

CULTURAL RESISTANCE AND REBELLION IN SOUTHERN MEXICO

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REBELLION FROM THE ROOTS: INDIAN UPRISING IN CHIAPAS. By John Ross. (Monroe, Me.: Common Courage, 1995. Pp. 424. \$29.95 cloth, \$14.95 paper.)

THE CHIAPAS REBELLION. By Philip L. Russell. (Austin, Tex.: Mexico Resource Center, 1995. Pp. 154. \$10.95 paper.)

CHIAPAS: ENTRE LA TORRE DE BABEL Y LA LENGUA NACIONAL. By Rodrigo de la Torre Yarza. (Mexico City: Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social, 1994. Pp. 147.)

SHADOWS OF TENDER FURY: THE LETTERS AND COMMUNIQUES OF SUBCOMANDANTE MARCOS AND THE ZAPATISTA ARMY OF NATIONAL LIBERATION. Translated by Frank Bardacke. (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1995. Pp. 272. \$30.00 cloth, \$15.00 paper.)

ZAPOTEC RENAISSANCE: ETHNIC POLITICS AND CULTURAL REVIVALISM IN SOUTHERN MEXICO. By Howard Campbell. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1994. Pp. 327. \$45.00 cloth.)

A RICH LAND, A POOR PEOPLE: POLITICS AND SOCIETY IN MODERN CHIAPAS. By Thomas Benjamin. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996. Pp. 376. \$40.00 cloth, \$22.50 paper.)

Few have not heard of the Zapatistas, the Zapatista Rebellion, and their spokesman, Subcomandante Marcos. The Zapatista Rebellion captured the national and international imagination and made the front page of newspapers around the world. And who can forget the graphic portrayal on Cable Network News of reporter Lucille Newman holding a mock rifle carved from wood. Marcos became a cult hero as his letters and communiqués written on behalf of the CCRG-CI of the EZLN (the Comité Clandestino Revolucionario Indígena, Comandancia General del Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional) were published nationally and interna-

tionally via print and electronic media. The results of all this attention were dramatic. An international aid caravan was organized to bring food, clothing, and medical supplies to the impoverished region. When newly elected President Ernesto Zedillo launched an offensive to break the Zapatistas and capture Marcos, an estimated hundred thousand protesters filled the Zócalo in Mexico City, chanting "We are all Marcos." Even more important, the Zapatistas succeeded in delegitimizing the Mexican government's use of force.

Yet few know the background of the Zapatistas, their causes, hopes, and aspirations. Three of the six books to be reviewed here were written by journalists with long experience in Mexico. *The Chiapas Rebellion, Rebellion from the Roots*, and *Shadows of Tender Fury* describe the Zapatista Rebellion, the course of events that led up to it, and what happened between the onset on 1 January and December 1994. These books make good use of scholarly research and current discussions (including Zapatista communiqués), despite sometimes presenting opinions uncritically where facts are needed. One shortcoming is that these works lack a cohesive theme. Their chronological organization gives readers a sense of the course of events and purpose but misses underlying implications.

Three other works under discussion here broaden the frame of reference historically, theoretically, and geographically. Thomas Benjamin's overview of Chiapas political and economic history, *A Rich Land, A Poor People*, explains how an elite was able to maintain control of Chiapan riches and exclude the indigenous majority despite changing political climates. Rodrigo de la Torre's *Chiapas: Entre la Torre de Babel y la lengua nacional* describes multilingualism in the Chiapas lowlands. Howard Campbell describes in *Zapotec Renaissance* how one group (the COCEI of Juchitán, Oaxaca) uses Zapotec history and culture in political struggles. Although the Zapatistas are the best known, they are not the only group in Mexico to struggle for equality and justice, either currently or in the past.

These three authors' accounts advance a different image of Mexico than that put forth by national image makers. In spite of Mexico's claim to first world status, the country is troubled by uneven internal development. These gaps have spawned localized uprisings throughout Mexico.

The common theme running through these three works is cultural resistance: the use of culture (albeit in created and re-created forms) as a locus of organization and a counterhegemonic tool in their conflict with entrenched political powers within the Mexican political economy. The consensual democracy of the Zapatistas, the ethnic identity of the Zapotec of Juchitán, and the conscious use of the Mayan languages Tzeltal and Chol in lowland Chiapas are elements of Mayan or Zapotec culture that have been wielded by social movements. The works under review collectively reveal the power of culture in the contemporary world.

The Zapatista Rebellion

The three books by journalists describe the Zapatista Rebellion well. John Ross uses a florid, sometimes exaggerated style, while Philip Russell relies more on direct description of selected events. *Shadows of Tender Fury* provides insight into the ideology of the Zapatistas. Before focusing on the counterhegemonic thrust of the Zapatista Rebellion, however, it is worthwhile to examine the rebellion itself and its causes.

Just after midnight on 1 January 1994, the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN) captured San Cristóbal de las Casas and three other municipal seats in Chiapas. Marcos is reputed to have said, “Feliz año nuevo, cabrones.” The takeovers were well organized and dramatically easy except in Ocosingo, where an estimated four hundred Zapatista troops battled thirty to forty state police who had barricaded themselves in the city hall. By New Year’s Day, the Zapatistas were in control. They sacked government offices and destroyed government documents. They looted stores and took control of the radio station in Ocosingo.

In San Cristóbal at noon on that day, Zapatista leaders proclaimed the Declaración de la Selva Lacandona. The document states,

We are the product of five hundred years of struggle. . . . We are denied the most elementary education so that they can use us as cannon fodder and plunder our country’s riches, uncaring that we are dying of hunger and curable diseases. Nor do they care that we have nothing, absolutely nothing, no decent roof over our heads, no land, no work, no health, no food, no education. . . .

But today we say enough! We are the heirs of the people who truly forged our nation, we are the millions of the dispossessed, and we call on all of our brothers and sisters to join us on the only path that will allow us to escape a starvation caused by the insatiable ambition of a seventy-year-old dictatorship. . . . (*Shadows of Tender Fury*, pp. 51–52)

The declaration goes on to lay out demands for “work, land, housing, food, health, education, independence, freedom, democracy, justice, and peace” (p. 54).

The next day, the EZLN withdrew from San Cristóbal and tried to withdraw from Ocosingo. But they were trapped by federal troops in the central market. In the bloodiest fighting of the rebellion, ninety-three were killed—Zapatistas, federal troops, and civilians. Within the next two weeks, the government dispatched more than fifteen thousand troops along with helicopter gun ships and fighter planes. The Zapatistas disappeared into the hills. The initial phase of the Zapatista Rebellion was over, along with most of the fighting. But what caused them to leave the jungle, hills, and canyons in the first place?¹

1. See also George Collier’s excellent book, *Basta! Land and the Zapatista Rebellion in Chiapas* (Oakland, Calif.: Food First, 1994).

The first day of 1994 also marked the inauguration of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), known in Mexico as the *Tratado Libre Comercial* (TLC). When questioned about the timing of the uprising, Marcos responded, “the free trade treaty is the death certificate for the ethnic peoples of Mexico” (Ross, p. 21). NAFTA would flood the market with cheap imports from the United States—especially maize, which U.S. farmers produce more efficiently than do the indigenous Maya—and ruin the local peasant economy (Russell, p. 16). Yet according to Marcos, the EZLN had been organizing for ten years prior to NAFTA. Thus NAFTA, while significant, must be considered only a proximate cause, an event used by the Zapatistas to further their cause. The timing was perfect: an uprising by impoverished and marginalized indigenous people to counter Mexico’s claim to first world status.

Another significant factor was the reform of Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution in 1992. The Agrarian Code written into the postrevolutionary Constitution of 1917 granted poor landless citizens the right to petition the government for grants of land—the Mexican *ejido*. The reforms in 1992 ended these rights and dashed any hope of obtaining land. Marcos explained, “The comrades say that land is life, that if you don’t have land, you’re living dead, so why live. It’s better to fight and to die fighting” (Russell, p. 40).

But neither NAFTA nor agrarian reforms caused the rebellion. They were only the most recent events. As Ross correctly points out, the rebellion was 502 years in the making. Ultimately, it was caused by an ongoing legacy of exploitation and discrimination that made the indigenous people of Chiapas one of the poorest in all Mexico. Chiapas was not “forgotten,” as some might suggest. Rather, it was the manner in which Chiapas had been incorporated into the national economy that produced such poverty. As Benjamin notes, Chiapas is not poor but rich. It ranks as one of Mexico’s top producers of coffee, maize, cattle, petroleum, natural gas, and electricity. Yet Chiapas leads the nation in the proportion of homes without electricity. Chiapas also registers the highest rates of illiteracy and deaths due to curable diseases. Government expenditures in Chiapas have perennially been lower than the national average. The lack of development has been matched by repression: Chiapas suffers from the highest number of human rights violations in Mexico. Marcos summed up the situation eloquently: “Five hundred years after the ‘meeting of two worlds,’ indigenous people have the option to die of misery or repression” (*Shadows*, p. 36).

The EZLN’s actions on New Year’s Day surprised many. But how much of a surprise should it have been? The indigenous people of Chiapas have compiled a long history of organized protest dating back to the colonial period, as Benjamin, Russell, and Ross point out. In the contemporary period, indigenous peasants have organized struggles for land and wages

since the late 1960s. Organized groups have staged land invasions, strikes, marches, blockades, and takeovers to protest landlessness, poverty, low wages, and lack of government assistance.² Marcos reports that he entered the area in 1983 and began organizing. Yet the government claimed to have had no warning. Ross, Russell, and Marcos argue otherwise. Prior to 1994, encounters took place between the rebels and government forces, and a Zapatista training camp was discovered in 1993. Ross goes so far as to argue that some elements of U.S. intelligence must have known about these matters. Yet it was kept quiet. Why? All the authors agree that the reason was the fact that the United States was in the middle of intense debate over NAFTA. Ross cites an insider's comment that had rebel activity in Chiapas been known, "NAFTA would have been dead" (p. 51).

The Zapatista Rebellion had several important consequences, in Chiapas and on national and international levels. Within Chiapas the rebellion stimulated peasant protest. Russell quotes one activist as saying, "The Zapatistas have opened our eyes" (p. 57). One hundred and eleven municipal mayors were forced out of office within the first five months. Landless peasants invaded ranches. In response and sometimes in anticipation, ranchers hired private armies.

The most enduring legacy of the Zapatista Rebellion, however, promises to be the Zapatistas' success in challenging the hegemony of the Mexican government. Even before the bullets ceased to fly, the battle to control representation of the rebellion began. It was, in terms established by Antonio Gramsci, a war of position in which each side strove for hegemony.³ The Zapatistas managed to present their perspective and thus broaden and in some sense recast the terms in which the rebellion was discussed. The accounts by Russell and Ross capture well this aspect of the rebellion. Even more insightful are the communiqués assembled in *Shadows of Tender Fury*. Together these three works show how the Zapatistas managed an unprecedented triumph in their war of words with the government, which was unable to delegitimize their cause. Three factors combined to enable the Zapatistas to challenge Mexican governmental hegemony: the EZLN's political ideology of seeking democratic and equitable governance (expressed repeatedly in communiqués), Marcos's broadly appealing prose, and a new era of communication technology that included the Internet.

The Mexican government's response, beyond sending thousands of troops and war equipment, was to attempt to discredit the EZLN. By 5 January, the Mexican government was claiming the rebellion was not an indigenous uprising but one led by Mexican and foreign professionals.

2. For an overview, see María Odile Marion Singer, *El movimiento campesino en Chiapas, 1983* (Mexico City: Centro de Estudios Históricos del Agrarismo en México, 1984).

3. Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, translated by Q. Hoare and N. Smith (New York: International, 1971).

President Carlos Salinas de Gortari called them “professionals of violence” (Russell, p. 26). Government representatives further claimed that the indigenous people had been manipulated by Guatemalans, Salvadorans, and “communistic priests” (Ross, p. 107).

Marcos joined the battle of words the following day. Speaking for the clandestine revolutionary council, he refuted these government assertions. In a letter addressed to the people of Mexico and the people of the world, he stated, “our EZLN does not contain a single foreigner in our ranks or in our leadership bodies” (*Shadows*, p. 58). He explained that EZLN troops “are mostly indigenous people of Chiapas, because the indigenous are the poorest and most dispossessed of Mexico” (p. 57).

As Marcos notes in his introduction to *Shadows of Tender Fury*, the communiqués were written for specific purposes. Yet readers can see how elements of Mayan history and culture were used in presenting the Zapatista cause. Hard work, poverty, discrimination, and death are the themes that formed the core of Zapatista rhetoric. These same themes are core elements in the culture of indigenous people in Chiapas. They know their history well—it is part of indigenous consciousness and identity. The Zapatista movement did not create this consciousness but used it and in the process transformed a cultural identity into a revolutionary consciousness.

Chiapas, History, and Language

Thomas Benjamin’s *A Rich Land, A Poor People: Politics and Society in Modern Chiapas* describes the legacy of exploitation and discrimination of the indigenous populations of Chiapas by elite, ethnically distinct *ladinos* that underlies the Zapatista Rebellion and the many other insurgencies throughout Chiapan history.⁴ He does not focus on the indigenous population. Rather, Benjamin examines the elite—*la familia chiapaneca*—and their control of economic resources and political power throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Benjamin’s well-supported thesis asserts that over the two centuries, the elite used government to promote “narrow economic development without broad-based social development” (p. xix). This new edition (the first was published in 1989) brings the history of Chiapas up to the outbreak of the rebellion. My only criticism is that in trying to support his thesis, Benjamin sometimes overlooks the unintended consequences of elite and subaltern actions. By following Benjamin’s analysis exclusively, one might understand why the Zapatista Rebellion occurred but not how or why at this time.

Spaniards conquered Chiapas in 1524. The area held no mineral wealth—no gold, no silver. But there was wealth to be had from Chiapan

4. Another excellent account is Antonio García de León, *Resistencia y utopía* (Mexico City: Era, 1985).

agricultural commodities, especially cacao and cochineal—and later coffee, cotton, sugarcane, and tobacco. Colonial institutions granted Spaniards control of indigenous labor with which to exploit these products. Although the mechanisms changed, this situation continued throughout the colonial and postcolonial periods. Postcolonial conflicts arising elsewhere in Mexico during this time took on superficial expressions in Chiapas. “Liberals” ultimately gained the upper hand. They strengthened the power of state government and increased ties to the central government. But according to Benjamin, the wealthy, landed regional bosses (*caciques*) continued to reign supreme.

Once Porfirio Díaz had consolidated his power, he set out to modernize Mexico. Porfirian governors in Chiapas followed his lead. They promoted a model of development emphasizing infrastructure: roads, railway lines, and private property. Communal land tenure was effectively abolished. Foreign investment in Chiapas increased, especially in the coffee region of Soconusco and the hardwood forests of the Lacandón jungle. Benjamin argues that these government actions resulted in “economic success [but] social disaster” (p. 49). This model of development benefited the elite, and the elite in Chiapas were large landholders producing agricultural commodities with indigenous labor. In fact, debt peonage was so rampant in Chiapas that it became known as “the slave state.”

Indigenous voices are not heard in Benjamin’s account. His analysis includes an impressive array of written records: government decrees and laws, and even letters between Porfirian governors and Díaz himself. The indigenous peoples did not participate at this level of governance, and readers therefore must infer indigenous political activities from this period.⁵

The Mexican Revolution ended the Porfiriato. The revolution in Chiapas, however, is known not for its peasant armies and its reforms—the stuff of central Mexico—but for its conservative response. Benjamin argues that no true social revolution occurred in Chiapas (p. 96). The peasants did not take up arms. Antagonists assumed national labels (*maderista* and *carrancista*), but they were largely labels of convenience in internal struggles for power. In 1911 leaders in the central highlands fought against power holders in the central valley. The conflict was short-lived, ending that same year. Benjamin argues that it was short-lived not only because of military defeats but because the highlanders organized an indigenous army that created the specter of caste war. When one of Carranza’s armies led by General Castro entered the area in 1914, the revolution arrived in Chiapas. Taking control of the government, Castro ended debt peonage and instituted other reforms. In response, conservative landowners

5. For an account of Chiapan history that focuses on the indigenous populations, see Robert Wasserstrom, *Class and Society in Central Chiapas* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1983).

organized an army that fought the revolutionary army to a standstill. In a 1920 agreement with President Alvaro Obregón, their leader became the governor of Chiapas. Control of economic resources and political power remained in the hands of the elite. But as Benjamin accurately points out, “small acts of local defiance, popular violence, village independence, and individual rebellion . . . created a Chiapas that was far more difficult to govern, control, and farm” (p. 96). The largely indigenous peasants had been revolutionized.

In post-revolutionary Chiapas, the elite both “resisted and adapted to changing circumstances” (p. 148). Over the course of the twentieth century, national politics played a progressively larger role within the state. With the ups and downs of various factions, agrarian movements and union efforts were either supported or brutally repressed. Little changed in the period immediately following the revolution. The counterrevolution had largely succeeded, leaving landowner economic resources intact. President Lázaro Cárdenas (1934–1940) and his governor in Chiapas forced through revolutionary reforms. The Departamento de Protección Indígena (DPI) was created to regulate and protect indigenous labor. Unionization increased. These two acts had unintended consequences, according to Benjamin. The DPI gave greater autonomy to indigenous communities but in the process created indigenous caciques. And the government in essence co-opted the unions. Nonetheless, by the end of the Cárdenas era, indigenous groups were more prone to organized action than ever before.

In the modern era (1950–1990), Benjamin argues, the government has continued to serve elite interests. During this period, Chiapas experienced considerable growth in the agricultural sector. Large private landholders benefited, while the ejido sector remained underdeveloped. Nonetheless, peace reigned during the 1950s and 1960s, with agrarian reform acting as a safety valve. In the 1970s, increasing demand for land by indigenous peasants coupled with severe repression by landowners and the government led to what Benjamin calls “a low-level, locally focused agrarian war, bitter and bloody” (p. 230). Peasants lost faith in government agencies (such as the Confederación Nacional Campesina, or CNC) and organized on their own. The better organized peasants then staged land invasions and strikes. The government responded with increased repression. By the 1990s, according to Benjamin, Chiapas was a state ripe for rebellion: the peasants had tested organizations, were experienced in conflict, and had suffered severe government repression. In 1992 the group who soon came to be known as the Zapatistas voted to go to war. Benjamin’s well-grounded analysis of Chiapan history leads readers up to this point. But the rebellion was not as inevitable as he implies. Many questions remain, not the least of which is the role of culture.

Rodrigo de la Torre Yarza’s *Chiapas: Entre la Torre de Babel y la lengua*

nacional promises insight into the culture and the possibility of cultural resistance expressed through use of indigenous languages by the peoples in lowland Chiapas from which the Zapatistas emerged (de la Torre's research was done prior to the Zapatista Rebellion). In the lowlands, he found (in addition to Spanish) six indigenous languages, which were brought to the region by immigrants arriving at various times in the past century. The interesting feature is that Spanish does not dominate. According to de la Torre, no linguistic hierarchy exists (pp. 90–91). The central question raised by his book is, why does Spanish not dominate?

De la Torre explains that the linguistic diversity in Chiapas is a product of immigration. First by river, later by road, various peoples migrated into the region in search of land. With the establishment of agrarian reform after the Mexican Revolution, rural landless peoples petitioned the government for grants of land. In this region, these solicitants were wait-listed on the basis of their landlessness, not their community of origin nor their language. Consequently, newly established ejidos often contained speakers of several languages. In addition, groups of indigenous persons organized by religion rather than by language founded communities.

Over time and with new generations, linguistic diversity transformed into multilingualism as individuals began to learn and use the languages of others in the region. The vast majority of Chiapans are at least bilingual. De la Torre found several individuals who speak three and even four languages. Spanish is frequently one of the languages spoken, seemingly more so than any other (no exact assessment is offered and the tables in which the data are presented are ineffectively organized). Yet de la Torre argues that it does not dominate in multilingual settings but is instead one of several equally valued alternatives for communication (p. 87).

Multilingualism continues, de la Torre argues, because of a conjunction of factors operating at three levels: the family, the community, and the region. Early settler families were often monolingual. Newer families, however, frequently brought together adults who spoke different languages. Children grew up in households where multilingualism was necessary and encouraged. Similarly, according to de la Torre, multilingual communities facilitate multilingualism. At the regional level, economic and religious factors promote multilingualism. Workers communicate through indigenous languages, thus perpetuating multilingualism. Translations of the Bible into indigenous languages have added support and value to those languages. Taken together, these factors help explain how multilingualism is perpetuated in the region. But they do not completely answer the question of why Spanish has not become the dominant language.

De la Torre argues that two theoretical models can be used to explain multilingual situations. The assimilationist model proposes that the national language, imposed in an obligatory fashion, will come to domi-

nate. De la Torre rejects this model on the simple grounds that indigenous languages continue to be spoken. Although accurate, his rejection misses some of the finer points he presents later: schools are relatively new to the area, and bilingualism (Spanish and one of the several indigenous languages) seems to be increasing. A better understanding of the position of indigenous languages and the “*lengua nacional*” should be expanded to include the Spanish side of the equation in more detail.

De la Torre also rejects the second model, cultural resistance. Unfortunately, his reading of this perspective is based solely on Fredrik Barth’s *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*.⁶ Barth has argued that ethnic identities create or maintain distinctions or boundaries between “we” and “they.” De la Torre contends that boundary maintenance is nonexistent or minimal in this region, and therefore cultural resistance cannot explain the continued use of many indigenous languages. More recent scholarship on ethnic identity suggests that ethnicity is situational and hierarchical.⁷ The indigenous peoples of Chiapas have an identity not just as Tzeltal or Chol but as indigenous groups as opposed to being ladino and Spanish-speaking. De la Torre asserts that competence explains why the Spanish language does not dominate. Individuals speak in the language in which they are most competent. Linguistic competence may play a role, but de la Torre misses the implications of choosing to speak indigenous languages, a fact he notes but ignores. Continued use of indigenous languages in the face of the official national language is a clear example of cultural resistance, notwithstanding de la Torre’s superficial rejection. Overall, *Chiapas: Entre la Torre de Babel y la lengua nacional* presents a fascinating topic and interesting data but is poorly organized and inadequately conceptualized. By reading between the lines, one can perceive potential bases for resistance in the rebellion that would emerge.

Zapotec Renaissance

The theoretical insight lacking in de la Torre’s study and in the accounts of the Zapatista Rebellion can be found in Howard Campbell’s *Zapotec Renaissance: Ethnic Politics and Cultural Revivalism in Southern Mexico*. Campbell’s rich description of the history of resistance by the Zapotecs of Juchitán, Oaxaca, focuses on how indigenous culture and ethnic identity became the foundation for solidarity and political action. Through selective use of history and ethnic identity, Juchiteco Zapotec culture has become a tool used in past and current political struggles. Campbell argues against stereotypical views of Indians: they are oppressed, they always

6. Fredrik Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* (Boston, Mass.: Little, Brown, 1969).

7. See the excellent review by Brackette Williams, “A Class Act: Anthropology and the Race to Nation across Ethnic Terrain,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 18:401–44.

lose, they bear rich culture but are victims, and similar clichés. The Zapotecs of Juchitán are none of these, Campbell argues. They “are intensely proud of their history, control local political offices, run most of the commerce, and have a lively cultural movement” (pp. xv-xvi). *Zapotec Renaissance* concentrates on the Coalición Obrera Campesina Estudiantil del Istmo (COCEI), a coalition of workers, peasants, and students in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. The book thus reveals processes whereby culture is constituted and reconstituted into a political force.

Campbell critically reviews three theories of ethnic politics, all of which he finds flawed.⁸ Marxist theories minimize the importance of ethnicity. Literature on new social movements neglects the importance of history. Campbell also criticizes an approach asserting that traditions are invented and identity is a cultural invention, a local tactic. This perspective, Campbell contends, “may not give a full account of the histories of cultural production and political struggle within which such ‘inventions’ are inserted” (p. xviii). Campbell advocates instead a processual approach based heavily on William Roseberry (1989), one that is simultaneously local and global and views history, ethnicity, and political struggle as both constituted and constitutive.⁹

Campbell argues that history and ethnicity are used by COCEI in contemporary political struggles. Yet their vision of history and ethnicity is rooted in a long history of political struggle. The author devotes several chapters to the history of the Zapotec Isthmus from the precolonial period to the present. This selective history emphasizes political conflict and ethnicity. COCEI leaders claim that “the Zapotec race” has always been free. Campbell sets out to prove their claim in *Zapotec Renaissance*.

The Zapotecs entered the region circa 1350 and conquered the local population. They resisted Aztec incursions repeatedly. In the sixteenth century, they were conquered by the Spanish but continued to resist. Campbell documents several rebellions during the colonial period. He notes that not everyone rebelled but the level of resistance was high enough for future generations to draw on (p. 26). After independence the Zapotecs of Juchitán continued to resist outside control, whether French (circa 1860) or Mexican.

Campbell describes the birth of COCEI. Previous organizations laid much of the groundwork, but Juchiteco students trained in Oaxaca

8. Campbell cites several examples. Prominent among them are Scott Cook, *Zapotec Stoneworkers* (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1982); *Power and Popular Protest*, edited by Susan Eckstein (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989); Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); and James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

9. William Roseberry, *Anthropologies and Histories* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1989).

City or Mexico City got the group off the ground. At first COCEI activities centered on freeing prisoners and raising wages (p. 151). With each victory, however, the movement expanded. A crucial factor in their success was that the Zapotec intellectuals leading COCEI also promoted Zapotec culture through art, books, language, and song. With the support of famous Zapotec artist Francisco Toledo, COCEI established the Casa de Cultura, which became a focal point for Zapotec culture and politics, fusing them into a powerful weapon.

In the 1970s, COCEI began to compete with conservative elements of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) for local political offices. COCEI leaders were jailed or assassinated in PRI attempts to repress the movement. Campbell claims that such repression only made the movement stronger. In 1978 they formed the “people’s government” (*ayuntamiento popular*), orchestrating land invasions, taking over government buildings, and organizing strikes. In the 1980s, COCEI became a legal political party and ultimately won control of local political offices, despite continued repression and fraudulent elections. Campbell argues that this unprecedented victory was due in large part to the impetus of their millenarian vision of Zapotec culture.

Zapotec culture and ethnicity played a central role in their success. Writers in the Casa de Cultura defined the struggle as a continuation of Zapotec ethnic resistance, digging into various archives to support their arguments. Campbell points out that the Zapotec language “became a very conscious, symbolic act of ethnic affirmation” (p. 176). Even COCEI demonstrations are very much in Zapotec style. They begin in neighborhoods with everyone participating, including women who did much of the yeoman work for the movement (Campbell notes that no women occupy leadership positions). Speeches in Zapotec are full of “culturally specific anecdotes.” With music, dance, and drink added, the demonstrations take on the atmosphere of a fiesta (p. 179). Clearly, the COCEI movement has used Zapotec culture to mobilize support and add legitimacy to their efforts. Campbell cites a speech given by a COCEI leader at a rally attended by President Salinas de Gortari: “We are a people who over the generations have defended with pride, passion, and bravery our ethnic identity” (p. 206).

Campbell also points out that COCEI leaders “developed a rich ethnic discourse whose central elements are a politicized view of Isthmus history and a grounding of current coalition politics in their supposed Zapotec cultural roots” (pp. 239–40). It is a local tactic, but according to Campbell, these traditions and identities are not completely fluid. They are situated within a history of struggle and its collective memory. In this regard, the Zapotec movement closely resembles the Zapatista Rebellion. An ethnic identity, a vision of history, a people’s culture in short is used to counter the dominant ideology and organize resistance.

One question remains. Why were the Zapotecs of Juchitán successful, albeit in a limited local forum? Why have the Zapatistas of Chiapas enjoyed the successes they have? Other areas of Mexico and Latin America have rich cultural traditions and deep visions of their history. Many groups in Latin America, especially indigenous peoples, have been exploited and discriminated against for centuries. Governments have either turned their backs or actively repressed such groups. These are the very points that the authors reviewed here believe brought on the Zapatista Rebellion. Yet few groups have taken up arms. Many remain oppressed, seemingly unmotivated and unorganized. The six works reviewed here suggest that maybe the answer lies not in the fact of exploitation or in the presence of an ethnic identity but in its use. An ethnic or cultural consciousness is not enough. Rather, to borrow a distinction made by Marx long ago for class consciousness,¹⁰ what is needed is a consciousness not just “of” but “for” ethnicity or culture. It is a form of cultural resistance that mobilizes and motivates a people. Culture may be a mechanism of resistance and rebellion, but it certainly does not assure success. The Zapatista Rebellion continues, however, despite the possibilities of a peace agreement begun with the San Andrés Larrainzar accords. In fact, the government has begun a campaign to destroy this sense of “culture” by promoting and even arming those who oppose the Zapatistas.

10. Karl Marx, *Capital, Volume 1*, translated by S. Moore and E. Aveling (New York: International, 1967; first published in 1867).