly broke down paradigms, particular during the period of the barricades. When there were not confrontations, in the tranquil moments, when we ate together and talked and got to know people who are our neighbors although we had never talked to them before because, for whatever reason, we thought that they were different from us...

In the social structure that divides us by class, by color, by smells...the rich kids don't want to be friends with the poor kids and vice versa, the street kids don't want to be friends with the kids who live in houses and vice versa, the teachers don't want to be friends with *campesinos* and vice versa, old people don't want to be friends with the young and vice versa, the *señoras* in the APPO don't want to be friends with the other *señoras* who aren't participating...Well, all of these barriers were broken down, and broken down to the point that you cannot say that it was class unity, because there was not any particular socio-economic class. We were brought together by the need to defend ourselves, because on the streets and on the barricades, you can win on one day and then lose the following day...

Well they had to send in the federal authorities to crush the movement. To me, this demonstrates that the movement never lost the ideological battle against the State. All of the government, from the federal level on down, using all of its power against us - we rejected all of that...And you saw it on the barricades and in the marches, that is where I was the whole time...I remember seeing indigenous people marching together who had, for many years, been in a state of war over territorial questions. I remember seeing squadrons of punks, Afro-descendants, homosexuals, prostitutes, teachers, students, indigenous communities... marching with an authority and a determination in their own hands...

Where I live is near the radio antennas, and that is where we put in the barricades to defend our neighborhood and also the greater need for communication for the movement...Well I lived on that barricade for two months, the Brenamiel barricade, in the northern part of the city, at the exit in the direction of Mexico City. At that moment it was the largest barricade in the city, we occupied twenty-four trucks and trailers so that we could block the entrance to the city, and when the federal police arrived, it was the only barricade that they could not sweep away, because there were so many of us defending it, and they had to find an alternate route to enter the city...

Like everything in life, we all had roles to play...While I was always there, that wasn't always the case for other people. There were usually some 60 people on the barricade, but in our times of confrontation, like when the federal police came in, more than 2000 came out to defend the barricade...We were an important part of the movement, beyond the teachers union, but part of the notion of resistance in the long term that the people have embraced to resist oppression...We organized ourselves both within and parallel to the movement, occupying this space of defense, resistance, and breaking down social barriers...Because of the importance of the barricades to the movement, we also had representatives that were part of the APPO, because of our own needs, organization, and this particular role that we played...As I said before, being on the barricades was this combination of all sectors of society and intense and interesting political and social discussions that really illuminated the autonomous Oaxaca that we wanted to create.<sup>243</sup>

David, because of his outspoken and visible participation in the movement, was arrested by state police forces in 2007 and spent months in prison before being released the next year. He never finished his academic work at the University of Chapingo, and remains involved in Oaxacan protest and resistance. He is, among many other things, representative of the inclusion of unorganized youth participation in the movement. His descriptions of the barricades as locations where social barriers were broken down speaks to the often amorphous nature of the movement as a whole. The barricades, erected initially to defend the movement from clandestine attacks at the hands of thugs, paramilitaries, and state authorities, became symbols of resistance and drew comparisons to the Paris Commune.<sup>244</sup>

Although the idea of the Oaxaca Commune has persisted among more radical movement participants, the organization and vitality of the barricades forced the APPO to incorporate them into the assembly's decision-making processes. As David explained in a different interview, the barricades began electing representatives to participate in the APPO assemblies, and because of

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<sup>243</sup> David Venegas, interview with author, July 17, 2012.

<sup>244</sup> Esteva, "The Oaxaca Commune," 979.

the importance of the barricades in defending the movement, five barricade representatives were elected to the APPO's Constituting Congress in November 2006.<sup>245</sup>

The barricades themselves provided the means and opportunity for participation outside of the previously existing civil society organizations, expanding the representative capacity of the movement and the APPO. From street kids to radical students, housewives to retired people, the barricades invited community participation in which individuals held agency in imagining and building community autonomy. David's participation, like many others on the barricades and in the streets, showed that one did not have to be a member of any organization to participate in the movement. Rather, their participation was crucial to constructing the collective memory of resistance and autonomy that has permeated recollections of the movement.

Students, like the various sectors of civil society, entered the movement for a variety of reasons and with multiple forms of participation. Many, like Prospero, either were already part of or created their own student organizations within the walls of the public university. Under the banner of the changing the government, these organizations also fought for greater access to higher education. Other students, like Nestor, who were in *las Normales*, were already participating in the initial stages of the movement as junior members of Sección 22. However, they brought to the movement their specific demands and goals as they looked toward an uncertain future in public education. Finally, David and his youth cohort of unorganized students represented a strand of participation that has been romanticized in the collective memory of resistance. They deliberately constructed, alongside a host of other sectors of society, locales of neighborhood autonomy and rebellion that were among the last to be crushed

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<sup>245</sup> Valencia and Venegas, "Conversaciones con Rubén Valencia y David Venegas," 98.

by the federal police forces at the end of November 2006. As such, we can see that students cannot be viewed as a homogenous block, but rather that their participation, much like that of greater civil society, must be disaggregated in order to understand movement dynamics.

## **Conclusion**

The 2006 movement in Oaxaca cannot and must not be viewed in romantic or utopian terms as a unified body of protestors that sought to overthrow the governor. Not only did the APPO and its constituent parts have different goals than Sección 22, a disaggregated APPO illuminates the various strands of civil society participation. Constructed deliberately as a horizontal body, the APPO was an inclusive social movement organization dedicated to achieving social and political change in Oaxaca, yet it was hardly free from its own internal contradictions.

First and foremost, membership in the APPO was restricted to already existing organizations. However, as demonstrated by the inclusion of barricade representatives later in the movement, the APPO was forced by movement participants to expand its purview and accept unorganized participants. Second, the construction of the APPO was far from novel. Its organizational structure drew upon previous Oaxacan social movements as well as the recognized and practiced indigenous forms of communal governance. As Rubén Valencia argued, "nobody can even imagine of the APPO forming in June 2006 if there had not been many important historical references in Oaxaca to draw upon...and the one that is foremost in my mind was that of the COCEI...as one of the first movements that was seeking to democratize the relationship between the government and the people."<sup>246</sup>

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<sup>246</sup> Valencia and Venegas, "Conversaciones con Rubén Valencia y David Venegas," 114.

Within the coalition that was the APPO, having drawn upon previous social movement organizations, it is clear that each sector of participation brought with it particular demands and methods. From the oft-criticized participation of groups and individuals who used the APPO to obtain political power to the participation of women's organizations, human rights organizations, and the Catholic Church, the APPO was far more diverse than its overarching demand for the ouster of Governor Ruiz. The Oaxacan intellectual Gustavo Esteva, in attempting to understand the institutional arrangement of the APPO, has described it as a "movement of movements" in which there was "a diversity of intentions and trajectories."<sup>247</sup>

Only by breaking down the trajectories of civil society participation, as this chapter has attempted to do, can we begin to understand how such a diverse movement functioned day-to-day. It is clear that many groups had their own particular roles. The Catholic Church, but more specifically the liberationist strain of the Catholic Church, operated often as a foundation for the movement, not only providing sustenance and shelter, but also articulating a moral economy of righteous resistance in line with Catholic social teachings. Women's organizations and human rights organizations infused the movement with their own conceptions of gender equality and an expanded definition of human rights that often was directed at educating movement participants. These groups, and particularly the human rights organizations, acted as facilitators in constructing a vision of an ideal Oaxaca in which human rights are respected, and the concrete measures for achieving this future. Finally, student organizations can be seen as a microcosm for the movement as a whole, embracing the diversity of the movement in a variety of forms of participation and activism both within and outside of the university walls.

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<sup>247</sup> Esteva, "The Oaxaca Commune," 981.



None of this would be complete without some mention of indigenous participation. It goes without saying that Oaxaca possesses a very large indigenous population, and that the indigenous movements of the past and present deeply influenced the structure of the 2006 movement. Lynn Stephen argues that "indigenous Oaxacans throughout the state played important roles in the Oaxaca social movement, despite media and academic coverage that focused on urban, *mestizo* participants."<sup>248</sup> Across the state, and even in the migrant communities in Los Angeles and Fresno, California, indigenous Oaxacans and activists participated in the movement and used the movement to pursue long-held goals of community autonomy and indigenous rights. From the occupations of municipal halls that occurred across the state to the conflicts over power and representation in indigenous communities, their participation cannot be ignored. Indigenous communities formed regional APPOs, like that in Juchitán, and continued the movement even after the federal forces crushed the urban protestors in November 2006.<sup>249</sup> Not only were the practices of indigenous communal governance elevated to prominence during the movement, but the indigenous presence in the movement was expressed across the state as their demands and intentions made up a significant part of the diverse movement.

While much of movement participation relied on existing organizations, we saw that new organizations forced their participation in the movement as well. However, this examination of movement participation among the various sectors of civil society, illuminating as it is, does not yet fully encompass the variety of forms of participation in the movement. The following

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<sup>248</sup> Stephen, *We Are the Face of Oaxaca*, 209

<sup>249</sup> *Ibid*, 227.

chapter examines the media, artistic, and cultural forms of participation, which helps understand the nature of mobilization and longevity in 2006.

## Chapter 4: Occupied Walls: Graffiti Artists in the Movement

Written on the wall in Oaxaca's *Zócalo* (central plaza) was the simple phrase: "Nos vemos en 2010," accompanied by a stencil of what appears to be a protestor or a guerrilla.<sup>250</sup> Immediately recognizable to Mexico's collective memory, the phrase refers Mexico's apparent affinity for insurrection and revolution every hundred years. Following the insurrection of 1810 that ended in independence and the Mexican Revolution of 1910 that ended in what would be more than 70 years of single party authoritarian rule by the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), many on the Mexican left saw the localized uprisings and rebellions of the 1990s and 2000s as preludes to the next cycle of revolution in 2010. In hindsight, we clearly know that no such revolution occurred. However, in 2006, in the impoverished states of southern Mexico, the future was not quite so clear. As Diego Osorno notes, Oaxaca was not alone in proclaiming the forthcoming revolution, the same phrase appeared across the country in protests and social movements.<sup>251</sup> What this suggests is that Oaxacan protestors and graffiti artists placed their struggle firmly within the boundaries of national collective memory, drawing upon recognizable symbols, figures, and historical events to articulate their messages.

These next two chapters will examine the roles of media in the movement. Media, in its many forms was integral for the practical aspects of sustaining, mobilizing, and informing the movement, but it also lent the movement an aspect of cultural counterhegemony through the use of graffiti and the political imaginations of the *grafiteros*. The appearance of phrases, stencils, murals and paste-ups, covering the walls of Oaxaca in 2006 were both a product of and a

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<sup>250</sup> The phrase was commonly used in graffiti across the city as witnessed numerous times by the author in 2008-2009.

<sup>251</sup> Osorno, *Oaxaca Sitiada*, 121.

mobilizing call for the social movement. Similarly, movement participants recognized the importance of radio and television as media for the dissemination of information and the crafting of movement messages. This chapter will focus on the various forms of media as mobilizers for the movement. From the graffiti on the city walls to the occupied radio and television stations to the use of internet pages for alternative media dissemination, both protestors and the government sought to leverage the accessibility of walls, radio waves, and the internet to craft a message and call supporters to the streets. This topic also relies heavily upon the participation of the previously unorganized who responded to the calls from the radio, created their own media, and began to participate in the movement while not necessarily motivated by the original demands of the teachers union.

While a significant body of the 2006 movement was made up of already existing organizations, many of the movement participants were unorganized youth, artists, and marginalized residents of Oaxaca for whom collective action may have been a novel experience. The amorphous nature of the movement thus provided an opportunity for participation on one's own terms, whether that involved attending marches and rallies, painting on the city walls, or defending the barricades that sprung up nightly across the city.

As the movement organized itself into deliberative bodies, so to did the previously unorganized. Graffiti artists came together to form the Asamblea de Artistas Revolucionarios de Oaxaca (ASARO), and neighborhoods formed local assemblies to organize the barricades, provide neighborhood security patrols, and distribute food and resources to movement participants. Although many organizations already existed on university campuses, particularly those aligned with far left parties, students in the Universidad Autonoma Benito Juarez de

Oaxaca (UABJO) were critical in occupying and maintaining the university radio station - an action that drew in many previously unorganized students. Finally, the barricades became not only locations of local organization, but spontaneous sites of discussion and criticism crucial to articulating rhetoric and demands for a different form and practice of democracy that transcended the unifying call for the resignation of the state governor.

As mentioned above, both the movement and the state government recognized the power of media forms to articulate their arguments and demands. As such, one of the first actions of the government's police forces during the attempted *desalojo* on June 14 was to destroy and confiscate the radio equipment that belonged to Radio Plantón, the radio station operated by the teacher's union. To reestablish radio as an informational tool of the growing movement, students immediately took over the university radio, Radio Universidad, which remained in the hands of the protestors for the duration of the movement (although its functioning was disabled for nearly two months). Of great significance was the takeover of the state radio and television following a spontaneous mass decision during a women's march on August 1st. Female movement participants, a number of whom had been active in women's organizations previously, marched from the Zocalo to the state media outlets initially to demand airtime to counter the propaganda of the state government. Once refused access to airtime, the women decided to take over the radio and television stations to transform them into movement media outlets. Dubbed Radio y Televisión Cacerola (Frying Pan Radio and Television), the stations run by female movement participants supplemented Radio Universidad as a tool of communication as well as an outlet for broadcasting documentaries and testimonials supporting the movement and the goals for a more democratic and socially just Oaxaca.

In the sections that follow, I will examine the various forms of unorganized participation that came to occupy crucial roles in sustaining the social movement through the use of media. The amorphous nature of the movement, brought together by the central demand for the governor's resignation, allowed various forms of participation, unique to personal preferences and situations. From graffiti artists to students, neighborhood barricades to occupied media outlets, the participants who fell outside the teachers union and the organizations represented in the APPO took on roles within the movement providing publicity, defense, and communication, among other roles that demonstrated that the movement itself transcended the organizations and structures that initially built the movement.

## **Graffiti and Street Art**

*True creativeness is a force inexplicable, and therefore hostile, to those who do not possess it.*<sup>252</sup>  
- Diego Rivera

In the United States, graffiti are deemed criminal, representing disorder, anarchy, and the dissolution of law and social values. However, "the way we view graffiti is fundamentally linked with our images of the places we live, our cities and countries, both practically and ideologically."<sup>253</sup> In a US society that criminalizes the urban poor and their cultural expressions, graffiti become an indicator of criminality, associated with gangs regardless of whether or not the substance of any particular graffiti is gang related. In other parts of the world, including much of Europe and Latin America, graffiti, while still criminalized, is less associated with gangs and more often associated with the political left. In some places, such as Spain and Argentina, political parties from both sides of the spectrum have embraced graffiti to promote

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<sup>252</sup> Diego Rivera, "The Guild Spirit in Mexican Art," *Survey Graphic* 52.3 (May 1, 1924), 174.

<sup>253</sup> Susan A. Phillips, *Wallbangin': Graffiti and Gangs in L.A.* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), 56.

candidates and announce meetings and events in an easily visible, accessible, and cost-effective form of mass communication.<sup>254</sup>

Contrary to the hip-hop and gang graffiti that Susan Phillips documents, the Oaxacan graffiti artists who operated during the course of the 2006 movement invoked popular heroes of Mexican history, glorified indigenous roots, reconfigured popular religious images such as the Virgin of Guadalupe, and expressed political ideas and ideals. Phillips posits, "it may in fact be the potential for political change that generates the recurrence of politically motivated messages - that people write graffiti in order to create or utilize windows of change."<sup>255</sup> In the case of Oaxaca, she may indeed be correct.

According to the political process model of social movement theory, social movements mobilize internal resources and organization to exploit moments of political opportunity. In turn, movements create new windows of opportunity for themselves and associated groups by "diffusing collective action and displaying the possibility of coalitions, by creating political space for kindred movements and countermovements, and by producing incentives for elites and third parties to respond to."<sup>256</sup> Within the Oaxacan mobilization, one subset of the protestors was that of the graffiti artists who seized the opportunity of an unpoliced city governed by protestors to cover the city with their messages of resistance and images of the society they wished to construct. If it is true that "the walls of a city are true barometers of the past and the present,"<sup>257</sup> then the *grafiteros* and stencilists of Oaxaca expressed on city walls the various demands and

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<sup>254</sup> Lyman G. Chaffee, *Political Protest and Street Art: Popular Tools for Democratization in Hispanic Countries* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1993), 8-9.

<sup>255</sup> Phillips, *Wallbangin'*, 56-57.

<sup>256</sup> Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*, 2nd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 72.

<sup>257</sup> Pedro Celedón, "Muros y Almas," in *Palabras escritas en un muro: El caso de la Brigada Chacón*, ed. Alejandra Sandoval Espinoza (Santiago, Chile: Ediciones Sur, 2001), pg. 9.

ideals of an uprising and a dynamic social movement attempting to articulate a vision of the city, state, and nation, that they were attempting to create.

### **Artists and Activists**

Oaxaca has long been home to a vibrant art scene, known both nationally and internationally through its biggest names: Rufino Tamayo and Francisco Toledo. Tamayo, of the generation that came of age during and immediately after the Mexican Revolution, "was initially criticized for his departure from the social themes and formal approaches" of his Mexican muralist compatriots Diego Rivera, Jose Clemente Orozco, and David Alfaro Siqueiros.<sup>258</sup> Yet Tamayo later benefited from the support of the PRI government and opened the door for the hybrid artistic styles that became associated with the Oaxacan School embodied by Tamayo and Francisco Toledo, combining international influences with the local Oaxacan elements of folk art and *indigenismo*.

Francisco Toledo, as a member of the post-revolutionary generation, has been instrumental in promoting the revolutionary art that flowered during the 2006 uprising. Much of Toledo's own work was explicitly political, for instance his series titled *Lo que el viento a Juárez*, created in the early 1980s, was "an attempt to take away the 'sacredness' surrounding [Benito] Juárez, an important lesson in critical-thinking citizenship."<sup>259</sup> Furthermore, as the founder of the *Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Oaxaca* (Contemporary Art Museum of Oaxaca), the *Patronato Pro-Defensa y Conservación del Patrimonio Cultural de Oaxaca* (Patronage for the Defense and Conservation of the Cultural Patrimony of Oaxaca), and the

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<sup>258</sup> Edward McCaughan, *Art and Social Movements: Cultural Politics in Mexico and Aztlán* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 117.

<sup>259</sup> *Ibid*, 32.



*Comité de Familiares de Asesinados, Desaparecidos y Presos Políticos de Oaxaca* (Committee of the Families of the Assassinated, Disappeared, and Political Prisoners of Oaxaca), Toledo has had a generous hand in both building the institutions to promote the artists of the uprising as well as using his public position to advocate on behalf of incarcerated APPO members.<sup>260</sup> Understanding the influence of Tamayo and Toledo, and more generally the widespread use of *indigenismo* in the post-revolutionary Mexican School of social realism, is crucial to understanding the graffiti that graced the walls of Oaxaca in 2006 and the years that followed.

In his study on street art during democratization in Hispanic countries, Lyman Chaffee recognizes that "street art can shape and move human emotions and gauge political sentiments...Clichés, slogans, and symbols - substance of political rhetoric - help mobilize people."<sup>261</sup> This type of street art most often appears in the midst of political opportunity windows: during the processes of democratization and in "movement[s] opposed to the hegemony of a dominant...culture."<sup>262</sup> While the use of slogans and clichés proliferates, street art is used to articulate a counter-hegemonic discourse. In the Basque regions of Spain, street art has been used extensively to promote linguistic consciousness and to establish a collective memory contrary to the dominant Spanish cultural and political hegemony.

The graffiti artists of Oaxaca are not so different. Their work surpassed demanding the resignation of Ulises Ruiz to articulate and attempt to practice a vision of their ideal society. In the participatory spirit of APPO, the artists of Oaxaca, some already organized in their own small art collectives, formed the Asamblea de Artistas Revolucionarios de Oaxaca (ASARO) in

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<sup>260</sup> Octavio Vélez Ascencio, "Excarcelan en Oaxaca a 51 seguidores de la APPO," *La Jornada*, September 9, 2008.

<sup>261</sup> Lyman G. Chaffee, *Political Protest and Street Art*, 4.

<sup>262</sup> *Ibid*, 70.

October 2006. In the effort to bring together the disparate groups and to pool and coordinate resources and supplies, the formation of ASARO gave name and organization to the loose collection of artists who were already working the streets and walls of Oaxaca. Operating both individually and collectively, all of the artists who formed ASARO committed to using public art to create a dialogue in the streets about the crimes of an oppressive state and the society that *Oaxaqueños* wanted to create in its place. They declared: "ASARO manifests itself in favor of inclusion and in the struggle to generate new rules of social participation and a profound change in the conscience of Oaxacans. We are a countercultural movement, of artistic creation."<sup>263</sup>

On the one hand, ASARO and other revolutionary artists were supporting the APPO through their street art. On the other hand, the *grafiteros* were often articulating a radical vision of society that went beyond the declarations emanating from the APPO meetings and Sección 22. The major themes that were constant in their work were democratization, gender equality, a glorification of indigenous roots, an appropriation of recognized religious symbols for political use, and the social and political revolution that they perceived themselves to be in the midst of. Their work included simple slogans written quickly on the wall with spray paint, stencils and paste-ups, collectively constructed murals, and woodcut prints that recall the iconic prints of José Guadalupe Posada.<sup>264</sup>

However, ASARO did not form until later in the movement, coming together as an official organization only in October 2006 to unite the various artists who had already been painting across the city. Initially, "graffiti, stencils, posters, and stickers appeared isolated, yet

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<sup>263</sup> ASARO, "Declaration," accessed April 23, 2012, <http://asar-oaxaca.blogspot.com>.

<sup>264</sup> José Guadalupe Posada (1852-1913) was an illustrator who often worked with woodcut engravings and whose work is widely recognized as popularizing the skeletons that are now dominant in Day of the Dead art.

intervened in more spaces parallel to the escalating actions and the expansion of [movement] occupations. The graffiti transformed and enriched its discourse with stencils, that on occasion were inserted over posters, assumed large forms and multiplication... and modified the visual landscape of the city, contributing to the construction of the image of a city in rebellion."<sup>265</sup> In what Norma Patricia Lache Bolaños describes as a gradual expansion of street art across the city, it was clear to observers that graffiti artists were reflecting their personal transformations and politicization in their art. As artists began to collaborate, they adopted the collective, participatory discourse of the APPO in ASARO. As a collective working for and with the movement, the members of ASARO decided that none of their work would be signed by the artist, rather, the street art would bear the name only of ASARO, eliminating the individualistic aspect of graffiti as an implicit critique of the individualism of capitalism. The artists who formed ASARO, as well as those who worked with ASARO but were never members, far from being a homogenous block, brought many different perspectives, backgrounds, and educations to their participation. To better understand the role of the artist in the movement, we must turn to some of the individuals who participated.

**Mario:**

For years I have worked with the teachers union. I usually helped them paint the banners with revolutionary slogans and images, to really articulate the struggle that we maintain year after year...As you know there are many different currents within the union, I work with the more radical, revolutionary groups, as we try to build a better union and society...Socialism is the only path to improving the

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<sup>265</sup> Norma Patricia Lache Bolaños, "La Calle es Nuestra," in *La APPO ¿rebelión o movimiento social? (nuevas formas de expresión ante la crisis)*, ed. Víctor Raúl Martínez Vásquez (Oaxaca: UABJO, 2009), 201.

situation here in Oaxaca and it is our job to articulate the goals of the revolution through our art.<sup>266</sup>

Mario spent the majority of his teaching career in Oaxaca's Costa Chica, a region bordering Guerrero on the Pacific coast, impoverished and with a high concentration of peoples of African descent.<sup>267</sup> As an art teacher, Mario sent many of his best pupils to Oaxaca to study plastic arts (*artes plasticas*) at Bellas Artes, his alma mater and the premier art institute in Oaxaca City.

Having long incorporated themes of social justice, indigenous rights, and revolutionary change into his art curriculum, some of his more recent like-minded students were already



Figure 1: Ulises Ruiz as *granadero*, "The shame of Oaxaca," 2006, retrieved from ASARO, <http://asar-oaxaca.blogspot.com>

studying in Oaxaca when the movement began in 2006.<sup>268</sup> In early May 2006, Mario, in Oaxaca City, began going to the *plantón* with some of his students and helped to paint the *mantas* (banners) used in marches and displayed around the Zócalo and on the headquarters of the teachers union.

Using the contacts that Mario had

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<sup>266</sup> Mario Guzmán, interview with author, July 3, 2012. The radical current that he refers to is the Frente Popular Revolucionario (FPR), a Stalinist political party that has organized within the teachers union as La Unión de Trabajadores de la Educación (UTE).

<sup>267</sup> See Peter Guardino, *Peasants, Politics, and the Formation of Mexico's National State: Guerrero, 1800-1857* (Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), for a more complete history of the Costa Chica and the role of Afro-descendent populations in settling the area.

<sup>268</sup> One former student, Carlos Navarrete, currently an active artist in Arizona, credits Mario for his early instruction and the exploration of Afro-Zapotec themes in his art, see "About Me," accessed October 13, 2012, <http://www.navarreteart.com/>.

developed over the years within the teachers union and within activist circles across the state, he was the driving force behind the formation of ASARO. A generation older than the majority of artists painting the walls of Oaxaca, Mario leveraged his experience and contacts to coordinate space and resources for the fledgling organization.

Originally consisting of about fifteen members when formed in October 2006, ASARO quickly grew to around thirty artists over the next months, dedicated to creating art for the movement. By coordinating resources, primarily stencil-making materials and paint donated by the teachers union and other movement participants, the members of ASARO were able to expand their activities that had been disparate and uncoordinated in the initial weeks of the movement. "The works at the beginning of the struggle were very monotonous, very primitive, conforming to the advance of the movement there was a great technical and aesthetic development. But the stencil always played a very important role, because in the end it was a cultural response to the control of the modes of communication that did not give space to our voice, what the people want, what the people dream of."<sup>269</sup>

Mario saw the formation of ASARO as an important development for both the movement and for the political development of the *grafiteros* who had already been working in the streets. As a career art teacher and as a spokesman for ASARO, Mario emphasized the space that street art opened for the previously unorganized youth. In particular, "Confronting the irrationality of the government and its oppressive forms of maintaining itself in power, ASARO seeks to create images that synthesis the critical force that is born from the youth of the *barrios*, the periphery,

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<sup>269</sup> Mario Guzmán quoted in Arturo García Hernández, "Asaro, una respuesta cultural ante el control de los medios," *La Jornada*, November 3, 2008.

and the *pueblos*."<sup>270</sup> Fundamentally, the formation of ASARO was so that "art and artists could play a role in social struggle, that we supported the social struggle through our art and our work."<sup>271</sup>

Mario argues that the art that arose out of the movement was an organic process that evolved in dialogue with the progression of the movement. Often the graffiti would respond to major events in the movement, citing the government's failed eviction of the *plantón*, displaying images of helicopters shooting tear gas at protestors, recalling movement achievements and government failures. The stencils would often use the head of Governor Ruiz, placed on the body of a policeman or a rat, to illustrate either the repression carried out at his orders or his involvement in destroying and stealing the cultural patrimony of the state (Figure 1). Additionally, Mario stressed the vanguard nature of cultural resistance, articulating calls for revolution, social upheaval, and actions against a repressive government. In such a manner, street art not only served to support the greater social movement by visually articulating its demands, but the street art also served to push for greater radical visions of social change, pushing the movement to adopt more radical demands and perspectives.

As a member of FPR, Mario sought and seeks to present the radical vision of his political party through street art as well as more conventional plastic art techniques. For him,

the formation of ASARO gave voice and space to the artists in the movement, allowing us to advance the calls for revolution that Mexico needs. This revolution may be violent or not, but it is something that we need and as artists we are able to spread that message...This is not to say that we promote the party with our work, there are many different tendencies here, and we collectively made the

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<sup>270</sup> Mario Guzmán quoted in Octavio Vélez Ascencio, "El IAGO abre sus puertas a Graffiteros al paredón," *La Jornada*, February 4, 2007.

<sup>271</sup> Mario Guzmán, interview with author, July 3, 2012.

decision not to work with any particular party. But such a political vision allows our work to advance the revolutionary vision on the artistic front.<sup>272</sup>

Additionally, ASARO was structured in such a way so as to practice collective decision-making and ownership.

We hoped, that in its creation, that ASARO would serve as a vanguard for possibilities of collective structures. And it worked for a while. We always had internal contradictions, particularly when there was an international demand for the Oaxacan movement art, which started precisely in 2007...Well, because of the idea that every piece of art made with the collective is the property of the collective, not of any individual artist, it requires a degree of collective discussion and political development that unfortunately didn't always occur. But we did succeed in creating a collaborative space of social critique that has been sustained more or less, for six years now since the movement. We are making some other plans to revitalize ASARO and bring new people in, but it served us exactly as we needed in the moment, as a collective space in which we attempted the best possibilities of collective and collaborative structure. It gave us also a physical space in which to develop our cultural forms of political thought and action. That was very important to continue our work and practice art in support of the social struggle. And even though we have had success, with our art being seen and displayed in many places outside of Oaxaca, the focus remained on the streets and on political development.

Well, the collectivization of our art and our graphics was at first a product of circumstances. Particularly after the PFP moved in at the end of November, with such a big police presence, many had to flee or hide...Under these conditions, it was difficult to put anything in the streets like we had been doing during the movement, the only time it was really possible was during marches when we could paint with anonymity with all the people...So we developed the practice of signing ASARO rather than our names in order to protect ourselves...Later, we were offered space in IAGO [The Institute of Graphic Arts of Oaxaca], and it prompted serious internal discussion about what direction ASARO should take...So we lost some members who left ASARO because they disagreed with involvement with IAGO, and through internal discussions we realized that we needed to use other means of advancing the social struggle on the artistic and graphic fronts...So ASARO reoriented and maintained our collective practices and used the art of the *asamblea* to support the social struggle both within and outside of Oaxaca.

The importance of our work was this: it was necessary to advance the social struggle on as many fronts as possible. ASARO and the artists who were engaging in political critique and revolutionary messaging encouraged

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<sup>272</sup> Mario Guzmán, interview with author, July 3, 2012.

participation on other fronts as well as all of the people in the streets. As we developed politically, the action of signing ASARO rather than a name is itself an action against the individualism of capitalism. So we both use art and practice to demonstrate the possibilities of revolution, cultural and political.<sup>273</sup>

### **Baltazar and Iván:**

Baltazar and Iván, both students at Bellas Artes in 2006, sought involvement in the movement from the beginning. Baltazar had been Mario's student in the Costa Chica while Iván had come to study plastic arts in Oaxaca from one of the villages outside of the capital city. The two had worked together at school and initially helped painting and designing banners and posters. Baltazar pointed to Mario's influence for his artistic interest in social justice while Iván had not yet been working with direct political themes at the time in his schoolwork.<sup>274</sup>

According to Baltazar:

There were a number of us at Bellas Artes who had radical or leftist views. So when things started heating up, we started to go to the *plantón* to see what they might need. We initially began by just painting banners, but we were able to each bring our own substance into our work...I am originally from the Costa Chica, my family and I are Afro-descendents, and I tried to bring that spirit and image into my work here. You can see it in the work that I continue to do, combining Mexican and African motifs and cultural symbols...Well, Mario had been my teacher, so much of my work was about community autonomy and growth, having our own space for cultural and political expression free from interference. So that is what it is about, the movement allowed us to express our beliefs while also supporting the movement...

When we created ASARO we were able to spread our message further because we had more resources. The teachers were really helpful. They would give us all the paint and stuff that we needed and we helped them too by continuing to work with them on their projects...I have continued to work with Mario, we have a great space here and we can also work on our own things. The movement helped give me the freedom to articulate my beliefs and still help the movement. In that way, the cultural part of the movement was very important,

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<sup>273</sup> Mario Guzmán, interview with author, July 3, 2012.

<sup>274</sup> Baltazar Castellano, interview with author, July 4, 2012; and Iván Bautista, interview with author, July 4, 2012.



you know. Not just painting, but there was music, I also play music, and other expressions of cultural resistance.<sup>275</sup>

Similarly, Iván, also played with the themes of indigeneity and indigenous autonomy and self-determination.

The movement helped us create a community of like-minded artists. Well, in school we had a good group, we all came to work with the teachers, but the experience of working together in resistance has made us closer and has made Oaxaca into a great space for art today...

You don't see much graffiti any more, because the state and the city have been on a campaign to stop it...but I was working in the plastic arts anyway, with woodcuts and painting...For me the movement was about different possibilities, for us as students and artists, but also for the state of Oaxaca. We as artists had the responsibility to extend the vision of the movement, to create something new. We had that ability.

The other success that came out of the movement was the support that we as artists received for our work. Much of what we did was shown in many places beyond Oaxaca, and this has revitalized the culture of art here in Oaxaca and has given opportunities to our generation. Although I don't work with ASARO as much as I used to, a number of us have started our own workshops and galleries, also organized collectively although we sign our own names to our work. You've



seen walking around [the city] that our workshop (*taller*) is just one of many that have opened in the last few years... precisely because much of the work that we are doing came out of the movement and we combine our political and artistic developments in the work we do. I think that experience was very important.<sup>276</sup>

Both Baltazar and Iván continue to work with ASARO and

Figure 2: "Neither forgiveness nor forgetting," 2006, ASARO, <http://asar-oaxaca.blogspot.com>.

<sup>275</sup> Baltazar Castellano, interview with author, July 4, 2012.

<sup>276</sup> Iván Bautista, interview with author, July 4, 2012.

Mario in ASARO's Espacio Zapata, which opened in 2011. At the same time, they also create their own work and display it in other galleries and workshops in the city. They, like many of the artists that continue to work with and disseminate what could be called "movement art," have found fertile ground in a revitalized Oaxacan art scene. They credit movement participation for their individual political growth, recognizing that the social struggle is something that now deeply informs the art and other cultural endeavors they undertake.

For instance, Baltazar participates every year in creating *tapetes de arena* for Day of the Dead. These sand paintings, which line the principal pedestrian street in the center of Oaxaca, first took on major political significance in 2006. Only three days after US journalist Brad Will was killed by local PRI members, the federal police had taken the Zócalo from the teachers and the *plantón* had been moved a few blocks north to the plaza in front of the Santo Domingo church. On the pedestrian avenue that runs north from the Zócalo to Santo Domingo, the artists brazenly constructed political sand murals in front of the federal police (Figure 2). In such a manner, Baltazar and the others appropriated the motifs of the Day of the Dead to make culturally resonating political statements, a practice that has continued in the years since.

Furthermore, Baltazar also alluded to the existence of movement music. During the summer months of 2006, constantly heard over the radio were a number of songs written and recorded by movement participants. The most emblematic song is likely *Son de las Barricadas* (The Son (musical style) of the Barricades/They Are From the Barricades), with its double

entendre title. It continues to be played and replayed in Oaxaca over the radio and live, performances that Baltazar is often a part of.<sup>277</sup>

What Baltazar and Iván articulated was not just artistic participation in a social movement, but rather the use of art and culture as a tool of politicization. The sand murals constructed in front of the federal police were as much directed at the audience of the movement as they were directed at the audience of federal police, calling on the police to abandon their positions as a repressive force sent in to stop a social movement. As individuals, the artwork that they continue to produce in the years since 2006 is, by their own words, deeply influenced by their participation in 2006.<sup>278</sup> Conversely, their art was also an effort to extend the realm of movement ideals, bringing in concepts and slogans that transcended the overarching demand for Governor Ruiz to step down. For Baltazar and Iván, the artistic and cultural products of the movement, from stencils to sand murals to movement music, were tools of both political development and information dissemination, tools leveraged by teachers, artists, and students alike.

### **Vaín:**

With his chosen *nom de plume*, Vaín was still a high school student in 2006. Like many of his friends, Vaín was the son of public school teachers and he had grown up with the politics of the labor movement and the teachers union, or in his words, ""we all grew up as leftists."<sup>279</sup> In 2004, he and a handful of friends formed a graffiti collective known as Estencil Son that sought to disseminate critiques of society and politics on the walls of the city. He said that at this point

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<sup>277</sup> Baltazar Castellano, interview with author, July 4, 2012. The author was an audience member for two rallies during which these songs were played by Baltazar and other musicians, July 2012.

<sup>278</sup> Baltazar Castellano, interview with author, July 4, 2012; and Iván Bautista, interview with author, July 4, 2012.

<sup>279</sup> "Vaín," interview with author, July 17, 2012.

in time, not many artists were using stencils, so they were some of the first in Oaxaca to use stencil graffiti against the government. Among the first stencils that Vaín and his friends created were images the Ulises Ruíz's head on the body of a rat, denouncing the remodeling of the Zócalo in 2004:

We started making works against the government when they cut some trees here in the Zócalo, some very old trees, *muy antiguos*, they took them out, destroyed the trees, some people were uncomfortable, it started some inconformity, asking why did they do this? They don't have the right [to destroy cultural patrimony], so many people began to protest...Ulises Ruiz had just entered office, just entered in that year, and this was one of his first projects. In the Zócalo, there were a shitload of rats where they had removed the trees. So what we started to do was create images with rats and the head of Ulises Ruiz. We painted them mostly in the historic center, stencils on the wall to reflect the inconformity with what he did to the Zócalo. A little later, we were in favor of the Lopez Obrador campaign, so we started painting things in favor of him.<sup>280</sup> So we really tried to work the themes that surged forward in this time, the political...

We were Estencil Son, there was another collective called Arte Jaguar, that also painted political things. We didn't know them yet, but our works overlapped. Arte Jaguar started working more and more, so I met Ismek, one of the founders of Arte Jaguar, and we integrated into Arte Jaguar and started working under that name. We were doing the same thing, painting against the government, the things that we saw and observed. We were painting at 3 or 4 in the morning, when no one was out there, before going to high school...

When 2006 happened, we just continued working. But we began working in the barricades as well. Because...well my dad is a teacher, he is a leftist. Same with some of the guys in Arte Jaguar, the dad of Ismek is a doctor, but very leftist. So our parents agreed with us, our attitude was to make posters, flyers, banners, working with the people of our neighborhood...

It was really cool, working with great friends, and it really united the people in streets and in the barricades. The unity between neighbors because we were together in the barricades. Us, as *grafiteros*, when there were marches and *plantones*, we painted banners, walls, posters, it was our work, our contribution. We were still some of the only ones working at this time, although some of the

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<sup>280</sup> As discussed in Chapter 2, Andrés Manuel López Obrador was the PRD presidential candidate in the 2006 election. He lost by a razor-thin margin that many attributed to electoral fraud on the part of the party on power, the PAN. The former mayor of Mexico City can best be described as a moderate-left candidate that, like many in the PRD, had left the PRI to join the PRD.

anarchists asked us to give courses to teach them how to make stencils, and the teachers asked for it as well.<sup>281</sup>

What Vaín described was the loosely affiliated nature that many graffiti artists had with the movement itself. Not part of any formal organization, many of them had grown up knowing the struggle of activism, and that atmosphere and upbringing prompted their participation in the movement to unseat Governor Ruiz. The work that they had been doing prior to the movement, political graffiti that went up overnight, had prepared many of the artists for work within the movement.

While Vaín and Arte Jaguar were only temporarily part of ASARO, both groups had remarkably similar relationships with the teachers union. Mario and his students worked with teachers and groups that Mario knew, just as Vaín and his friends in Arte Jaguar worked with their parents and the friends of their parents in the neighborhood barricades and in creating banners and posters for marches. As another participant, who became friends with Vaín during the movement, described the situation:

There was a unity between *grafiteros* and neighbors. We worked together equally, without leaders, in the neighborhood barricades, each contributing skills and experiences in an equal manner...We really had no choice but to participate...we would hear the patrols [at night] and the sound "pow pow" and old ladies of 80 or 90 years would come out of their homes carrying sticks...When you are a kid of maybe 20 years, and you see the old ladies and the little kids [at the barricade], you had to come out and help...So there we were, it was a certain motivation to participate. And it was really cool this unity between everyone, not like friends, nor like neighbors, but really more like brotherhood...<sup>282</sup>

For each of these artists who shared their story, the path to involvement was fairly similar: they were already leftists in some sense, and most were already making art that was

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<sup>281</sup> "Vaín," interview with author, July 17, 2012.

<sup>282</sup> Ramón Nuñez Castro, interview with author, July 17, 2012.

critical of the current political and social realities of Oaxaca. The step to full participation in the movement itself then required but a redirection of energy from schoolwork (for Baltazar and Iván) to movement work, or a dedication to use artistic skills to help teachers and other movement organizations prepare banners, posters, and murals.

### **Movement Art in Context**

As mentioned above, many of the *grafiteros* went far beyond simple painting banners and giving stencil classes to members of Sección 22. Rather, their stencils that appeared on the walls of Oaxaca often transcended the demand for Governor Ruiz's resignation to critically examine sexism and discrimination, to reject capitalism in favor of revolution, to celebrate indigenous heritage, and to appropriate easily recognizable religious symbols for movement use.



Figure 3: "Woman in the struggle," 2006, Colectivo Zape, <http://colectivozape.blogspot.com>

In Edward McCaughan's comparative study of social movement art in Mexico and the United States, he posits, "movement-associated artists helped develop counterhegemonic visual discourses whose meanings correspond to local particularities as well as to shared international and/or national contexts."<sup>283</sup> In the case of Oaxaca, the

themes that surged forward in the movement art were both intensely local and universal at the same time. For instance, although not many in number, among the Oaxacan *grafiteros* were a handful of women, encouraging the artists to use the uprising as an opportunity to challenge the

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<sup>283</sup> McCaughan, *Art and Social Movements*, 12-13.

notions of gender embedded in Mexican society. Responding to developments within the movement that encouraged not just female participation, but female leadership and agency, the street artists, both male and female, made sure that the messages of gender equality made it to the walls. The artists celebrated the women's roles in the movement and explicitly questioned societal gender norms (Figure 3). In doing so, they celebrated the local images of the sturdy female market vendors and female teachers as sources of strength while challenging gender stereotypes. Another piece shows indigenous women dressed guerrillas with the caption "*¿sexo débil?*" (the weak gender?), drawing upon indigenous female resistance to the State as a symbol of strength and Oaxacan indigenous culture.<sup>284</sup>

Additionally, the artists in 2006 drew upon popular religious symbols and other images deeply embedded in Mexico's collective memory of uprising and resistance. Anyone familiar with Mexico and Mexican Catholicism is aware of the prevalence and importance of La Virgen de Guadalupe. Not only is she a symbol of devout Mexican Catholicism, but she also has long



Figure 4: "Virgin of the Barricades," photo by Rodolfo Villalobos, 2007.

been a symbol of insurgency and resistance. During Father Hidalgo's 1810 revolt that would end in "Father Hidalgo took a flag of Guadalupe found at Atotonilco as the banner of insurgency...She became the sponsor of those who fought for justice and

<sup>284</sup> "*¿sexo débil?*" ASARO, 2006, <http://asar-oaxaca.blogspot.com>

independence after 1810."<sup>285</sup> In the Mexican Revolution, the soldiers of Zapata's army were said to carry a symbol of the Virgin on their sombreros, both out of devotion for the protector of the insurgents and to recognize comrades.<sup>286</sup> Susan Phillips found that the Virgin and other related Catholic imagery is common in Chicano gang graffiti and tattoos in the Los Angeles area.<sup>287</sup>

The graffiti artists of Oaxaca did not, however, adopt Guadalupe as their protector as past Mexican revolutionaries and Chicano gang members had. Rather, in an appropriation of form and figure, the Oaxacan artists preferred to create their own virgins, popular protectors separate from the images and figures formally associated with the Church. In one particular piece that was painted repeatedly around the city and later on t-shirts and posters, the graffiti artists created the Santísima Virgen de las Barricadas as the protector of the Oaxacans manning the barricades every night (Figure 4). Within the Virgin's shroud are included the burning tires of the barricade and on her face is the gas mask to protect her from the tear gas that the police repeatedly used. By bringing together the tools of resistance with the figure of the Virgin as protector, the artists from ASARO drew upon Catholic symbols and Mexican collective memory and culture to legitimize resistance.

Similarly, the Day of the Dead, as an amalgamation of Catholic and pre-Columbian practices, is recognized as a particularly strong element of Oaxacan folklore and culture. The celebration of ancestors has long tradition of folk art that often features skeletons dressed as the living. Given the resonance of Day of the Dead in Oaxaca, the *grafiteros* also appropriated the

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<sup>285</sup> John Tutino, *Making a New World: Founding Capitalism in the Bajío and Spanish North America* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 450.

<sup>286</sup> Margarita Zires, " Los mitos de la Virgen de Guadalupe. Su proceso de construcción y reinterpretación en el México pasado y contemporáneo," *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos* 10.2 (1994), 298.

<sup>287</sup> Phillips, *Wallbangin'*, 178.



holiday's motif to create figures and images of skeletons involved in the protest and the resistance (Figure 5).

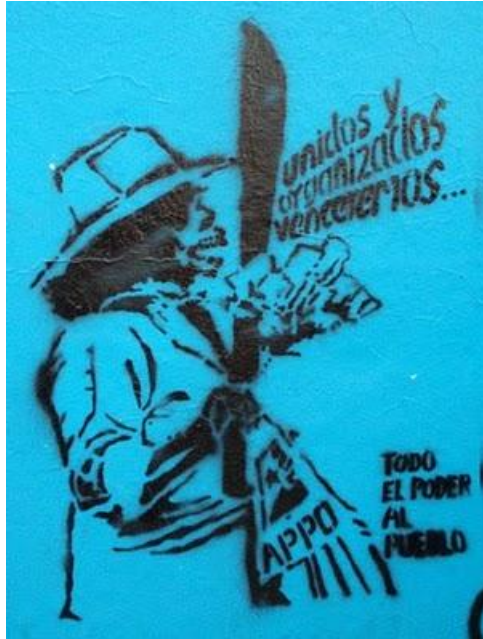


Figure 5: "United and Organized We Will Win," ASARO, 2006, <http://asar-oaxaca.blogspot.com>.



Figure 6: "Our Dead Will Be Avenged, COMO/APPO," ASARO, woodcut print 2007, <http://asar-oaxaca.blogspot.com>.

Similar to the appropriation of the symbol of the virgin as a protector, the Day of the Dead figures were used to express feelings of vengeance, remembrance, and resistance. Other popular figures that were common to the Oaxacan graffiti, such as Emiliano Zapata, were also depicted as skeletons at times. In adopting the Day of the Dead motif, the graffiti artists revealed both the resonance of popular religion in Oaxaca and how malleable these images are for use in a social movement and for revolutionary messaging. Furthermore, as mentioned above, the individuals within ASARO that were students in plastic arts at Bellas Artes used woodcuts reminiscent of José Guadalupe Posada to create movement prints and posters (particularly in the

months and years after the movement ended), drawing upon additional media to leverage Day of the Dead images with movement demands and memories (Figure 6).<sup>288</sup>

In a combination of local conditions and greater Latin American collective memory of revolution, the graffiti artists further drew upon revolutionary symbols, faces, and slogans to advance the movement. Although often presented as unproblematic celebrations of resistance, the use and reference to Mexican figures such as Emiliano Zapata side by side the ever-present Che Guevara connected the struggle in Oaxaca to revolutionary activity of the twentieth century across the Americas. Through their images, the artists drew upon the Mexican struggle for "Tierra y Libertad" (Figure 7), while the images and words of Guevara provided the revolutionary, anti-capitalist frame of the uprising (Figure 8).



Figure 7: "Zapata Lives," ASARO, 2006, <http://asar-oaxaca.blogspot.com>



Figure 8: "The true revolutionary is guided by great feelings of love" (Che Guevara), ASARO, 2006, <http://asar-oaxaca.blogspot.com>.

Among other revolutionary figures seen on the streets of Oaxaca were Pancho Villa, Leon Trotsky, Subcomandante Marcos, and Oaxaca's nineteenth-century hero, Benito Juárez. Disregarding ideological consistency, the

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<sup>288</sup> Deborah Caplow, "Art of Rebellion: Oaxacan Street Art in a Mexican Context," in *Signal: 02: A Journal of International Political Graphics and Culture*, eds. Alec Dunn and Josh MacPhee (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2012), 98.

artists emphasized resistance to state power rather than articulating a particular position consistently. In a sense, the amalgamation of revolutionary figures represented the variety of opinions within the movement, with the consistent commentary being rejection of Ulises Ruiz, the PRI, and the corrupt democracy that they saw themselves in the process of dismantling.

Other common revolutionary graffiti called on the populace to keep the images of state repression and injustice in the collective memory. These often took the form of dates written hastily on the wall in spray paint: "2 de octubre," "14 de junio," "nunca lo olvidaremos." October 2nd refers to Tlatelolco Massacre in 1968 when state security forces killed an estimated 200 to 300 protesting students in Mexico City, and June 14th is the day that Oaxacan state police first moved against the teachers union. By keeping these memories alive in the public discourse, the Oaxacan artists both emphasized the criminality of the state and memorialized the victims of state repression. Additionally, the revolutionary phrases and clichés served, in Chaffee's conception of political graffiti, to energize and mobilize the population in support of the revolution. From celebrating movement achievements to condemning government repression, the revolutionary graffiti "commemorates a political transformation and in the process creates a historical memory of events, happenings, emotions, and thinking."<sup>289</sup>

Finally, the movement artists drew deeply upon Oaxaca's indigenous past and present, portraying indigenous heritage as uniquely Oaxacan and in opposition to the "bad government" that they were struggling against. Such *indigenismo* has long been part of the Latin American search for identity. From the early nineteenth century liberators to mid-nineteenth century liberals to twentieth century intellectuals, the elites that sought to create the Latin American

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<sup>289</sup> Chaffee, *Political Protest and Street Art*, 10.

"imagined community," to borrow Benedict Anderson's term, recognized that "the pre-Columbian past thus formed an essential part of national history, much more glorious than the 'three hundred years of tyranny' of which the colonial era was said to consist."<sup>290</sup> In other words, creating nations in a post-colonial context required a national history separate and apart from the history of Spanish colonialism. Through the use of imagery and rhetoric, Latin American elites at once glorified the indigenous past while seeking to modernize the indigenous present. Chaffee notes that the muralists of post-revolutionary Mexico "used the figure of the native Indian to symbolize the new Mexico...they used native names and words from the indigenous linguistic heritage to distinguish Mexican identity from the dominant Spanish culture."<sup>291</sup>



Figure 9: "Long live 500 years of resistance," 2006, photo by Carlotta Cramer-Klett, <http://arteycallejero.blogspot.com>.

The images that appeared on the streets of Oaxaca were ones then in dialogue with the past constructions of national identity. Movement artists, as subaltern actors, reappropriated indigenous identity from the social realism of the past Mexican muralists and presented indigeneity as a politics of resistance to neoliberalism, authoritarianism, and modernization at the expense of the indigenous (Figure 9).

By framing the movement as one embracing the indigenous history of resistance, the actions taken against the Ruiz government were justified as continuation of resistance to a regime antithetical to indigenous and subaltern interests.

<sup>290</sup> Rebecca Earle, *Return of the Native: Indians and Myth-Making in Spanish America, 1810-1930* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 4.

<sup>291</sup> Chaffee, *Political Protest and Street Art*, 11.

One concrete example was the rejection of the state-sponsored annual indigenous festival known as the Guelaguetza. The Guelaguetza had been held annually since the 1920s as a celebration of indigenous identity, culture, and a "tradition" of gift-exchange. As Oaxaca began to see more



Figure 10: "Long Live the Popular Guelaguetza...Boycott the Commercial Guelaguetza!" ASARO, 2006, <http://asar-oaxaca.blogspot.com>

tourist traffic in the 1990s and 2000s, activist and indigenous organizations began to protest that the Guelaguetza had lost its original focus and was becoming merely a tourist attraction. Further outrages included increasing the number of performances per day for the tourists' benefit and increasing the ticket prices to make

it unaffordable for the majority of the Oaxacan populace.

In a rejection of what APPO framed as the state's exploitation of the indigenous populations and heritage, Sección 22 opted to create Guelaguetza Popular in 2006 (discussed in Chapter 2). As one participant who had previously performed in the commercial Guelaguetza remembers, the difference between the two festivals was that in the Guelaguetza Popular, "people came from communities to present dances that had never been seen before in the commercial Guelaguetza...The people who came to dance were really from the pueblos, from the indigenous communities. You could see their roots and see that they were from the places they



represented."<sup>292</sup> The graffiti artists of ASARO took it upon themselves to condemn the commercial Guelagueta, and then promote the Guelagueta Popular that was to be held by the teachers union (Figure 10).

The art that covered the walls of Oaxaca during the movement touched on the quotidian realities of life within Oaxaca as well as universalizing the Oaxacan movement by placing it within the broad parameters of revolutionary collective memory. Drawing on such themes as indigenous resistance and Che Guevara, female strength and appropriated Catholic iconography, this art not only supported the movement, but expanded the discourse of participation and meaning in such a social movement. Although plenty of stencils existed that lambasted Governor Ruiz, the graffiti and the "movement art" that continues to be popular today far surpassed the demand for the Governor's resignation. Rather, the images of resistance fundamentally questioned and critiqued the Oaxacan, Mexican, and global status quo, putting forward calls for indigenous rights, gender equality, and revolutionary anti-capitalist rhetoric. Furthermore, the participation of artists that varied in age from high school to middle aged demonstrated the possibilities of participation on one's own terms, opening opportunities for individuals to use their skills to not only assist the movement, but propel forward radical discourses.

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<sup>292</sup> Denham and C.A.S.A. Collective, *Teaching Rebellion*, 144.

## **Chapter 5: Occupied Media: Popular Radio, Television, and Internet**

If the graffiti on city walls was the visual representation of the movement that stretched the bounds of movement demands and ideals, then the airwaves were the audible manifestation of the movement that worked in a similar fashion. Over the course of the movement, protestors managed to hold on to and operate at least one radio station at all times, as well as operating a television station for nearly a month. Through these media outlets, social movement participants used the airwaves to denounce governmental actions, announce marches, protests, and rallies, and to broadcast cultural programming such as documentaries and indigenous music.

Parallel to the radio outlets were the websites that sprung up as alternative media sources during the movement. The individuals involved in running the website Oaxaca Libre were motivated by what they felt was a lack of accurate reporting about the movement. They took it upon themselves to participate in the movement "as communicators" rather than activists. Similar to the graffiti artists discussed above, the use of media outlets drew participation from those skilled with operating radio, television, and in web design, and forced open a dialogue on representation and rights. However, this dialogue was not necessarily novel. In fact, Oaxaca possesses quite a number of community radio stations that broadcast in indigenous languages and have programming that promotes indigenous cultural expressions. In a sense, the occupied media outlets were similar to the network of community radio stations, yet the ability of movement participants to access the television studios and publicly denounce government repression endowed speakers with an agency that media often denies the poor, the indigenous,

the women, and the everyday Oaxacan who does not fit the mold for the voice or face of commercial media.

### **Community Radio and Polyvocality**

Community radio has long been a medium of communication and information in Oaxaca's social fabric. For indigenous villages beyond the reach of or without the means for television, and beyond circulation of statewide newspapers (nearly 25% of households in Oaxaca are without a television set, compared to 9% nationally), radio is perhaps the most important source of news and information for events and developments both within and beyond the immediate municipality.<sup>293</sup> Beginning in the late 1970s, the Mexican state, under the direction of the *Instituto Nacional Indigenista* (INI), created and operated a network of community radio stations "as part of the Latin American trend to use radio for education and development."<sup>294</sup>

The INI set up the first station in Guerrero in 1979 and began to develop a network, now known as the *Radio Cultural Indigenista*, which expanded to include twenty stations by the late 1990s. The stations within the network broadcast in indigenous languages and generally maintain a politically nonthreatening focus on indigenous cultural preservation. Originally run by appointees from outside of the communities, there has been "a trend toward developing guidelines for promoting indigenous involvement in the network."<sup>295</sup> This participation may take more active forms including the use of the radio station and its personnel as advocates and guides for navigating the public bureaucracy, audience participation in programming and musical

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<sup>293</sup> "Viviendas particulares habitadas que disponen de televisión - 2010," data accessed July 12, 2013, [www.inegi.gob.mx](http://www.inegi.gob.mx).

<sup>294</sup> Lucila Vargas, *Social Uses and Radio Practices: The Use of Participatory Radio by Ethnic Minorities in Mexico* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995), 52.

<sup>295</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.



selection and performance, and the use of airwaves for sending messages and *avisos* to friends and family in other villages.<sup>296</sup>

As a state with sixteen recognized indigenous groups and many more local dialects, the four state-operated community radio stations in Oaxaca that broadcast in indigenous languages provide an important connection to the greater world.<sup>297</sup> In the sense that community radio provides a space for public dialogue and information, "*to communicate* goes beyond informing or transmitting messages from a sender to a receiver. The term 'to communicate' refers to *community* and construction of bonds of union."<sup>298</sup> Thus, when conceived as a medium that has the possibility to increase democratic practices in the cultural sphere as well as in the dissemination of information, community radio in its participatory form is a powerful tool for marginalized sectors of the population not necessarily served by for-profit media.

In 2006, both sides of the conflict clearly recognized the power of radio as a tool of communication, information, and political development. As such, control of the airwaves became a battleground that was both parallel to and embedded within the conflict over the physical space of the city. As will be outlined below, movement protestors occupied and operated both public and commercial radio during the course of the movement in order to use the airwaves for political development and information dissemination. Conversely, in addition to the

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<sup>296</sup> Ibid, 250.

<sup>297</sup> See Jorge Hernández Díaz, "Las demandas indígenas en el movimiento de la Asamblea Popular de los Pueblos de Oaxaca," in *La APPO ¿rebelión o movimiento social? (nuevas formas de expresión ante la crisis)*, ed. Víctor Raúl Martínez Vásquez (Oaxaca: UABJO, 2009), 296, for a brief discussion of indigenous language radio as an information source for the movement; the four community radio stations in Oaxaca broadcast in Mixteco and Amuzgo from the Costa Chica (XEJAM), Zapoteco, Mixe, and Chinanteco from the Sierra Juárez (XEGLO), Mazateco, Cuicateco, and Chinanteco from the Chinantla (XEOJN), and Mixteco and Triqui from the Sierra Mixteca (XETLA), <http://ecos.cdi.gob.mx/>.

<sup>298</sup> Margarita Zires, "Estrategias de comunicación y acción política: Movimiento social de la APPO 2006," in *La APPO ¿rebelión o movimiento social? (nuevas formas de expresión ante la crisis)*, ed. Víctor Raúl Martínez Vásquez (Oaxaca: UABJO, 2009), 161, emphasis in the original.

commercial radio that remained supportive of the Ulises Ruiz governorship, government operatives started a clandestine radio station to broadcast attacks on APPO members. Radio Ciudadana, claiming to be the voice of the "true people of Oaxaca," broadcast names, addresses, and locations of APPO spokespersons in attempts to foment vigilante action against leading movement participants.<sup>299</sup>

In a parallel development, both the protestors and the State opened and operated websites that served as founts of information for the movement. On the side of the protestors, a handful of individuals began Oaxaca Libre (Free Oaxaca), a website dedicated to compiling news reports on the movement as well as publishing their own reporting - compelled by what they felt was biased and missing coverage of the movement in the commercial media.<sup>300</sup> Those on the side of Ulises Ruiz also began operating a webpage, deceptively titled Oaxaca en Paz (Oaxaca in Peace), that published names, addresses, photos, and exaggerated political histories of movement leaders as a resource for loyalists, vigilantes, and paramilitaries to use when going after movement leaders.

This chapter will detail the battle over the airwaves and internet bandwidth that occurred throughout the course of the movement. The greater question is not what happened, but rather, the meaning of community and popular media as a mode of communication. While viewed by government supporters as propaganda and nonsense, the occupied radio stations redirected those same criticisms toward commercial radio and television stations, claiming that commercial outlets such as Televisa and TV Azteca "have always been in the service of the rich."<sup>301</sup> Thus, occupied radio and the battle over the airwaves became also a battle over ideology and

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<sup>299</sup> Ibid, 185; Denham, *Teaching Rebellion*, 79.

<sup>300</sup> Kiado Cruz, interview with author, July 11, 2012.

<sup>301</sup> Movement spokesperson broadcasting from Radio Universidad, quoted in Osorno, *Oaxaca sitiada*, 67.

participation, questioning the access that subalterns should have to the levers of media and information.

I believe that we can characterize the occupied radio and television stations as similar to the indigenous community radio stations under the auspices of the INI. Lucila Vargas points to these stations, most often broadcasting in indigenous languages, as "a space where cultural hegemony is constructed and struggled over."<sup>302</sup> For instance, she continues to argue that "broadcasting in vernaculars is in itself a political act...this may advance a process of psychological empowerment among indigenous peoples."<sup>303</sup> If we further expand the concept of vernaculars to include discourses that are rarely, if ever, heard on commercial media, then we can draw parallels between the cultural counterhegemonic possibilities of community radio and political counterhegemonic use of occupied media outlets during months of conflict. The occupations opened up the radio and television stations to allow speakers that explicitly challenged the stereotypes with which they are often portrayed in mainstream media. This too is a vernacular, an audible and visual vernacular that was, for many participants, psychologically empowering because it was the first time that the speakers on radio and television looked, sounded, and acted like them, free from the stereotypes of the poor illiterate campesino, the lazy and bumbling indigenous maid, the up-to-no-good teenager from the working class neighborhood.

Lucila Vargas also cautions against the celebration of community or participatory media as a form of popular resistance, but rather pushes us to examine polyvocality of media texts as having "ideological and/or legitimating benefits which participatory stations might accrue to the

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<sup>302</sup> Vargas, *Social Uses and Radio Practices*, 17.

<sup>303</sup> *Ibid*, 248.

dominant culture."<sup>304</sup> That is to say, if we conceive of civic and political participation as generally positive for subaltern actors, then we must examine the role of occupied and/or popular media as a means to advance and encourage civic participation. In this case, the democratization of media was not granted or encouraged by the state, but rather was forcefully (re)claimed following the state's effort to close down the existing radio station operated by the teachers union. In doing so, the appearance of counterhegemonic vernaculars and discourses may strengthen democracy in Oaxaca, forcing listeners, viewers, and readers to consider and think about the words and images broadcast and disseminated through occupied media.

### **Radio Plantón and Occupied Media**

Sección 22 began operating its own radio station, Radio Plantón, in 2005, a year prior to the events of 2006. Operating without official permission from the state, Radio Plantón "occupied" 92.1 FM during its first year of operation.<sup>305</sup> Although the teachers union had used radio as a means to communicate with its membership during the annual *plantónes* in prior years, it was in May 2005 that Radio Plantón became a permanent installation inside of the union headquarters in the historic center of Oaxaca.<sup>306</sup> The teachers union proposed the radio station "as a free and independent union radio station that the Oaxacan society, little by little, was supporting; a society tired of communication media in the service of the rich and powerful."<sup>307</sup>

What made the permanent installation of Radio Plantón different from the use of radio in past years was that it transformed from being a primarily propaganda tool of the teachers union

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<sup>304</sup> Ibid, 17.

<sup>305</sup> Osorno, *Oaxaca sitiada*, 68.

<sup>306</sup> "Interview with Radio Plantón staff, July 7, 2007," accessed June 20, 2013, <http://www.aliveinmexico.org/video/2007/07/20/radio-planton-in-oaxaca/>

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Octavio Vélez Ascencio, "Radio Plantón reanuda sus transmisiones" *La Jornada*, March 9, 2007.

during the annual strike to a counterhegemonic media tool that involved academics and activists from outside the ranks of Sección 22. The station began "to put [on the air] more of another form of ethics and questions about the power of the state. 'How can the State violate the rights of smaller organizations to exercise their power? How can the two co-exist?...Why is it that the State acts the way it does? These are the questions that help generate the mobilization [in 2006]."<sup>308</sup>

Radio Plantón, in the conception articulated by Kiado Cruz, sought to provide a participatory space in which union members and others could share news, cultural programming, pedagogy, and organizational logistics for the *plantón*. In the words of the radio staff, the station

has become the constant pulse of the movement. It has kept up to date with the movement, mobilizations, and what is going on in a constantly changing environment. And everyone had the information at their fingertips, the whole state, everyone had the information they needed up to date.<sup>309</sup>

As the "voice" of the movement, and through rebroadcasts by the community radio stations across the state, Radio Plantón was a specific target during the attempted *desalojo* on June 14, 2006.

Under a state of "subnational authoritarianism," the direct challenge to government authority and the office of the governor in particular was an affront to the power held by Ulises Ruiz. Hence, one of the key components of the attempted *desalojo* was the dismantling of Radio Plantón. Silencing Radio Plantón would then prevent the dissemination of information during the *desalojo*, and cut off the *plantonistas* from allies who were not, at that moment, camping in the *plantón*. As discussed before, nor was a silencing of opposition media without precedent. In

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<sup>308</sup> Kiado Cruz, interview with author, July 11 2012.

<sup>309</sup> "Interview with Radio Plantón staff, July 7, 2007."

June 2005, "a group of thugs from the *Confederación Revolucionaria de Obreros y Campesinos* (CROC) occupied the installations of the newspaper, *Noticias, voz e imagen de Oaxaca*, the only [print] media at the state-wide level that questioned the Ulises Ruiz administration."<sup>310</sup> In similar fashion, the police forces involved in the *desalojo* attempted to silence Radio Plantón.

In the time between the installation of the *plantón* on May 22 and the *desalojo* on June 14, the radio station "abandoned its programming and offered its amplification, its open telephone lines, as a space for denouncing [the government] and invitations to the mobilization, particularly the *plantón*."<sup>311</sup> The radio station opened its telephone lines to public participation, and created what they hoped was a democratic space to air thoughts and grievances, calls for help and support, and news from across the state regarding the progress of the movement. In one marathon night in early June, the radio scheduled what it called a *megadenuncia*: "During the night of Friday and the dawn of Saturday, Radio Plantón...received hundreds of calls from fathers and mothers, students, campesinos, workers, even priests, in solidarity with the movement before an eventual repression."<sup>312</sup>

As the climate of uncertainty increased with each passing day, more and more people tuned into Radio Plantón to hear the voice of the teachers union and follow the developments of the *plantón*. "The leaders of the union were happy, although worried, with the high ratings that Radio Plantón registered in May 2006. At any moment, the leadership were aware, that the radio could be attacked."<sup>313</sup> As rumors flew around of impending action on the part of the authorities,

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<sup>310</sup> Osorno, *Oaxaca sitiada*, 29.

<sup>311</sup> Zires, "Estrategias de comunicación," 164.

<sup>312</sup> Octavio Vélez Ascencio, "Ultimátum del gobernador Ulises Ruiz a maestros de Oaxaca," *La Jornada*, June 4, 2006.

<sup>313</sup> Osorno, *Oaxaca sitiada*, 68.

certainly fed and disseminated by the callers into the radio station, the radio operators feared that their operation would be shut down and attacked by the police. Perhaps justified in their fear, that was precisely "one of the most important tasks of the *desalojo*: silence the teachers union's radio, silence the denouncing and that collective voice."<sup>314</sup> In the process of the eviction, the police stormed into the union headquarters with two missions: capture and arrest the union leaders, and destroy the radio installation.<sup>315</sup>

At the moment of the *desalojo*, as the police forces were moving in on the teachers' encampment, Eduardo Castellanos, a radio host at Radio Plantón kept the broadcast going as long as possible:

They are entering, we are (static)...we invite the people of Oaxaca to rise up against the tyrant Ulises Ruiz...The *granaderos* (troops) are entering, the union headquarters is filling with tear gas...We are resisting and we will return...Neighborhoods, organize yourselves, organize yourselves...we are calling you to civil resistance...we are calling you *compañeros y compañeras*.<sup>316</sup>

Once the police destroyed the broadcasting equipment in the union headquarters, the movement was temporarily left without a medium for dissemination of information.

In the meantime, protestors and their families and friends resorted to cell phones and text messages to call for help and check on their loved ones.<sup>317</sup> However, in a matter of hours, students who had been participating in the teachers' mobilization occupied Radio Universidad, the radio station of the public university, *Universidad Autónoma Benito Juárez de Oaxaca* (UABJO). From the grounds of the university, movement participants began to broadcast where

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<sup>314</sup> Zires, "Estrategias de comunicación," 165.

<sup>315</sup> Osorno, *Oaxaca sitiada*, 68.

<sup>316</sup> *Ibid.*, 21-22.

<sup>317</sup> Sergio Vale Jiménez, interview with author, July 27, 2012; Hilda Acevedo Reyes, interview with author, July 25, 2012; and Kiado Cruz, interview with author, July 11, 2012.

Radio Plantón left off, transmitting live updates from teachers and family members who called in from the conflict and disorder in the historic center.

In the absence of a functioning Radio Plantón, Radio Universidad took up the mantle of being the voice of the movement. Broadcasting twenty-four hours per day, the radio was used to announce meetings, call marches, and to provide space for testimony and public forum. According to one participant, "the radio and the telephone constituted the operative instruments of the popular movement...The radio played a very important role, it raised consciousness, mobilized, organized, gave voice to the silence and made us women visible."<sup>318</sup> It was through Radio Universidad that the first calls were made to organize the megamarch in response to the *desalojo* on June 14. By early afternoon that day, a female voice on the radio was calling out: "I call to the people to come out and support the teachers, it isn't possible that this [the violence of the *desalojo*] can happen."<sup>319</sup>

The broadcasts from Radio Universidad dealt with all aspects of the movement, from the most urgent calls for support and aid to helping distribute resources to movement participants across the city. One journalist remembered listening to the radio throughout the entire movement:

We didn't have the social networks that the Arab Spring had, we had the radio and cell phones...And the people would fall asleep with Radio Universidad on, it was always on...It was there where they would call for supplies like 'we are asking the people for coffee, we have very little coffee here.' And then a little while later we would hear, 'Don't bring any more coffee, we have too much coffee now...'

I also remember one day, with my son, three kilometers outside of town, with the radio on, and they were announcing on the radio, 'they are attacking us, please, come out people and mobilize!' Well I left my son and went back to the

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<sup>318</sup> Itandehui Santiago Galicia, "Voces al aire," in *Lo vimos, lo vivimos: Narraciones en movimiento, Oaxaca 2006*, ed. Citlalli Méndez et. al (Oaxaca: Oaxaca Libre, 2009), 23

<sup>319</sup> *Ibid*, 29.



city. Three kilometers, no more, in these ten minutes I couldn't get through: the people were outside with sticks, cans with rocks, wanting to defend what they considered theirs. It is surprising how a communication media can generate a reaction of that magnitude, but also the people wanted to defend their movement.<sup>320</sup>

## Oaxaca Libre

In the days that followed the *desalojo*, as the APPO was formed, Radio Universidad became the voice of the movement, broadcast throughout the city and rebroadcast across the state. With technology to simultaneously stream the radio broadcasts over the internet, migrants and activists across the world were able to listen to Radio Universidad.<sup>321</sup> Simultaneously, other media activists sought to leverage the growing use of the internet as an alternative media source to disseminate information on the movement.

We had a webpage that we had just bought, but we didn't know what to call it, nor how to use it. 'I will design the web page and you write,' my friend told me, 'and my cousin can do the technical part. This way we can make a webpage and disseminate what is happening in the movement.'...From our chat we decided on the name 'Oaxaca Libre.'...A free Oaxaca, free from teachers (*laughing*), free from governments, a little radical the proposition, right?...That was our first idea.

And so arose Oaxaca Libre, a simple site, but the only one that was compiling the news from periodicals such as *Reforma*, *La Jornada*, *El Universal*, and publishing them. We didn't know how to do journalism, I wrote little things, but no one knew how to be a journalist at this moment. And so, after that I integrated myself into the movement, more as a communicator than an activist, because what we would do was go and cover protests, inform the people what was happening. We made various tools: first the webpage, then videos, and later electronic newsletters, the newsletter was called 'Urolandia.' [UROland, for Ulises Ruiz Ortiz]. The newsletter was totally sarcastic. We joked even about the movement, about everything. We thought that if we could maintain this joking attitude, it was like recovering the spirit of the Oaxacans...And through joking, we could also generate other opinions...

Well, Oaxaca Libre was born into a small world of Oaxacan affairs but it was surely going to reach others outside. We did not reach the indigenous

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<sup>320</sup> Pedro Matías, interview with author, July 26, 2012.

<sup>321</sup> Stephen, *We Are the Face of Oaxaca*, 233.

peoples because they aren't connected to the internet, but we did reach the urban groups, in Oaxaca, Mexico City, Guadalajara, New York, all sides, I remember once that we received a visitor from Greece. This was the external public. But it made it possible for us to create other tools, like setting up video viewings in the neighborhoods...

Another thing we did was create podcasts of 20 or 30 minutes and gave them to the community radios or whoever wanted to download them. We did one daily, after which we received space in Radio Plantón with a program that was called 'Carpa Rebelde' [tent rebel], with a dynamic tone, comical, that was how we were throughout the movement.<sup>322</sup>

Both Kiado Cruz and Pedro Matías, a media activist and journalist respectively, made reference to the Arab Spring, a recent event at the time the interviews were carried out. The points that the two of them made were similar however: despite the occupied radio stations and websites, the use of cell phones, and a newspaper (*Noticias*) that was critical of the government, the movement suffered from not enough media. Matías claimed that demand for news on the social movement was so strong that the newspaper *Noticias* was forced to expand operations to two daily editions and reached a circulation of nearly 80,000. When compared to normal daily circulation of 5,000 to 10,000, the eight-fold increase indicates that the demand existed for news on the Oaxacan conflict that criticized the government.<sup>323</sup> When other critical newspapers such as *La Jornada* (Mexico City) were not reaching Oaxacan audiences, when television news outlets were either not reporting on the movement or doing so with a denigrating attitude toward movement participants, there was a natural tendency to seek out media outlets that were reporting accurately on the daily lived experience in Oaxaca.<sup>324</sup> And in the absence of accurate reporting, the experiences of Kiado Cruz, Pedro Matías, and others who were involved in

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<sup>322</sup> Kiado Cruz, interview with author, July 11, 2012.

<sup>323</sup> Pedro Matías, interview with author, July 26, 2012.

<sup>324</sup> Much of the criticism of television news was directed at *Televisa* and *TV Azteca*, two of the biggest outlets, with nationwide reach in Mexico.

creating, writing, publishing, and disseminating pro-movement news, demonstrated further the variety of participation, allowing many to begin to create the media that was consistent with their lived experiences in Oaxaca.

### **Radio y Televisora Cacerola**

On August 1, a women's march, having completed its announced path from the Fountain of the Seven Regions to the Zócalo, spontaneously decided to continue marching to the studios of Channel 9, the state public television station. Upset by media coverage of the movement, the women who arrived at the television station demanded airtime to present their opinion of the movement. First they demanded an hour, then announced they would be satisfied with a half-hour of airtime.<sup>325</sup> When the station refused, the protestors responded by occupying the station, retaining a number of the employees to help them continue broadcasting. Thus the public television station became a movement media outlet operated by female movement participants, a large number of whom were teachers.<sup>326</sup>

Similar to the occupation and operation of Radio Universidad, which Margarita Zires describes as "a new territory of audibility in which the communicators were those who had never penetrated the studios of a radio station," the occupied television station broadcast a mirror of Oaxacan society in which working women stood in front of the camera and spoke of their experiences.<sup>327</sup> While community radio has been used often to provide cultural and linguistic programming relevant to the communities in which the radio operates, never before had state television ceded the broadcast to social movement participants, much less women, to present

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<sup>325</sup> Zires, "Estrategias de comunicación," 173.

<sup>326</sup> Eugenia Pizarro García, interview with author, July 1, 2012.

<sup>327</sup> Zires, "Estrategias de comunicación," 168.

their own programming free from stereotypes. By taking over and operating Channel 9, which had been directed by PRI appointees, the women involved in the occupation gave a more visible face to the multitudes of social movement participants. "It was just the people. The feminine part of the people, the *señoras*. Not rich, neither made up, nor with manicured nails. Those who work. And today they came out on television. Live, literally."<sup>328</sup>

By 7:30 that evening, with the help of a handful of Channel 9 employees as well as a number of volunteers who had responded to the call put out over Radio Universidad, the women protesters were in full control of the station, and began their broadcast with testimony about their experiences that day. Behind them were banners hung on the studio wall, one with the oft-seen slogan "*Fuera Ulises*," another with the phrase "When a woman advances, there is no man who can hold her back."<sup>329</sup> Over the next twenty-three days, the female protesters held the public television and radio stations and opened them for use by the movement.

On the television station, the women initiated two major programming decisions. First, they opened the studios to anyone who wanted to testify, inviting all participants to show themselves and let themselves be heard. This drew hundreds, if not thousands, of people over the three weeks the station was in operation, with lines forming outside of the studios with people who wanted to go on air and say something.<sup>330</sup> Never before had such an eclectic mix of common people stood before the cameras day after day. Second, the programmers put on political commentary, documentaries, and analysis that was far from the normal broadcast content. One of the women who ended up running station remembered the programming as

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<sup>328</sup> Hermann Bellinghausen and Octavio Vélez Ascencio, "Mujeres Oaxaqueñas toman los medios oficiales para alzar su voz," *La Jornada*, August 2, 2006.

<sup>329</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>330</sup> Eugenia Pizarro García, interview with author, July 1, 2012.

such: "In morning documentaries; in the afternoon APPO news...programs of the women talking about what they needed in their neighborhoods; in the evening a program of culture, afterwards a program called 'Urban Space'...and at 9 PM a forum of political discussion and analysis."<sup>331</sup> Many celebrated the occupied media outlet not only for giving voice to the movement, but also for broadcasting images and words of indigenous women with agency, directly contradicting the prevalent media and popular culture stereotype of the indigenous woman as the uneducated and backward. Such programming was empowering to everyday viewers, and the television station daily registered among the highest viewer ratings in the state. But fundamentally, the appearance of movement participants on the television provided a mirror through which Oaxacan's could see themselves and their neighbors. Just as Lucila Vargas argues that broadcasting in vernaculars is a psychologically empowering political act for indigenous peoples, so too is the appearance of one's neighbors and equals on the television screen, many of whom also spoke to the cameras in indigenous languages.<sup>332</sup>

### **The Media War: Violence and Broadcasting**

*Las armas brillaban en la oscuridad./The guns shone in the darkness.*  
- Sergio Vale Jimenez

While Radio and Televisión Cacerola were operated by participants who were not all members of Sección 22, the union immediately embraced the occupation of the public media outlet and devoted resources and manpower to assisting in the growing media battle between the protestors and the State. On August 8, while one group of masked attackers set fire to a bus near the studios of Radio Universidad as a diversion, "infiltrators succeeded in throwing acid on the

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<sup>331</sup> Patricia Jiménez, quoted in Zires, "Estrategias de comunicación," 174.

<sup>332</sup> Eugenia Pizarro García, interview with author, July 1, 2012.

equipment and [put Radio Universidad] out of order until October [2006]."<sup>333</sup> Although Radio Plantón had been repaired by late July, it was operating at far less power than before, relying on other radio stations and the internet to rebroadcast its programming. With the attack on Radio Universidad, the defense of the occupied public media outlets was made more important for the movement. In response to the increasing attacks in August that were beginning to add to the count of dead and injured, the APPO and Sección 22 called upon movement participants to defend their neighborhoods from the paramilitary and police patrols. The participants began setting up barricades on a nightly basis, and to defend the remaining occupied media outlets, the union called upon members to form security brigades to guard the transmitting towers located on a hill on the northern side of the city.

When the attacks on protestors, and particularly the attacks on movement occupied media outlets increased in August, the necessity of security was heightened. In response, rank and file union members, along with their friends and family, organized to defend the broadcasting towers and the media outlets from further sabotage. Sergio Vale Jimenez was one of the teachers who volunteered for the security patrols:

We had all been to Channel 9, there with our families, our *compañeros*, with everyone...and so we made the decision to protect it, to protect the antennas up on the hill...I was named coordinator of one group, and we would arrive around seven in the evening, and we would go over what happened that day. Being there, everything was going normally. Some of the *compañeros* from the union committees arrived to give orders. They told us, "you already know, but you need to stay here to watch over this, don't leave this place. Here the fireworks are ready to go in case anyone tries to come and attack you."

...The night was normal: midnight, one in the morning, and so forth...we were all awake. It had to be around three in the morning and some minutes when a *compañero* received a call: "Be alert because the police and the thugs are on their way to the antennas. They are climbing the hill, we can see them." So then

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<sup>333</sup> Zires, "Estrategias de comunicación," 172.

we called the union headquarters to let them know that the police and thugs were coming up the hill.

So that *compañero* dropped his phone and quickly went to set off the fireworks so that the whole world would know that we were being attacked. It was then that we saw, about 100 meters away, the police and the thugs almost running...And they were coming armed, the guns shone in the darkness.

...I was still thinking, "well they will come and threaten us, I don't think they are capable of shooting at us." I went to the front of our group, some of us started to run and take off down the hill. But I stood there and raised my arm...and called out, "Look, if you want to take control of the antennas, you can take them, but show us some paperwork that says that you are going to take them, and then we will leave. We aren't going to fight, because we are not armed."

They were about 20 meters away when they took out the guns and started shooting. They hit me with a bullet in the leg, because as soon as I heard the shots I turned around, and then I felt the first bullet here in my leg...I didn't wait a second longer, they were trying to kill us! I took off running down the hill, in zig-zags, so that they couldn't shoot me again. Further down, some of the *compañeros* had stopped a van...I barely made it down the hill, I also hurt my shoulder when I had to jump over a small wall. When I fell, my *compañeros* picked me up and put me in the truck.<sup>334</sup>

Sergio's experience on the security patrols illustrates dramatically the seriousness with which the media war was carried out. Under the instructions from the union and human rights organizations, the security brigades that protected the antennas did so without arms, only supplied with radios, cell phones, and fireworks. When Sergio spoke of the fireworks, he alluded to another form of communication that gained widespread use within the movement. When the barricades were erected on a nightly basis, in addition to the radio being used a communications hub that received phone calls from barricades across the city, the fireworks were used as emergency warning signals and mobilizing calls if a particular barricade needed help. The use of fireworks for communication went as follows: one firework meant that a police or paramilitary patrol was seen passing by; two fireworks meant that the authorities or thugs were nearby and there was concern that there might be a confrontation; finally, three fireworks

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<sup>334</sup> Sergio Vale Jiménez, interview with author, July 27, 2012.

were a call for immediate assistance and that anyone available should come to the barricade immediately to help.<sup>335</sup>

Following the armed attack on August 21 that wounded Sergio, the police rendered the antennas inoperable, cutting off the transmissions from Radio and Television Cacerola. In response, movement participants reorganized and occupied twelve commercial radio stations by the next morning, a demonstration "of the capacity to convoke the movement [participants] immediately, and the necessity to control a communications medium as a mode of survival against the terrorism of the state."<sup>336</sup> Additionally, the use of barricades multiplied overnight as the direct attack against the antennas and the security brigade reinforced the feeling of a populace under siege by their own government.

Within a few days, ten of the twelve radio stations were returned to their owners and operators, and the movement kept two stations, Radio Oro and Radio La Ley. Radio La Ley replaced in importance the previous stations held by movement participants. With a broadcasting power that reached nearly eighty percent of the communities in Oaxaca, Radio La Ley served as an amplifier for the movement and an important news source for the entire state.<sup>337</sup> Renamed Radio APPO: La Ley del Pueblo, it served much the same function as the previous occupied media outlets, with one important programming distinction: it dedicated all night to a program entitled "The Hour of the Barricades," in which one could hear the calls for assistance, information on what happened the previous day, and the use of a call in number through which barricade participants could send messages, greetings, and expressions of solidarity to other

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<sup>335</sup> David Venegas, interview with author, July 17, 2012.

<sup>336</sup> Zires, "Estrategias de comunicación," 180.

<sup>337</sup> Ibid, 180.



barricades across the city.<sup>338</sup> In this manner, Radio APPO: La Ley del Pueblo served not just as a source of information, but as a psychological support for the movement participants that spent their nights on the local barricade.

Radio APPO continued to function until October 23, 2006, when the government succeeded in blocking their signal. One listener recalled that he could still tune in to the radio signal, but all that he heard was the same death metal music repeated over and over.<sup>339</sup> However, by that point, Radio Universidad had been repaired and was ready to take over where Radio APPO was cut off. Simultaneously, the government began operating its own clandestine radio station. Similar to the website discussed earlier, Oaxaca en Paz, the government's Radio Ciudadana broadcast calls to vigilantism. It announced over the airwaves the crimes of social movement leaders, called on Governor Ruiz to deal with the movement once and for all, and "incited the population to remove the barricades."<sup>340</sup>

With all other signals blocked, the only two radio stations that remained on air were Radio Universidad and Radio Ciudadana, operating in a polarized Oaxacan society as counterpoints to one another. In Radio Ciudadana's first days on air at the end of October, Enrique Rueda Pacheco announced that the teachers would be returning to the classroom, having received the majority of their original list of demands. For many other movement participants, as discussed earlier, that Sección 22 would abandon the movement was seen as a betrayal of all they had fought for over the previous almost five months. As such, when the federal police

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<sup>338</sup> Ibid, 183.

<sup>339</sup> Horacio Gómez Pineda, interview with author, July 15, 2012.

<sup>340</sup> Zires, "Estrategias de comunicación," 185.

forces moved into Oaxaca on October 29, movement participants reinforced certain crucial locations around the city, one of which was the studio of Radio Universidad.

On November 2, a day that later became as emblematic to some as the day of the attempted *desalojo*, the federal police forces began to move toward UABJO, the public university and the site of the Radio Universidad. Immediately the call for help went out over the radio and via fireworks, a call that was heeded by hundreds of movement participants. With fireworks, molotov cocktails, and rocks, the people on the barricades held back the federal police for hours in defense of the radio station. As one reporter characterized it, the majority of the fighters were young men, "the youths were in the midst of their revolution on the barricades."<sup>341</sup> Yet others noted a more varied crowd resisting the federal police: "Something notable was the role of the women. There were a whole bunch of young women in the front lines, and in the rearguard others were bringing in shopping carts full of rocks, yelling, neutralizing the cans of tear gas by dousing them with cola, and doing all they could to beat back the enemy."<sup>342</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The confrontation with the federal police on November 2, motivated by the need to defend Radio Universidad as the sole remaining widespread communication tool of the movement, was remembered as the last movement victory in the attempt to unseat Governor Ruiz. In the three weeks that followed, until the federal police finally gained control of the city on November 25 through a massive operation that saw hundreds arrested and many injured, Radio Universidad stayed on air, denouncing the crimes of a repressive state government and a

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<sup>341</sup> Pedro Matías, interview with author, July 26, 2012.

<sup>342</sup> Alejandro Moreno Corzo, "La batalla del dos de noviembre," in *La Batalla por Oaxaca*, ed. Carlos Beas Torres (Oaxaca: Ediciones Yope Power, 2007), 255.

complicit federal government. The outpouring of support to defend the radio station indicates the importance that it held for movement participants. As discussed above, the occupied media outlets provided a space in which working people could be on the air, whether radio or television, and tell their story. The occupied media outlets expanded the discourse from the normal news, sports, and music heard over the radio to one of political analysis and critique, a discourse that had the effect of promoting engagement in democracy.

Beyond occupied media outlets, the social movement that was born from repression against the teachers union used a variety of communication tools to broaden the political and social discourse, to mobilize movement participants, and to articulate visions of the possibilities of an Oaxaca without the enduring PRI government. The counterhegemonic *grafiteros* who painted the walls of the city put up images that questioned deeply held social norms such as the role of women in society. They further used their artwork to transcend the overarching demand of the Governor's resignation to articulate an anti-capitalist, revolutionary dream of an Oaxaca without exploitation and racism, drawing on the biggest figures in revolutionary collective memory to make their points. They used very recognizable symbols and figures within Mexican collective memory to draw parallels between the struggle in Oaxaca and the struggle for social justice and revolutionary change elsewhere.

On the internet, a number of participants embraced the possibilities of technology to act as "communicators." Kiado Cruz and his colleagues compiled articles from all over the country and republished them in an attempt to ensure that the movement participants (as well as readers elsewhere) were well informed about the movement and how it was being reported. They further began to engage in their own form of amateur journalism to elevate the voices of the participants

on the ground level. Although the use of social media and internet technology paled in comparison to its use in the Arab Spring and the various forms of Occupy movements that sprung up around the globe in 2011 and 2012, Oaxaca Libre's existence was surely the first time in Oaxaca that this technology had been used to support a social movement.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, was the fact that those who operated and engaged in media and communication during the movement, in whatever form it took, were unorganized more often than not. Although they often organized themselves in the midst of the movement, creating parallel bodies that operated both within and independently of the APPO and Sección 22, the various forms of media provided the opportunity for participation on one's own terms. From redirecting artistic endeavors to manning the barricades in defense of the lone remaining movement media outlet, those that did not come into the movement as part of existing organizations played crucial roles in the development and continuation of the movement. They often pushed the organized actors to take more radical stances, and were essential elements in the day-to-day functioning of the movement. They were the artists and engineers, the family-members and neighbors, all of whom contributed to the movement in their own fashion in the streets, in occupied media outlets, and on the barricades.

## Conclusion

On October 27, 2006, Bradley Will, an independent journalist working with Indymedia, filmed his own assassination during a confrontation between protestors and armed assailants in Santa Lucia del Camino. In his last minutes, which have been uploaded to Youtube, one can see the testimony immediately prior to the confrontation. A woman that he is interviewing tells him:

That truck right over there [*points to the truck down the street*], two men got out with pistols in their hands and they started to shoot at us. It is that truck that is burning over there...For that reason everyone came out to defend us. They took three people away and they haven't appeared yet. They are PRIistas from the municipality of Santa Maria [unintelligible]. They pay them \$300MX per day to come attack us. We are the people, not the teachers! We are the people, not the teachers! We are people who are fighting for our rights. We don't want to live like this anymore. We don't want to live in a state of repression, of blackmail, of assassinations...When Ulises leaves, that is when we will have peace.

Brad's continues filming as we hear someone in the background say, "more thugs just arrived," and we begin to hear gunshots. The atmosphere is tense, protestors, mostly young and mostly male, are out on the streets trying to find the armed attackers. The protestors are armed with rocks, slingshots, and fireworks. Many of them are wearing bandanas to cover their faces. Periodically, there are more shots fired that can be heard although there are no gunmen visible. The protestors converge on the house that the armed men have gathered in and they begin to throw rocks at the door and over the fence. One person tries to kick in the gate, and the response is more shots fired into the air. The protestors gather again down the street, trying to keep under cover as best they can. Someone retrieves a truck and uses it to ram down the metal fence of the house. More gunshots, more rock throwing, an older man has been shot although his wound seems minor. Someone steps out of the house and fires, Brad yells and drops the camera. Brad

is carried away screaming "help me, help me!" and his camera is moved to the side. It continues recording the gunshots and yelling protestors.<sup>343</sup>

On the same day, October 27, there were two Oaxacan protestors killed in addition to Brad Will, and the photographer Oswaldo Ramírez from *Milenio* (Monterrey) was wounded. Thanks to the presence of additional journalists, the national daily *El Universal* and other media outlets were able to disseminate photos of the armed assailants. They identified the armed individuals as employees of the municipal government: the mayor of Santa Lucia del Camino, the chief of personnel, the chief of security and two police officers.<sup>344</sup>

Brad Will's death was hardly exceptional. He was only one of a number of dead at the hands of state violence during the 2006 movement. Various estimates put the number of assassinated between eighteen and twenty-seven, but Brad's death, as the only foreigner, was the death that warranted federal intervention.<sup>345</sup> Two days later, federal police forces entered Oaxaca and took control of the capital city.

Although the federal government had engaged in negotiations with movement representatives, the reality was that the federal government was reluctant to intervene in the Oaxacan conflict. Since the political reforms under President Zedillo (1994-2000) that decentralized executive authority, and the presidential election of 2000 that unseated the PRI for the first time in Mexico's post-Revolutionary history, state governors possessed significant

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<sup>343</sup> "Video de Brad Will en Oaxaca - 27/10/2006," accessed December 7, 2013, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OHdkmTJDutc>.

<sup>344</sup> Staff writer, "¿Quién Era Brad Will?" *El Universal*, October 29, 2006; Luis Hernández Navarro, "Brad Will," *La Jornada*, October 30, 2006; Al Giordano, "Brad Will, New York Documentary Filmmaker and Indymedia Reporter, Assassinated by Pro-Government Gunshot in Oaxaca while Reporting the Story," *NarcoNews*, October 27, 2006, <http://www.narconews.com>.

<sup>345</sup> Amnesty International, "Oaxaca - Clamour for Justice," 2007, 1; Denham and the C.A.S.A. Collective, *Teaching Rebellion*, 282.

autonomy from the federal executive branch. The absence of the previous control that the federal executive had wielded over state governors "empowered state-based hard-liners and gave political cover to local authoritarians bent on resisting the competitive pressures of national politics."<sup>346</sup> In Oaxaca's case, the party machinery of the state-level PRI sought to preserve its power against political and social components by reconstituting itself as a state-level corporatist body.<sup>347</sup> In an assessment by the US Embassy in Mexico, embassy officials judged that "the PRI years ago lost support among the majority of [the Oaxacan] population, but was able to remain in power through its grip on political institutions."<sup>348</sup>

In doing so, the consolidated power of the Oaxacan PRI made itself felt on the national level as it consistently delivered votes for the national PRI and sent PRI representatives to the federal legislature. Although the PAN held the presidency, the PAN did not make up a majority in the legislature, making the PRI ever more important for President Fox's and incoming President Calderón's ability to govern. As President Calderón had only barely beaten the PRD's Andrés Manuel Lopez Obrador, who refused to recognize the validity of the 2006 presidential election, "the deadlock was a godsend to the Oaxacan governor [because]...the PAN was ready to negotiate. In exchange for the PRI recognition of its victory, it promised cooperation on several issues, including the fate of the Oaxacan PRI."<sup>349</sup>

In the midst of negotiations between the federal government and the Oaxacan PRI as well as between the federal government and the Oaxacan protestors, Brad Will was assassinated.

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<sup>346</sup> Gibson, *Boundary Control*, 145.

<sup>347</sup> Snyder, *Politics after Neoliberalism: Reregulation in Mexico*, 27.

<sup>348</sup> "Mexico's 'Other Half,' - The View From Oaxaca (Part 1)," US Embassy Cable, August 14, 2006, accessed June 13, 2013, <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2006/08/06MEXICO4534.html>.

<sup>349</sup> Edward Gibson, *Boundary Control*, 143.

In the month prior, the US Embassy noted: "As the four month strike continues, it is complicating President Fox's exit and worrying president-elect Felipe Calderon. Although Fox has assured Calderon he will resolve the crisis before leaving office December 1, he appears to be vacillating in his response with a strategy of 'wait and see.' The federal government finds itself in a pickle."<sup>350</sup> Brad Will's death, in addition to the multiple deaths that same day, provided the impetus for President Fox to send in the *Policía Federal Preventiva* (Federal Preventive Police - PFP).

### **Barricade by Barricade**

On October 29, the four thousand federal police slowly entered Oaxaca, removing barricades as they passed from the outskirts to the city center. In their operation, which began to reach the city center around two in the afternoon, the federal police "broke barricades with tanks that shot high-powered water, shooting firearms, and throwing tear gas."<sup>351</sup> By seven in the evening, after a failed attempt at negotiations with Secretary Abascal and three protestor deaths, the APPO surrendered the Zócalo and retreated to the campus of UABJO. Over the course of the evening, police began raiding homes and barricades, arresting 50 protestors and detaining them at the local military base.

As briefly mentioned in Chapter 5, on November 2, the APPO won its only battle against the federal police forces in a confrontation in front of the university campus, at the barricade at *Cinco Señores*. The original mission of the PFP, according to *La Jornada*, was to remove the barricades blocking traffic, and they possessed orders not to violate the grounds of

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<sup>350</sup> "Oaxaca: Attitudes Harden as Protestors Shift," US Embassy Cable, September 28, 2006, accessed June 13, 2013, <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2006/09/06MEXICO5567.html>.

<sup>351</sup> Enrique Méndez, Blanche Petrich, Gustavo Castillo, and Octavio Vélez Ascencio, "Con tanquetas y disparos entran las fuerzas policiacas a Oaxaca," *La Jornada*, October 30, 2006.



the university. APPO members countered that *Cinco Señores* was the only barricade defending Radio Universidad, the largest remaining communication tool of the movement. As the PFP neared the barricades, "groups of suspected *PRIistas* and state police, which were identified by the *Secretaría de Gobernación*, provoked the police advance. The intention to generate more violence has, furthermore, the objective of keeping the PFP in Oaxaca as long as possible, not to maintain order, but to sustain Ulises Ruiz in his post."<sup>352</sup>

Over the course of seven hours, protestors battled the PFP. The PFP used water cannons with a water/chemical mix that burned on contact, two helicopters that launched tear gas canisters, but refrained from using firearms. According to one participant, "young boys were running around with shopping carts filled with rocks and the slingshots...people were making Molotov cocktails and throwing them at the tanks to try to stop them. People were defending themselves with sticks and stones, and whatever else they could find."<sup>353</sup> Thousands came out to defend the barricade and the PFP found themselves surrounded by protestors throwing rocks and launching fireworks. At the end of the confrontation, the PFP was forced to retreat, taking with them thirty detainees, and leaving some forty wounded after the battle, including ten police officers.<sup>354</sup>

November 2 would be the last victory for the APPO as the PFP embarked on a coordinated mission rounding up APPO leaders and other identified members of the social movement. It was during this point that APPO leaders asked for sanctuary from the Catholic

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<sup>352</sup> Enrique Méndez, Gustavo Castillo, and Octavio Vélez Ascencio, "Férrea resistencia civil en la UABJO y calles alledañas," *La Jornada*, November 3, 2006.

<sup>353</sup> Denham and the C.A.S.A. Collective, *Teaching Rebellion*, 196-197.

<sup>354</sup> Enrique Méndez, Gustavo Castillo, and Octavio Vélez Ascencio, "Férrea resistencia civil en la UABJO y calles alledañas," *La Jornada*, November 3, 2006.

Church, only to find themselves rebuffed. Even though Sección 22 had returned to the classroom following their negotiations with the federal government, their leaders too found themselves subject to harassment and detention by the occupying police forces. Over the next three weeks, the numbers of APPO participants dwindled through fear and repression, until the APPO decided to stage one last large protest to demand the resignation of Governor Ruiz.

On November 25, starting nearly eight kilometers from the center of the city, thousands of movement participants began a peaceful march demanding freedom for detained movement participants, the resignation of Governor Ruiz, and a plan to install a symbolic siege around the PFP in the Zócalo.<sup>355</sup> Upon arrival in the center of the city, the marchers installed themselves blocks away from the federal police, thinking that they had peacefully accomplished their mission. However, "at 5 o'clock in the afternoon, a group of teenagers started looking for trouble. They wanted to confront the PFP, and that's when it all exploded. There was a big confrontation, with teargas, gunfire (yes, there was shooting) and after that there were fires."<sup>356</sup>

The battle ended hours later with hundreds wounded, twenty by gunfire, over one hundred arrested, and public and private buildings burned. Finger-pointing went both ways, with the authorities claiming that the APPO was responsible for the destruction in the city center while the APPO claimed that the police themselves and movement infiltrators were responsible for the destruction, which included "documents that the government would just as soon see disappear."<sup>357</sup> The mass arrests, further arrest warrants, and the PFP's apparent willingness to

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<sup>355</sup> Octavio Vélez Ascencio, "Ataca la PFP tras marcha de la APPO; más de 100 heridos," *La Jornada*, November 26, 2006.

<sup>356</sup> Denham and the C.A.S.A. Collective, *Teaching Rebellion*, 239.

<sup>357</sup> Octavio Vélez Ascencio, "Ataca la PFP tras marcha de la APPO; más de 100 heridos," *La Jornada*, November 26, 2006; and Denham and the C.A.S.A. Collective, *Teaching Rebellion*, 239.

use firearms against a movement armed with stones and fireworks finally crushed the last vestiges of the mass movement that had started six months earlier. Although there were periodic marches demanding the release of political prisoners, the fear of reprisal ensured that the numbers of protestors continuing to operate paled in comparison to the masses of the months prior.

Although the Oaxacan movement succumbed to force, many participants argued that their defeat has forever changed the nature of Oaxacan politics and society. As Prospero explained in Chapter 3, participation in the movement taught him and others lessons in organizing and political activity.<sup>358</sup> Others, such as David Venegas, argued that movement participation broke down social barriers between classes and between indigenous and *mestizo* Oaxacans.<sup>359</sup> Nearly all interviewees pointed to opposition candidate Gabino Cue's gubernatorial election in 2010 as a direct result of the movement that had opened political possibilities for parties other than the PRI.

To truly understand the operation and legacy of the 2006 movement, it is useful to examine the movement in the context of protest and contention elsewhere in Mexico and internationally. In a recent issue of *Contemporary Sociology*, Francesca Polletta, the social movement theorist who is most known for her work around prefigurative politics, observed, "today, bottom-up decision making seems all the rage. Crowdsourcing and Open Source, flat management in business, horizontalism in protest politics, collaborative governance in policymaking - these are the buzzwords now and they are all about the virtues of nonhierarchical

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<sup>358</sup> Prospero Martínez, interview with author, July 17, 2012.

<sup>359</sup> David Venegas, interview with author, July 17, 2012.

and participatory decision making."<sup>360</sup> Oaxaca's 2006 social movement was certainly that, constituting the APPO on the basis of horizontal organizing and consensus decision-making. This form of organization was hardly new in Oaxaca as the APPO drew upon constitutionally recognized forms of indigenous communal governance as well as on Oaxacan social movement precedents.

Beyond the borders of indigenous Oaxaca, the organization of the APPO inspired the formation of similar assemblies in other states around Mexico and among the Oaxacan migrant population in the United States. Although the social movement assemblies in states like Puebla, Michoacán, and Mexico City hardly compared to the activity in Oaxaca, this revitalized form of social movement organization sparked the imaginations of different forms of democracy. The more recent Mexican social movement, Yo Soy 132, which arose in 2012 against the election of the PRI presidential candidate Enrique Peña Nieto also took on a decentralized, non-hierarchical form in its manifestations across the nation. In Oaxaca, many of the Yo Soy 132 participants were too young to have fully participated in the 2006 movement, but nonetheless drew upon the collective memory of resistance and struggle that the movement has left for subsequent Oaxacan activism.<sup>361</sup>

Around the world, since the Oaxacan movement, we have seen the Arab Spring, Occupy Wall Street, *los Indignados* in Spain, and massive protests against globalization, economic crises, and lack of democratic representation - many of which, as Francesca Polletta points out, have organized with deliberate horizontalism. What this suggests is that the Oaxacan movement, while infused with local particularities of protest repertoires, is also part of a global trend of

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<sup>360</sup> Polletta, "Participatory Democracy in the New Millennium," 40.

<sup>361</sup> Personal observations while conducting field work in Oaxaca, July 2012.

social movement organizational forms coming together in rejection of the current political and economic model in power. In Latin America, Kurt Weyland has noted that the economic policies of the last three decades, commonly known as neoliberalism, "have limited and weakened the quality of democracy in Latin America."<sup>362</sup> As such, leftist political parties, labor unions, and other activist organizations have been seeking new ways to exert power and influence in a system that has weakened their access to government and public policy.

When examining the various explanations for the movement in Oaxaca, from Oaxaca's tradition of resistance to a popular discontent with subnational authoritarianism, it is clear that there is some truth in all of these theories. Yet none of them fully explain the diversity of participation in the 2006 movement. To a certain degree, it can be explained by access to power, or rather, a lack thereof. That is to say that the institutional control that the PRI had built in Oaxaca cut off the ability of civil society, in most of its forms - from labor unions to the women's movement to indigenous movements - to achieve negotiation and compromise with a government that had allied with big business and large investment as part of the neoliberal economic model. The concentration of power limited both representation as well as the inclusive nature of the past model of corporatism - and the Oaxacan government felt that it was in the position of power in its subnational corporatist model to determine who it needed or did not need as part of the new model. The new model was no longer one of corporatism, but one of consolidated domination.

Thus, the Oaxacan movement, in its diversity of participation, brought many more grievances and demands to the bargaining table than the demands of Sección 22 or the demand

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<sup>362</sup> Kurt Weyland, "Neoliberalism and Democracy in Latin America: A Mixed Record," *Latin American Politics and Society* 46.1 (2004), 137.

of Governor Ruiz's resignation. When articulating demands for more inclusive education, an expanded vision of human rights, gender equality, protection and support for indigenous lands and farming, what the various sectors of civil society demanded was fundamentally a reconstruction of hegemony and democracy in Oaxaca.

In William Roseberry's essay on hegemony in Mexico, he proposes that we use the concept of hegemony to understand social struggle. In his conception, "by focusing attention on points of rupture, areas where a common discursive framework cannot be achieved, it serves as a point of entry into the analysis of a process of domination that shapes both 'the state' and 'popular culture.'"<sup>363</sup>

That 2006 was a rupture in the Oaxacan repertoires of contention is somewhat of an understatement. Sección 22 and other social organizations had demonstrated patterns of action and mobilization, and expected the State to reciprocate with its repeated patterns of negotiation. Yet the violence that the state unleashed ruptured the hegemony of the understood social contract in such a manner that neither side of the conflict fully knew what to expect.

That the Oaxacan social movement ended by being quashed by federal police forces is one of the least surprising aspects of the 2006 movement. Such a challenge not only to the Oaxacan PRI, but Mexico's fledgling national democratization could not be allowed to succeed. In spite of the repression, arrests, and jail time for many of the more notable movement participants, the majority achieved very real, if limited, gains. Sección 22 received the majority of what they asked for, and they have reconstituted their annual political ritual from a position of strength - knowing that Governor Ruiz would not try another *desalojo*. The outcomes of the

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<sup>363</sup> Roseberry, "Hegemony and the Language of Contention," 366.

Forum on Constructing Democracy and Governability have, to a limited degree, been taken up by the Oaxacan legislature to craft political and social reforms. Finally, I believe that we can say that the social struggle succeeded in changing the hegemonic nature of domination and representation in Oaxaca, prompting democratization on the state level and opening the political imaginations of social movement participants in Oaxaca and beyond to conceptualize a different form of government, a different form of democracy, and different economic model.

However, movement participation was never without its contradictions. Within Oaxacan society, or at least among the Left, movement participation seems to be required for individual credibility. Furthermore, within the operations of horizontalism, the existence of hierarchical organizations, and competing factions and currents, may have spelled the downfall of the APPO from the outset. Although much studying remains to be done on horizontally organized social movements, the experience in Oaxaca may suggest that horizontalism is simultaneously fragmentation. In the testimony that opened this chapter, the woman said: "We are the people, not the teachers!" Her few words demonstrate that Sección 22, which had summoned civil society to join it in its conflict with Governor Ruiz, had lost credibility in the eyes of "the people" when it decided to return to the classroom. Sección 22's decision to return to work and step back from the movement also shows the difficulties, if not impossibilities, of horizontal organizing, particularly among hierarchical organizations.

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