

DECOLONIAL AUTONOMIES: FAIR TRADE, SUBSISTENCE AND THE
EVERYDAY PRACTICE OF FOOD SOVEREIGNTY IN THE
HIGHLANDS OF CHIAPAS

by

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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Recognition of the world food crisis has increased popular and scholarly work on alternatives to corporatized agriculture. Among many alternatives, fair trade and food sovereignty are two movements that have received a substantial amount of attention. Scholarly work on these topics, however, has focused on larger-scale issues of policy, access and benefits accrued to producers and consumers within such alternative food systems. Producer-focused studies of fair trade—a broader certification system designed to ameliorate inequalities in the marketplace—have examined access to markets, producer benefits and fairness. Analyses of struggles for food sovereignty in the developing world—which are directed at producer control over agricultural systems—are focused on creating radical alternatives to neoliberal food systems. However, very little is known about the everyday agricultural and food production practices which farmers deploy as part of their involvement with these broader politics. Attempts to create secure livelihoods and food resources do not exist in a vacuum; they take place alongside other strategies for survival. This is a situation that is well illustrated by indigenous farmers living in self-declared autonomous communities in Chenalhó, Chiapas, Mexico, where,

cultivating subsistence crops and cash crops represents an effort to advance a political agenda for indigenous autonomy and create secure sources of food and income.

Based on research and fieldwork from 2010-2013, in this dissertation I examine how farmers who are linked up with broader networks (such as fair trade certification) understand and practice autonomy. Drawing on a feminist geopolitical approach, this research presents a ‘scaled-down’ analysis of autonomy, fair trade certification and practices of food sovereignty which is focused on the experience of farmers in self-declared autonomous communities. This approach provides critical insight into the daily negotiations of farmers as they interact with a range of networks.

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In the year of the 20th anniversary of the Zapatista Uprising—

Para l@s adherentes de la sexta y para l@s que trabajan por la justicia y la paz en Chiapas y el mundo.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

During the 2013 growing season, the rain-fed cornfields in the highlands of Chiapas, Mexico experienced a devastating drought. Conversations held with a group of *campesinos/as* during the harvest centered on the joy of fresh corn (*elote*) and the sorrow of the meager amount of corn remaining for storage. In a place where productive land is scarce and cultivation is divided between the production of food for the household and the production of coffee for sale, the drought made visible the everyday struggles of farmers to provide for themselves and maintain their political commitments to indigenous autonomy. In this group, a young *campesina* in a coffee-growing community talks about harvesting less *elote* as the harvest went by in order to save more corn for drying, for storage. Despite this frugality, the stored amount of dried corn for her family was not enough to last the year. “We will have to buy corn, and it is very difficult, because sometimes we have to buy it from people we do not know and it could be government or transgenic.” While peasant producers across the globe face similar trade-offs, what makes this group of *campesinos/as* unique is their position within overlapping and globalized political and economic networks.

This dissertation uses an examination of the day-to-day negotiations over subsistence and cash crops (primarily corn and coffee respectively) in self-declared autonomous communities in Los Altos—the highlands of Chiapas—as an entry point for understanding the globalized politics of indigenous autonomy, fair trade and food sovereignty. The findings of the research presented in this dissertation provide insight in three key areas. First, my data points to a scaled-down autonomy that is viewed as a

process and everyday agricultural practice by *campesinos/as*. Second, my research builds on existing critiques of fair trade certification, demonstrating the governmentality of fair trade certification development agendas and the trade-offs that farmers make for a guaranteed price. Finally, this work is an attempt to take an alternate approach to investigating food sovereignty, stepping away from a focus on creating so-called ‘radical alternatives’ to the neoliberal market and instead examining the diverse economic practices *campesinos/as* in the highlands. Farmers in the highlands put a variety of political and economic strategies to work as they negotiate the vicissitudes of everyday life. These strategies are predicated on farmer involvement in larger social movements in Chiapas and in global solidarity networks. The choices made by the group of *campesinos/as* introduced above are highly politicized as they are shaped not only by different social positionings but also through complicated political philosophies, commitments, and networks that crosscut daily production practices. These global and regional networks connect to day-to-day negotiations and decisions in farmers’ fields. At the center of this story are not just farmers, but *campesinos/as* ‘in resistance’ who are affiliated with the Zapatistas and Las Abejas social movements in Chiapas.

Social movements are often romanticized, but there is nothing romantic about being hungry. For within each social movement there is a membership: people, bodies, practices, and everyday actions, which make possible the larger organization. This dissertation is not about how the membership of the Zapatistas and Las Abejas maintain their organization, but about how they maintain themselves while simultaneously dealing with the politics of their struggle, their autonomy and their resistance. The most important element of everyday practice in self-declared autonomous communities in the

highlands is the production of corn and coffee. Yet agricultural production cannot be reduced to activities in the field; production takes on many meanings in the context of autonomous resistance. In this research, I examine how, in the context of their relationship to broader political movements and agendas, people make decisions about the spaces of agricultural production. To better understand how politics are mobilized in self-declared autonomous communities, it is essential to reflect on the social movements in which farmers in resistance claim membership.

The Zapatistas and Sociedad Civil Las Abejas

The movement most closely associated with resistance and a demand for indigenous autonomy in Mexico is the *Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional* (EZLN, the Zapatista Army of National Liberation). The Zapatistas are an indigenous social movement that adopted a more activist agenda in the 1970-80s in response to the simultaneous lack of recognition by the Mexican government and oppression by landholding elite in the region. The movement was made publically known through an armed uprising, which was timed to coincide with the official commencement of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) on January 1, 1994. Although the armed insurgency lasted only twelve days, the rebellion remains, and the demand for indigenous rights to land, work, housing, nutrition, health, education, liberty, democracy, peace and justice are still being pursued by the movement. These demands are based in reversing the ‘500 years of oppression’ (EZLN 1993) of the indigenous peoples of the Americas and are consistent with other indigenous movements for self-determination throughout the region. In the immediate period following the uprising, the Zapatistas

sought a resolution and the recognition of indigenous *campesino/a* cultural, political, and economic rights, the details of which will be expounded on in the chapter that follows.

Although the Zapatistas remain highly visible as advocates of indigenous rights and resistance in Mexico, in the context of Chiapas, the activities of a second, sister movement and organization, Las Abejas, whose membership lives and works alongside (and in solidarity with) Zapatista supporters is also important for understanding how farmers strive for autonomy and food sovereignty as part of their agricultural practices and their broader political commitments. In 1992, the *Sociedad Civil Las Abejas* (Civil Society of the Bees, Las Abejas) was organized in response to land conflict and injustice against women (Tavanti 2003). Based in their common Catholic religious identity and organizing through religious base communities, Las Abejas sought a peaceful way to claim rights (Moksnes 2005; Nash 2001). Their group was formed out of a need and desire to work collectively in spaces that were increasingly being torn apart through outmigration, land conflict, state-sponsored violence, and divergent community politics (Moksnes 2005). Although Las Abejas members seek to make their organization and broader social movement distinct from the Zapatistas, their identities and trajectories are intimately bound.

Tensions were heightened in Chiapas following the failure of the San Andrés Accords for indigenous autonomy (1996), agreements that had sought a negotiated solution to the demands put forth by the Zapatistas following their 1994 armed uprising (Collier and Quaratiello 2005; Nash 2001). Violence against the Zapatistas and Las Abejas in the late 1990s created a bond of solidarity between the two groups. In response to the mobilization of Mexican army troops in the aftermath of the uprising and

continuing into the late 1990s, a more cohesive opposition to the ruling party in Mexico (*Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI) - Institutional Revolutionary Party) commenced. This took the form of abstaining from voting in official elections, eschewing state support and making increasingly stronger claims to autonomy (cf. Moksnes 2005; Stahler-Sholk 1998). In communities populated by supporters of the Zapatistas and Las Abejas, families work together to maintain their ‘pacifist war against the state’ and to cultivate indigenous autonomy as enshrined in the negotiated (but not legislated) San Andrés Accords (1996). Efforts to deploy autonomy through the movements are enacted mainly through building collective systems of work and agricultural production, and in the case of the Zapatistas through self-governance and the provision of autonomous rebel healthcare, education and training in agroecology. Dissimilar to parallel movements for self-determination seen throughout the region of Latin America (cf. Blaser et al. 2010), the process of achieving autonomy for the Zapatistas and Las Abejas in the last decade has not been tied up with making demands on the state. Instead, community members have declared a *de facto* autonomy and have sought other avenues for gaining rights.

This is the context in which, in this dissertation, I examine how *campesinos/as* in resistance understand and practice autonomy. At the core of this conversation is a concern with power/knowledge dynamics related to how autonomy, solidarity and food sovereignty are understood and deployed as part of the struggle by farmers for indigenous rights. Taking a feminist geopolitical and decolonial approach, in this project I use conversations and observations in highland communities to examine the understandings that influence the agricultural practices enacted by *campesinos/as* in resistance in relation

to ideas of autonomy, fair trade and food sovereignty in self-declared autonomous communities.

A Feminist Geopolitical Approach

Attention to power/knowledge dynamics is an important theme for political geographers and especially for scholars interested in critical geopolitics, which relies on Foucauldian (cf. 1979) theories of deconstruction to expose how knowledge is produced. The primary avenue for exploring such dynamics is through analyses of state power and international politics. However, to date, critical geopolitics has largely remained wrapped up in discourse analysis, “only tepidly addressing the practices forged by such discourses” (Nicley 2009:19). Critical geopolitics assists with displacing the state as the central actor; however, as noted by feminist geographer Jennifer Hyndman, “it rarely engages in transformative or embodied ways of knowing and seeing” (in Jones and Sage 2010:317; see also: Dowler and Sharp 2001; Hyndman 2001; 2004; Nicley 2009; Secor 2001; Sparke 1996; 2000). A feminist geopolitics, which builds on the power/knowledge foundation of critical geopolitics, extends beyond the politics of statecraft and security to issues of identity and difference that are bound up in relations of nationality, race/ethnicity, gender, class, and sexuality. This extension facilitates analyses of the political in public and private arenas, and also the visible and hidden workings of power in everyday life (Dowler and Sharp 2001:167). Hyndman (2010) further argues that a feminist geopolitics acts to elucidate the more material aspects of how geopolitical processes shape and are shaped by the everyday lived experiences of individuals and communities (see also: Dowler and Sharp 2001; Hyndman 2001; 2004; Massaro and

Williams 2013). This elucidation incorporates and extends beyond attention to issues of gender, to assist with examining how power is deployed, by whom, how, and at what scales (cf. Hyndman 2004; Koopman 2011). It also serves to ground, locate and embody geopolitics and geopolitical processes (Dowler and Sharp 2001; Pain 2009).

At the same time as feminist geographers have, over the past decade, mobilized this critical intervention, in many cases we have failed to step outside the cannon, an observation that was made by Joanne Sharp, when she recently argued that “critical geopolitics remains a particularly western way of knowing which has been much less attentive to other traditions of thinking...” (2013:20). Both Sharp (2011) and Koopman (2011) have drawn in other ways of understanding and practicing geopolitics, Sharp through her discussion of Pan-Africanism and subaltern geopolitics and Koopman, through her examination of grassroots geopolitical reconfigurations in Colombia and alter-geopolitics. I attempt to extend this scholarship by linking Latin American philosophies that analyze the geopolitics of knowledge. This body of work is focused on decolonizing knowledge production and exposing power relations that have been normalized through neocolonial economic and political practices.

My attempts to put feminist geopolitics and the geopolitics of knowledge in conversation are a key features in this analysis and as such a critical component is addressing what Latin American philosophers and decolonial analyses call the ‘coloniality of power’ (cf. Dussel 2003; Grosfoguel 2002; 2007; 2008; Mignolo 2000; 2005; 2011; Quijano 1997; 2007; 2008; Vallega 2014). Put simply, the coloniality of power is used to make evident globalized hierachal systems of knowledge, which are based in the colonial experience, and specifically as Castro-Gómez notes “the idea that

the colonizer possesses an *ethnic* and *cognitive superiority* over the colonized” (2007:428, emphasis in original). Thinking through the coloniality of power enunciates knowledges ‘from below’ and the experience of the subjugated. In this way, the place of subjugation, is also the place of pluriversal thinking (see: Mignolo 2011). A decolonized knowledge production—that which attempts to document social injustices and recover subjugated knowledges while challenging paradigmatic racism, sexism and colonialism—allows for a dismantling coloniality (see: Tuhiwai-Smith 1999).¹ Note that this is not specified as the negation of western ways of knowing but as a decolonial approach one which recognizes multiple knowledges and ways of knowing the world (see: Grosfoguel 2011). Decolonial scholarship attempts to recognize and incorporate the production of knowledge by those who have been long-marginalized by race/class/gender/sexuality (see: Walsh 2007). The pluriversal result is recognition of alternative knowledges and practices in many places.

My work brings the geopolitics of knowledge and feminist geopolitics together and contributes and expands on the growing literature attentive to a feminist geopolitics. I attempt to do this within this dissertation by examining power/knowledge dynamics not solely in an abstract sense, but additionally by evaluating interactions with perceived changes in territory and politics and how such interactions are mobilized as part of everyday life and mundane agricultural practices. At the heart of this dissertation are three core concepts, indigenous autonomy, fair trade, and food sovereignty. Each is discussed as part of the politics of resistance that is practiced by *campesinos/as* in self-declared autonomous communities; the following sections provide an overview of each.

Indigenous Autonomy

The concept of autonomy lies at the heart of indigenous politics in Latin America, and unsurprisingly has been at the center of scholarly interest in indigenous social movements in the region. Much of this scholarship focuses on analytically ‘scaling up’ the politics of indigenous autonomy, as it relates to the nation-state, territoriality, national identity and social movement practices (cf. Castellanos et al. 2012; Stahler-Sholk et al. 2008; Stephen 1997a; Van Cott 2010; Waller and Marcos 2005); to the reconfiguration of citizenship and belonging (Mendoza, 2008; Stephen 1997a; 1997b; Ulloa 2011); or to the production of legal reforms shifting the nature of authority over people and territory (Speed and Collier 2000; Van Cott 1995; Van der Haar 2004). However, autonomy is very generally understood as decentralized self-governance over a territory (cf. Åkermark 2013; Cornell 2002; Heintze 1998).

However, as noted by Lynn Stephen in her work on indigenous rights movements in Mexico (1997a) a number of different understandings of autonomy exist in indigenous communities in Mexico, making it difficult to give a static definition of what it is or what it looks like on the ground. In particular Stephen identifies the ‘multi-ethnic’ autonomous communities forged in eastern Chiapas vis-à-vis other regions of Chiapas and the state of Oaxaca, where models were aligned more closely with specific ethnic groups (1997a:77). Complicating our understanding of autonomy is that the vast majority of work on struggles for indigenous autonomy remains focused on social movement demands for self-determination as well as the allocation and governance of territory (cf. Blaser et al. 2010; Díaz Polanco 1997; Stahler-Sholk 2010; Van der Haar 2004); few studies have

examined how autonomy is put into practice as part of everyday activities of indigenous communities and political actors.

Despite varying understandings of autonomy, in this dissertation I argue that the ability to maintain autonomy in highland self-declared autonomous communities is directly linked to the ability to produce food for subsistence and gain cash income through the production of coffee for sale. In the highlands of Chiapas, for *campesinos/as* in resistance autonomy is a process. It is a critical component of daily work activities and the practice of the political agendas of the social movements with which farmers are affiliated. Thus, my research takes a different approach to scholarship on the politics of indigenous autonomy by ‘scaling down’ and exploring the construction of autonomy through everyday life and practice, with a particular emphasis on how the practice of autonomy intersects with subsistence and fair trade coffee production. Autonomy as a lived experience in the highlands of Chiapas takes on new meanings and understandings in the context of the production of corn and coffee. Furthermore, when delinked from the politics of petitioning the state for rights to territory—as is the case in self-declared autonomous communities—more nuanced understandings of what autonomy is and how it is put into practice emerge. In particular I argue that scaling down from the demands of groups upon the state to the mundane everyday practices of farmers assists with viewing important processes linked to autonomy that we might otherwise overlook. Creating a commitment to examining day-to-day practices and to analyzing the process of building autonomy within communities, even as farmers are linked to larger-scale networks is critical to understanding the multiple meanings of autonomy and the paths taken to enacts it.

Fair Trade

One strategy of subsistence farmers to gain cash income in self-declared autonomous communities has been to engage markets that are tied to more direct sales, such as the fair trade market. The creation of cooperatives and the selling of commodities through the fair trade marketplace represent critical strategies for gaining cash income in peasant communities. The movement to make trade more fair represents an effort to create more direct trading relationships that are intended to improve producers' earnings, empower marginalized communities, and promote ecologically sustainable production systems (Bacon 2010; Jaffee 2007; Naylor 2014). Developed and deployed by producer groups in conjunction with non-governmental organizations in Europe and the U.S., fair trade certification and trading systems were designed with the aim of redistributing wealth in a more equitable way than 'free trade.' Very basically, certified fair trade products undergo a shorter commodity chain and are subject to price floors, which were designed to reduce small-scale producers' susceptibility to commodity price shocks.

Long hailed as a panacea for small-producers, recently the 'fairness' of fair trade has been questioned (Bacon 2010; Dolan 2010; Fisher 2010; Jaffee 2007; Lyon 2011; Naylor 2014). Within these critiques is the general question of whether fair trade certification is "working" for marginalized farmers, that is, whether farmers receive a net benefit from the pricing and programming (Naylor 2014; cf. Bacon et al. 2008; Barham et al. 2011; Dolan 2010; Jaffee 2007; Lyon 2007; Torgerson 2009). A major focal point of this research has been on fairly traded coffee. Coffee makes up the largest share of fairly traded products world-wide (Jaffee and Howard 2010) and the sale of coffee within the fair trade marketplace is intended to put a larger share of the coffee dollar in the hands of

producers. Studies have shown that fair trade coffee producers are slightly better-off than their conventional contemporaries (Jaffee 2007; Lyon 2011; Raynolds et al. 2007; Sick 2008); nonetheless, certification requirements bring a greater burden to fair trade producers, which is a trade-off (Jaffee 2007; Smith 2007).

In this research I critique fair trade certification by unpacking how third party certifier claims of solidarity and community development play out in self-declared communities in resistance. For coffee producers, the decision to grow and sell coffee is a long-term and risky one, as the maturation time for coffee plants differs substantially from edible crops and they take up space that could otherwise be devoted exclusively to food production. Yet, the sale of coffee has been an important income earning activity for subsistence producers, creating access to a cash economy for the purchase of items that cannot be produced at home. It also has enabled a large international solidarity network for the social movements that farmers are connected with. So-called ‘north-south solidary’ (cf. Raynolds 2002) and community development are important claims of success of fair trade certification (cf. FLO 2013). Indeed, connection to broader social and economic networks has been an important component of maintaining the visibility of the struggle of farmers in resistance. Earnings from fair trade certified coffee sales are important for maintaining autonomy as well. Cash generated from the sale of coffee assists with insulating farmers in times of economic need. Yet at the same time as farmers seek greater autonomy from the economic development plan of the state, they are compelled to meet standards for community development through their participation in certified coffee production. In this dissertation I utilize observations and discussions about the everyday experience of *campesinos/as* in resistance to problematize the claims

to solidarity and community development that are made as a part of fair trade certification. Specifically, I argue that the production of fair trade certified coffee represents a trade-off for farmers seeking autonomy. I further argue that studies of fair trade should not focus exclusively on whether farmers' lives are being 'improved' by fair trade pricing, premiums and community development efforts, but instead examine the meanings producers give to these practices as well as how fair trade production is woven into the fabric of everyday life.

Food Sovereignty

At the same time as farmers are negotiating a balance between their struggle against neoliberal economic development and their participation in export markets for fair trade coffee, they are cultivating secure sources of food and income that are based in diverse agricultural production and economies. Although farmers are interacting with capitalist-based markets as they strive for autonomy, their interaction with such markets is based in endogenous and appropriated knowledge systems that allow for diverse approaches to meeting material and social needs. Moreover, the politics of the Zapatistas and Las Abejas are multiple and intertwined with international social movement politics, such as those of La Vía Campesina (The Peasant Way), which has become the figurehead of the movement for food sovereignty. Communities in resistance are working toward a localized and diverse *soberanía alimentaria* (food sovereignty), which supports their autonomous resistance.

Receiving international attention in 1996 by being deployed by the transnational agrarian movement La Vía Campesina, the term food sovereignty has gained traction in

peasant communities and social movements worldwide (Martínez-Torres and Rosset 2010). Food sovereignty is promoted as an alternative to neoliberalism, a model that has, for decades, supported economic policies based in industrial, capital-intensive and corporatized agriculture and trade (Wittman et al. 2010). The food sovereignty movement, which seeks greater producer/consumer control over food systems, is a response to the building crises in the contemporary systems of control over agriculture that has garnered a significant amount of attention and support.

The term “food sovereignty” was coined to recognize the political and economic power dimension inherent in the food and agriculture debate and to take a pro-active stance by naming it. Food sovereignty, broadly defined as the right of nations and peoples to control their own food systems, including their own markets, production modes, food cultures and environments, has emerged as a critical alternative to the dominant neoliberal model for agriculture and trade (*ibid*:2).

Although this definition is potentially problematic because it includes all producers and consumers (see: Patel 2009), it serves as a basis for understanding not only how food is accessed, but also where it is produced and who is producing it (Rosset 2009b). This is an important departure from previous discourses centered on the “right to food” and “food security,” which emerged in post-war and neoliberal political economic contexts (Fairbairn 2010). The concept of food sovereignty is intended to go beyond both the right to food and food security by seeing food as not simply a commodity available on the market, but as a critical locus of social connections of production and consumption (Handy 2007). However, the practice and implementation of food sovereignty as a ‘radical alternative to neoliberal capitalist agricultural systems’ remains less well understood (Akram-Lodhi 2013).

The promise of an alternative food system has been especially provocative at a time when food is identified as a major factor in global politics (and geopolitics) (Brown 2011; Essex 2012). Food-related riots and violence reaching from Egypt to Haiti in 2007-2008 exposed long-standing problems with industrial-capitalist production-consumption systems.² Arguing that democratic control of the food system is an important step in constructing viable alternatives, food sovereignty is posited as the only viable solution (Desmarais et al. 2011; Rosset 2009b). Desmarais et al. argue that recent crises “result directly from an industrial, capital-intensive and corporate-led model of agriculture and that the time for “food sovereignty” has come” (2011:19). Yet how food sovereignty is to be implemented has drawn increasing critique by those who argue that issues of how to guarantee rights, where international trade fits and the ability of small farmers to achieve food sovereignty remain unaddressed (cf. Akram-Lodhi 2013; Bernstein 2014; Burnett and Murphy 2014; Edelman 2014; Hospes 2013).

In the case of the highland communities in resistance in Chiapas, the appropriation and adoption of food sovereignty is a daily practice as farmers seek to cultivate secure sources of food and income without state assistance and through diverse economic approaches. My project draws from scholarship on food sovereignty to critique the anti-capitalist narrative that has been adopted by proponents and suggest that a more nuanced examination of enacting food sovereignty is needed. By emphasizing its opposition to capitalist systems, the food sovereignty literature provides little space for conceptualizing how practices enacting food sovereignty are both within and related to spaces and decision-making processes that also incorporate current (capitalist) systems. Self-declared autonomous communities are exceptional locations in which the narratives

of food sovereignty play out differently, as *campesinos/as* in resistance attempt to distance themselves from the neoliberal marketplace and the state, while simultaneously drawing on collective production and sale of products. I argue that it is important to view diverse spaces of economic production that assist with putting into practice the ideas embedded in food sovereignty, but that are also enmeshed in the friction of interaction with different markets. In this chapter I seek not to determine what food sovereignty looks like or how it should be implemented, but instead to show how the ideas and goals of the food sovereignty movement are being appropriated by farmers in resistance in the highlands. In so doing, I hope to shed light on how producers link up with a number of different networks and politics, which fall both inside and outside neoliberal capitalist systems.

Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation utilizes the frameworks described above to examine articulations of autonomy, solidarity and food sovereignty in-place in the highlands of Chiapas. In particular I underscore the importance of feminist geopolitical approach toward analyzing the practices and ways of knowing and understanding these articulations. I attend to each in three separate empirical chapters, which are tied to my original research questions. Prior to delving into the data, **Chapter II** relates the key historical contexts in relation to farmer experiences with land, political organizing and indigenous autonomy and **Chapter III** details more deeply my epistemological approach, methods and limitations in conducting the research. **Chapters IV – VI** are stand-alone manuscripts that draw from the data collected over the course of the research to examine autonomy, fair trade,

and food sovereignty as they are practiced in the highlands. Each chapter is based in a decolonial approach and is concerned with expanding on feminist geopolitical analysis of knowledge production and material agricultural practice as they relate to the construction of autonomy, solidarity (in the context of fair trade) and food sovereignty. **Chapter VII** closes the dissertation, providing short summaries of findings, and offering concluding remarks. The scope of this dissertation only allows for the discussion of some options for non-universal ways of thinking and doing. Thus, there is not a solution, or policy recommendation offered at the end of the dissertation. However, alternate avenues and solidarity actions are necessarily discussed within these pages, yet at all times I seek to extrapolate and analyze rather than put forth dogmatic approaches to change. Instead I hope that the analysis contained in these chapters assists with unveiling the geopolitics of knowledge and the construction of resistance and autonomy through sites of agricultural production.

Notes

¹ Also note that this is a concept differentiated from ‘decolonized;’ as Walsh stated: “while colonialism ended with independence, coloniality is a model that continues” (2007:229).

² In 2008 it was reported that global food prices had risen eighty-three percent in three years (Wiggins and Levy 2008 in Holt-Giménez and Shattuck 2011).

CHAPTER II

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Introduction

Many historical examinations of contemporary Chiapas begin with the 1994 uprising of the Zapatistas, neglecting important historical processes and moments that are embedded in current experiences and events in the state. In this chapter, I aim to provide a simplified and relevant overview of the geographical-historical context for the questions examined in this dissertation, situating my analysis in the five hundred years of oppression experienced by indigenous peoples in the highlands as well as formal struggles for autonomy that reach back to the 1970s. This history provides the basis for discussing interconnected experiences and events in place across a number of spatial and temporal scales. Toward this end, I split this chapter into three geographical-historical moments in Mexico, Chiapas, and the Highlands more specifically: 1) Race and the invention of the Americas; 2) Land and Revolution; and 3) Post-revolutionary Chiapas. An examination of these geographical-historical processes is important because the experiences and practices in place in the highlands are impossible to interpret if rendered in ahistorical (or ageographical) terms. A discussion of these geographical-historical moments helps to ground the decolonial approach to the analysis undertaken in later chapters while also providing a basis for understanding the historically produced geopolitics of knowledge.

Chiapas is the southernmost state in Mexico (Figure 2.1), sharing an international border with Guatemala. Chiapas is the eighth largest state in Mexico and the 7th most populous (out of 32) (INEGI 2010). The 2010 census completed by the *Instituto Nacional*

de Estadística y Geografía (INEGI – National Institute of Statistics and Geography) in Chiapas recorded 4.7 million inhabitants, almost 30% of whom self-identified as indigenous.¹ The figure of 30% represents twelve ethnic groups, but the majority population is Tzeltal and Tzotzil speaking (INEGI 2010). These ethnic groups primarily populate the central highlands and eastern lowlands of Chiapas. In addition to demographic data, the government records data on marginalization, stating that Chiapas is the second most “marginalized” state in Mexico, and within Chiapas, the highlands has the highest degree of marginalization (CONAPO 2011).²



Figure 2.1: Chiapas State with Mexico inset, maps drafted by Derek Watkins

In arriving at the measure of “marginalization,” the government takes into account formal income and economic activities, housing and access to basic infrastructure (e.g.: running

water), education, health services, and migration. Many in Chiapas live and work in rural areas with scant access to such services, for example, in the official highland municipality of Chenalhó (highlighted in red, Figure 2.1) where this research was conducted, the vast majority of inhabitants are subsistence corn farmers who have been petitioning the state for access to resources for more than five decades. Indeed, Figure 2.2 demonstrates that the highest degree of marginalization (“*muy alto*” translated as: very high) maps seamlessly onto the highlands and Chenalhó in particular.

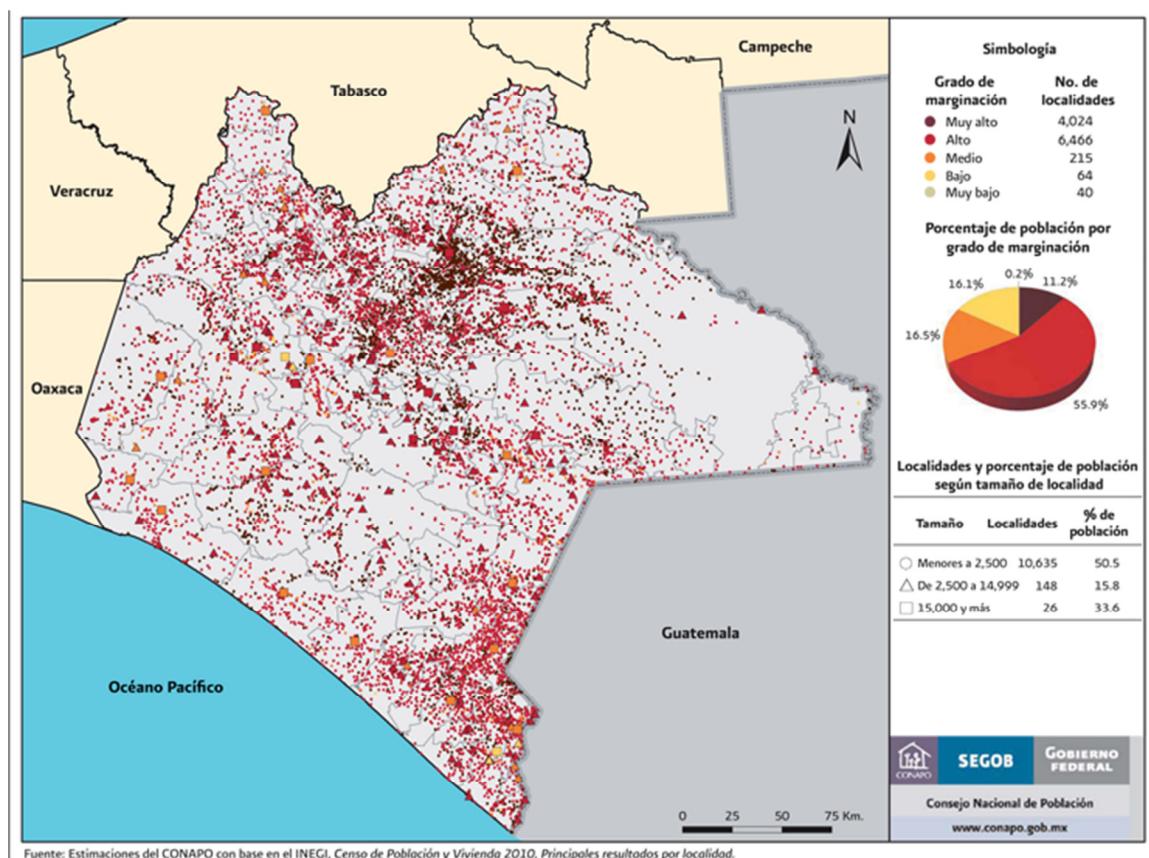


Figure 2.2: Chiapas State, 2010 degrees of marginalization map; CONAPO 2011

By other official measures, Chiapas is rich. In 2010, official data collected attributed the following percentages of production in Chiapas as part of the overall total for Mexico:³

- 44.5% of total hydroelectric production (top producer in Mexico);
- 26% of total mineral production (including gold, silver, magnetite, barite, lead, titanium and zinc)
- 2% of petroleum production
- 26% of timber production
- 78% of African palm production
- 41% of coffee production

Moreover, Chiapas is home to the second most biodiverse rainforest on the planet, the Lacandon Jungle. Twenty percent of Chiapas' territory is under official protection as federal natural areas and the state is increasingly a target for ecotourism projects (Flores 2014). Such ecological richness is measured against extreme poverty in Chiapas, creating a stark contrast on the landscape.

Chiapas is frequently treated by the state and by many scholars as a problem. This framing is based in the ‘impoverished population’ - ‘rich land’ contrast described above. Statistics on marginalization and resources are based in official narratives of economic development and ‘acculturation’ of the indigenous *campesino/a*. The state’s statistical representation of Chiapas is used to cast Chiapas and its population as a site for social, economic and environmental ‘improvement.’ In the recent Gubernatorial State Plan current Governor Manuel Velasco Coello wrote that his government would help to “put Chiapas in the place that it deserves, away from backwardness and closer to prosperity. The road to a successful Chiapas implies that development, economic betterment and welfare are present in each of the homes of each Chiapaneco family...” (*El Plan Estatal* 2013:7). Such official narratives provide a static snapshot of marginalization and strategic resource availability. This snapshot elides the complex spatial-historical processes that produce and maintain marginalization, as well as the longstanding resistance to these relations of power and exclusion on the part of the so-called ‘marginalized.’ The goal of

this chapter is to provide a deeper historical and geographical context, which will assist with understanding how these official narratives are constructed even while other narratives emerge as part of contemporary politics and indigenous resistance in the state.

Although the last three decades of struggles between indigenous *campesinos/as* and the state represent the focus of my analysis, none of these more contemporary dynamics can be understood without reference to the colonial and neocolonial relationships that have shaped the experience of southern Mexico for over five hundred years. Critical to understanding how indigenous livelihoods take shape in the highlands of Chiapas is the recognition of the colonial and post-colonial identities present in Mexico; furthermore, the experience of the colonial is not isolated to the period of conquest. The section that follows reaches back to the invention of the Americas to discuss the formation of racial and cultural hierarchies that were formed at the time of conquest and persist in present day.

Race and the Invention of the Americas

Before 1492, the Americas were not on anybody's map, not even on the map of the people inhabiting Anáhuac (the territory of the Aztecs) and Tawantinsuyo (the territory of the Incas). The Spanish and Portuguese, as the European occupants in the sixteenth century, named the entire continent that was under their control and possession. It may be hard to understand today that the Incas and the Aztecs did not live in America or, even less, Latin America. Until the early 16th century, America was not on anybody's map simply because the word and the concept ... had not yet been invented. The mass of land and the people were there, but they had named their own places; Tawantinsuyo in the Andes, Anáhuac in what is today the valley of Mexico, and Abya-Yala in what is today Panama... What is really confusing in this story is that once America was named as such in the sixteenth century and Latin America named as such in the nineteenth, it appeared as if they had been there forever (Mignolo 2005:2).

Prior to the arrival of the conquistadores in the Americas in 1492 and the 1500s there were no ‘Indians’ in Latin America (Mignolo 2002). However, through the conquest, the idea of racialized difference was imposed on the indigenous population, creating the other and distinguishing between the conqueror and the conquered. Categories of race and cultural hierarchies were invented by the Spanish as the basis for social order in the colonial system; the differences that were formulated by the conquerors were racialized in ways that highlighted sociocultural difference (dress, language, cultural practice) as much as bodily characteristics. The creation of these narratives of racialized/naturalized difference was utilized as a structure that tied people of diverse origins and belief systems to particular economic statuses that allowed for labor exploitation and dispossession (Quijano 2008). Such narratives of naturalized difference served to maintain the legitimacy of occupation and subjugation of the peoples of the Americas (*ibid*). The construction of race created new identities for these peoples—as all “Indio”—and these identities fell under European cultural, economic, and epistemological hegemony.

For Enrique Dussel (1995), the beginning of the modern era is tied to the conquest of the Americas. That Western Europe should call itself modern is based solely on the ability of the Europeans to set forth a trajectory for civilization and represent themselves at the apex. Quijano and Wallerstein (1992), writing from a Marxist perspective, tie the changing nature of this trajectory to the evolution of capitalism. They noted that “the Americas were not incorporated into an already existing capitalist world economy. There could not have been a capitalist world-economy without the Americas” (Quijano and Wallerstein 1992:549). The entry of Western Europe into the world economy was made

possible through the encounter with the Americas; the wealth that was amassed during the colonial period through resource plundering and extraction, as well as slavery and indentured servitude catapulted Western Europe into a global marketplace. The conquest also marked, as Dussel noted, not what has been long hailed as the “*descubierito*” (discovery) of the Americas, but the “*encubierito*” (covering-up) or “concealment and misrecognition of the non-European” (1995:66). For Dussel, Latin America was the first periphery of Europe (*ibid*:67). Through the subjugation of the peoples of the Americas (and of Africa), Europe defined itself; put differently, the violence of the conquest and the colonization of peoples and ways of thinking allowed Europe to create its other.

European cultural and epistemological hegemony, in conjunction with the establishment of world capitalism, brought all of the “experiences, histories, resources and cultural products...in [to] one global cultural order,” effectively elevating European thinking (Quijano 2008:189). This hegemony in turn allowed for a new global model which centered on/revolved around the European. As a consequence of this re-centering of the world, the colonial/modern system emerged and became the main framework in which knowledge is/was produced. The ways of knowing and frameworks that were used by colonized peoples were either usurped for the benefit of capitalism or forced underground, to the detriment of colonized societies (*ibid*). In conjunction with this, Grosfoguel (2007) argues that the minds of the people were colonized; as they were forced to learn the practices, language and religion of the colonizer; indigenous knowledge was subsumed and otherized identities were lost or hidden. The knowledge produced by Europe, and prioritized over all other ways of knowing and understanding

the world is an important historical practice that became embedded in indigenous societies in the Americas.

Critical to the elevation of the European over the indigenous was the aforementioned racialization of the indigenous population. People native to the areas being subjugated by colonial powers became ‘Indios.’ Through the label ‘Indio,’ people arriving from Spain identified themselves against the population native to the Americas. The identification of the other became a way to legitimize occupation and domination as well as violence against previously unencountered peoples (Quijano 2008:182-183).

Alejandro Vallega noted:

In terms of the construction of race, ultimately the point is that the colonizer distinguishes himself from the colonized by claiming natural superiority. This occurs as a hierarchy is established that recognizes those native to the Americas as naturally inferior to the colonizer...superiority is established by a series of mechanisms through which the colonizer allocates the colonized into a system of power and knowledge developed materially (2014:214-215).

During the height of the colonial period there were sixteen racial types articulated, including *indio* (indigenous) and *mestizo* (mixed white-indigenous) (Stephen 2002:84). Such designations were tied to a system of castes that recognized purity of blood and prioritized whites of European descent. In Chiapas (then part of Guatemala and annexed by Mexico in 1824), as the *mestizo* population grew the term *ladino* became the way to describe both Europeans and *mestizos*, while also describing indigenous peoples that had adopted European identities, including language, dress and urban lifestyles (Warren 1998:10 in Stephen 2002:85). Racially based divisions stemming from this period assisted in creating a long-lasting social hierarchy; race became an organizing principle for people and bodies. Independence did little to change colonial racial categories.⁴ The hierarchy, privileging ‘whites’ and subordinating ‘*indios*’ was normalized through labor

relations and legal codification throughout the colonial period and such racial categories permeated independent Mexico.

This colonial history is important contextual basis for understanding the contemporary struggle in Chiapas because economic and social development have become incontrovertibly racialized concepts. The view that indigenous peoples are ‘backward’ and in need of development is pervasive. Such a categorization strips a significant population of its political, social and economic agency, yet indigenous peoples in Chiapas have consistently sought rights and recognition. The next section turns to a discussion of the situation of indigenous peoples in Chiapas in the 19th century and early 20th century, leading up to and immediately following the Mexican Revolution.

Land and Revolution

Colonial racial hierarchies and inequalities cemented during the colonial period persisted in southern Mexico, particularly in Chiapas where indigenous peoples were fighting against their anchoring at the bottom of an increasingly deep socio-racial system. In seeking to understand the roots of contemporary indigenous livelihood struggles in Chiapas many scholars have examined the history of natural resource extraction and city building (cf. Collier and Quaratiello 2005), state formation and citizenship (cf. Harvey 1998; Stephen 2002), petitions for indigenous rights (cf. Harvey 1998; Nash 2001), and land tenure (cf. Bobrow-Strain 2007; Collier and Quaratiello 2005; Harvey 1998; Stephen 2002). However, in this chapter I do not seek to reproduce this scholarship, nor provide a comprehensive history of the Chiapan highlands. Instead, in this section, I will discuss

the situation of land and indigenous peoples in *Los Altos* (the highlands) in the context of the Mexican Revolution.

Despite the early annexation of Chiapas into Mexico (1824) following independence from Spain, Collier and Quaratiello argued that it took the better part of a century for independent-Mexico to politically and economically integrate Chiapas (2005:23). Yet by the mid-nineteenth century this began to shift as indigenous lands in Chiapas were marked as *terrenos baldíos* (vacant lands) and carved up for sale to non-indigenous elites (Bobrow-Strain 2007:62; Stephen 2002:92). This loss of land, along with labor regimes that created systems of debt peonage, had a dramatic impact on indigenous livelihoods. Servitude on haciendas and in logging camps was common, moreover in 1846 the first coffee *fincas* (plantations) were established on the Soconusco Coast (bordering the Pacific Ocean) and through a system of *enganchar* (recruited labor contracts) many indigenous peoples from all over Chiapas provided labor in the coffee fields (Martínez-Torres 2006:50-51).

Although these changes emerged incrementally, they began to accelerate under the dictatorial rule of Porfirio Díaz, which spanned from 1876 to 1910, when he was deposed in the context of the Mexican Revolution. During the Porfiriato Period export-led development and modernization were promoted throughout Mexico, such initiatives were assisted through the passing of laws that allowed for the accelerated break-up of indigenous held lands that had been previously protected by colonial regimes. *Ladinos* (non-indigenous) vastly expanded the number of private estates in existence while displacing—or in many cases creating a system of debt peonage ensnaring—former occupants (Harvey 1998). Changes made during the Porfiriato re-inscribed colonial

power relations, which drew on now normalized signifiers of difference—racialized notions of superiority and inferiority—to extract resources, land and labor from indigenous peoples. As noted by Stephen (2002) and others (cf. Collier and Quaratiello 2005; Harvey 1998; Martínez-Torres 2006) the events leading up to the Mexican Revolution (1910-1917) set precedent for the indigenous loss of land and petitions for land reform.

Despite these historical conditions, indigenous peoples in Chiapas were important agents of change. Although their livelihoods were tied to selling their labor or relying on the cultivation of subsistence crops on what little land was available to them, they were not passive subjects of the state or the elite; indeed, indigenous rebellions against landowners and the state in Chiapas have a long history. Scholars focused on contemporary resistance in the highlands and eastern Chiapas refer back to 18th and 19th century rebellions for liberation from the church and colonial government (1708-1712), for self-rule, autonomous markets and lands, as well as against *ladinos* (1867-1869), and critically, fighting for land and the right to self-determination in the Mexican Revolution (1910-1917) (Collier and Quaratiello 2005; Harvey 1998; Nash 2001; Stephen 2002). Issues of self-determination and land acquisition never exited history, instead ebbing and flowing through the long period of subjugation.

During the Mexican Revolution (1910-1917) the cry for “land and liberty” as voiced by revolutionary Emiliano Zapata took on multiple meanings. For the wealthy elite in Chiapas it was about who would maintain control over indigenous land, labor and production. For the indigenous population it was an opening to retake communal lands and force out *ladinos* (Harvey 1998). In Mexico, Emiliano Zapata—who fought for land

redistribution to *campesinos/as* and was assassinated by government forces (1919)—became an icon of the revolution (Stephen 2002:xxxiii). During the revolution Zapata's supporters developed the Plan de Ayala to put land redistribution into practice and parts of the document were incorporated into the 1917 Mexican Constitution. Despite important legal and political achievements of armed peasant revolutionaries, very little changed structurally in many parts of Mexico, but particularly in Chiapas where the powerful *ladino* elite did not allow significant land reform to move forward.

Neil Harvey's (1998) political-historical analysis of contemporary indigenous rebellions in Chiapas argued that indigenous involvement in the events of the Mexican Revolution was manipulated by the state and by the landed elite. Immediately following the fall of Porfirio Díaz (1910), landowners, in hopes of keeping their own control and minimizing federal interference in the state, mobilized indigenous peoples into private armies, which were used against local *porfiristas* (Díaz supporters). This tactic proved unsuccessful and indigenous people turned against the landowners and later began to provide support for whichever entity would assist them with regaining land. In 1917, when the troops of President Venustiano Carranza entered Chiapas a number of indigenous inhabitants joined their efforts and took over large estates. However, by 1920, the landed elites in Chiapas exchanged their support of the new government in power (under the presidency of Álvaro Obregón) in return for non-interference of the federal government in the state. This agreement made reforms to the constitution (discussed in the section that follows) almost non-existent in Chiapas and allowed pre-Revolutionary labor and land regimes to persist for decades (Harvey 1998:52-54; see also: Bobrow-Strain 2007).

As the immediate post-revolutionary period of political instability gave way to a more consolidated, corporatist regime in the 1930s, the radical goals of Zapata and others were restrained politically and institutionally (Harvey 1998). During the 1930s the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI - Institutional Revolutionary Party) consolidated its power and remained hegemonic in Mexican politics—at least at a federal scale—until the 2000 elections. The PRI created incentives for radical peasant and labor movements to join “official” peasant and labor unions, corporate institutions that ultimately subordinated the radical movements of the Revolution. For peasants, access to land redistributed by the state in the name of the “Revolution” was predicated on joining the National Confederation of Campesinos. The PRI draped itself in the mantel of the Revolution, deploying images of Zapata and other revolutionaries in official narratives and imagery, but over the decades it consolidated power in ways that maintained elite control of property. Indeed, John Hart (1987) argues that land reform in Mexico helped to break up colonial landholdings in ways that facilitated the rise of commercial agriculture (rather than supporting smallholder production).

Thus, at the end of the Mexican Revolution there were a number of promises made regarding land and labor and very little done to implement them in the case of Chiapas. However, landless peasant laborers throughout Chiapas began to organize and demand reform in the late 1920s (Collier and Quaratiello 2005:29). Such demands paved the way for the start of land reform in Chiapas and significant changes in peasant-state relations. The section that follows discusses in greater detail demands for land, recognition and the impetus for indigenous rebellion in post-Revolutionary Chiapas.

Post-Revolutionary Chiapas

Despite 500 years of marginalization, indigenous peoples in Mexico and in Chiapas more specifically have not succumbed to the imposition of racialized hierarchies or been passive recipients of state or capitalist-led socio-economic transformation. In this section I turn to moments of economic and social activity among indigenous groups that helped to shape the trajectory of currently existing movements and the politics of social movement actors in the highlands. The increased presence of the state from the mid-1930s heightened tensions between the landed oligarchy and peasant laborers, introduced new reforms and economic policies, as well as created new forms of clientelism throughout Chiapas.

New forms of state-peasant relations were bound up in racialized state structures which sought incorporation and assimilation. Although *mestizaje* emerged as an ideology during the Porfiriato Period, it only became a state project in the post-Revolutionary context (Mora 2007). Plan de Ayala, as it was incorporated into the Mexican Constitution of 1917 was used by the PRI to integrate indigenous peoples into the nation-state through an assimilationist model. *Mestizaje* was mobilized as a unifying nationalist ideology that was promoted as the mixing of race toward the “one-race nation” (Stephen 2002:85). Government programming following the Revolution sought to incorporate the indigenous population into the economic plan of Mexico. Indigenista policies, which were focused on the ‘westernization’ of the indigenous population, were developed alongside land reform in the 1940s and 1950s (Bobrow-Strain 2007:91). Notably the *Instituto Nacional Indigenista* (National Indigenous Institute, established in 1948) deployed programs that were designed to educate indigenous communities about capitalist markets and encourage

cultural assimilation (Mora 2008; Stephen 2002). The discourse and government social programs which followed the Revolution stood in stark contrast to the protections articulated in the constitution.

Following the Revolution patron-client relations between *ladinos* and indigenous laborers took on a new character. Such relations, while still remarkably unequal, were based in reciprocity and in some cases allowed for *campesinos/as* to receive aid or other ‘favors’ from landlords. These relations articulated with national efforts to accelerate land reform during the Presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1940) (Collier and Quaratiello 2005:31). Land reform had finally reached Chiapas. As a result, the presence and power of the local and federal government grew. The promise of land reform gave the state a tremendous amount of support from peasants for government programming and politics (*ibid*). As Bobrow-Strain noted, these policies attempted to reshape indigenous identity in a manner that suggested a greater relationship between *campesinos/as* and the state, thus, the Mexican government replaced the *haciendado* (estate landowner) in the patron-client relationship in Chiapas, offering resources and other forms of aid to *campesinos/as* (2007:91-92). This transition in clientelism is evident in indigenous *campesino/a* livelihood strategies and demands for recognition from the mid-1900s until the beginning of the neoliberal era. The experience of cultivating coffee for income serves as an important example of economic regimes in post-Revolutionary Chiapas. *Campesinos/as* initially relied on a corporatist state as market intermediary and were subject to significant change in their relations with the state following neoliberal restructuring. Changes in the coffee sector and in land tenure help to set the stage for indigenous

organizing in the 1970s, when peasant groups began to unite and pull away from the state.

Coffee and the Corporatist State

In an area that relied on patron-client relations and subsistence farming to maintain livelihoods, the large-scale introduction of coffee to the highlands (1960-70s) assisted with bringing new forms of organizing and income to communities, as well as in shifting away from peasant reliance on a landowner patron to a more firm relation with the state (Martínez-Torres 2006:53). As a project of economic ‘modernization’ was undertaken by the Mexican state following the Revolution and accelerated by the end of World War II, the promotion of coffee production was viewed as a way to develop rural areas in Mexico. During this period, coffee production in the highlands became a state-sponsored activity that facilitated the organizing of indigenous peasant groups.

In a study of organic coffee growing in Chiapas, anthropologist Maria Elena Martínez-Torres explains that coffee growers are among the most organized indigenous peasant groups in Mexico to date (2006). Her book, which demonstrates that organic farming is a productive means of cultivating coffee, also reveals that in combination with subsistence production of crops, coffee farmers have been able to survive in places that are considered marginalized. While coffee had traditionally been grown on plantations in Chiapas, the Revolution and the agrarian reforms that followed enticed highland farmers away from the Soconusco Coast and many returned to the highlands with coffee seedlings (beginning as early as 1914) (*ibid*:52). However, despite the increasing number of coffee plants entering the highlands (between 1914 and 1960), Martínez-Torres argued

that there was some hesitation to adopting coffee production as there was little market for the sale of green coffee beans, the vast majority was produced for household consumption. The production of coffee was also hindered by lack of access to land.

Following the Revolution the number of farmers growing food and coffee on small plots increased slowly, whether through land-invasion or constitutionally mandated redistribution (the results of which were mixed in Chiapas, see: Bobrow-Strain 2007).⁵ An increase in coffee production in the 1960s was facilitated through promotion by the National Indigenous Institute as a solution to impoverishment among peasants in the highlands, (Martínez-Torres 2006:53). However, coffee production only became viable for small producers in the highlands with increased access to land, which Martínez-Torres (*ibid*) attributes to the large-scale invasions of coffee lands in 1974. The ability to sell the coffee to a middle-person, called a *coyote* was also a significant contributor to the widespread adoption (or maintenance) of coffee on newly acquired lands.

As indigenous peasant farmers gained access to land, state programs to promote and facilitate small-scale coffee production were critical. Consistent with other economic development strategies being deployed in the region, the government, in the period of import-substitution (1940-1980), created a state-run institution for the regulation of coffee production and marketing. In 1959, the *Instituto Mexicano del Café* (Mexican Coffee Institute—INMECAFE) was established by the Mexican State to provide technical assistance, conduct research, administer International Coffee Agreement quotas, and issue export permits (Renard 2010:22). By 1973, INMECAFE had expanded its patron role through the purchasing and processing coffee, which displaced the *coyote* as the middle-person and created somewhat of a reliance on the state for coffee producers

(ibid:22). As early as 1979, groups of small producers began to collectively organize in favor of reducing the cost of transporting coffee and protesting the delay in compensation after the sale of coffee to the Institute (Stephen 2002:121). In the period leading up to the debt crisis these farmer groups grew stronger. Yet at the same time, oil development boomed in Chiapas during the 1970s and many farmers sought better opportunities for cash income, abandoning their coffee plots in search of wages (Martínez-Torres 2006).

Coffee and Neoliberal Restructuring

The default of Mexico on its loans in 1982 set into motion events that fundamentally changed socio-economic relations throughout the country, and is critical to understanding how state-peasant relations in the coffee sector (and for peasants in general) shifted in ways that fed growing indigenous dissent in the country. Structural adjustment following the 1982 debt crisis sought to reduce the role of the state in the market (through deregulation and fiscal austerity measures) while also integrating Mexico into the global market under ‘free trade’ principles (Cook et al. 1994). Mandated by the International Monetary Fund, this market-led economic agenda in Mexico was focused on generating development (and earning foreign exchange necessary to make payments on the debt) through promoting the freedom of domestic economic elites and foreign capital. State-owned industries, the cornerstone of the previous model of import substitution and industrialization were systematically privatized throughout the 1980s and beyond. To combat inflation, wages were frozen and price protections that had assisted with accessing food for economically marginalized groups were eliminated. The

culmination of this agenda came in the form of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), negotiated in 1992.

Neoliberal restructuring in the 1980s in particular generated a severe economic crisis for the majority of Mexicans as the dismantling of trade barriers reduced jobs in large and small businesses, decreased the competitiveness of the agricultural sector, and caused the decline of the real value of wages. This in turn generated political crisis, as the tools of political control within a corporatist state were dismantled as part of the neoliberal agenda (Harvey 1993). Two moments of severe political discontent stand out. The first was the disorganized response of the Mexican government in the aftermath of the devastating earthquake in Mexico City (1985), which emboldened a popular urban movement and also critics of the PRI regime (Saiz 1990). A second flashpoint of contestation was located in the Constitutional reforms undertaken in the early 1990s to make Mexico's legal system "work" with the expectation of enacting NAFTA.

Although it was an uneven process over time and space, the debt crisis and neoliberal restructuring severely impacted the lives of peasant farmers throughout Mexico. Martínez-Torres (2006), argues that the 1982 debt crisis foreclosed many opportunities for farmers to earn wages in the oil and other industries respectively and most Chiapan farmers returned to their plots by the mid-1980s. Yet, the inability to access credit significantly limited capital improvements that small farmers could make, which relegated many to continued small-plot subsistence and coffee farming. Neoliberal-style reforms and the 1989 International Coffee Agreement collapse (and crash in the global coffee price) precipitated the dismantling of INMECAFE from 1989-1993 (Jaffee 2007; Martínez-Torres 2006). As the Mexican state sought to recover from

the debt crisis and introduce neoliberal policies leading up to the signing of NAFTA, *campesinos/as* were increasingly closed out of the economic development plan of state.

The dismantling INMECAFE is profoundly connected to the larger story of neoliberal reform following the 1982 debt crisis.

The restructuring which followed the 1982 debt crisis impacted economic segments in Mexico in different ways, in the coffee sector, it took little more than a decade for the state to abandon coffee producers (Martínez-Torres 2006). The withdrawal of the state from the coffee producing areas of Chiapas was a critical component of the end of the former patron-client relations enjoyed by the state. Indeed, scholars point to the collapse of coffee prices as a key moment in the formation of contemporary indigenous rebellion and resistance movements (Jaffee 2007; Martínez Torres 2006). The removal of state support for coffee production combined with increased emphasis on large-scale farming over small-plot production placed *campesinos/as* as an obstruction to neoliberal development (Bobrow-Strain 2007). A number of small producers abandoned their coffee plots following the price collapse, either seeking new opportunities for paid labor or planting corn in its place (Jaffee 2007). Although some farmers began to rely on selling their labor, Bobrow-Strain (2007) argued that attempts by the state to incorporate subsistence farmers in the newly organized economy of the state (as contract farmers or wage laborers) were largely met with failure as they continued to cultivate small plots of corn and petition for land. Indeed, many *campesinos/as* mobilized under their coffee producing cooperatives to demand agricultural support, as well as continued land distribution (Martínez-Torres 2006).

State support for small-scale coffee production waned at the same time as protections for basic foodstuffs (corn and beans) declined. NAFTA for the Mexican government and economic elites was a signal of economic progress—price supports and land redistribution (as well as the communal landholdings of peasants) were viewed as a hindrance to economic efficiency and development. The 1992 amendment to Article 27 of the Constitution, which canceled land reform and facilitated the privatization of land, was a difficult prospect for many *campesinos/as* to face. Despite efforts at distributing land to indigenous farmers in the 1940s and 1950s, in 1992, there were more petitions outstanding and conflicts over land tenure yet unresolved in Chiapas than anywhere else in Mexico (Bobrow-Strain 2005; 2007; Harvey 1998).⁶ In place of state land reform efforts, the government promoted the privatization of communal land through a new program called the *Programa de Certificación de Derechos Ejidales y Titulación de Solares* (Program of Certification of Ejidal Rights and the Titling of Family Units—PROCEDE).

PROCEDE is a program designed to incorporate rural peoples into the neoliberal fold. Obtaining a title to land was marketed as a way to guarantee the “freedom” of the individual (Stephen 2002:62). PROCEDE is one of many programs initiated by the neoliberal government to ‘modernize’ rural areas and peoples. Mora has argued that, PROCEDE “represents new development interests directed at the rural sector, including the production of new peasant-subjects which more effectively respond to emerging market options” (2008:120). This neoliberal intervention in Chiapas and the highlands more specifically strikes a contrast from the previous decades of patron-client relations that were experienced by *campesinos/as* in the region. The privatization of land and the

withdrawal of the state however, did not signal the end of intervention in rural areas, but a new way to intervene and ‘fix’ what were viewed as places of economic stagnation. As a result of these socio-economic changes, peasant groups in Chiapas began to mobilize to protect their land and livelihoods.

Indigenous Organizing and Rebellion

Post-Revolutionary Chiapas experienced different historical regimes around coffee and land, one tied to a corporatist state and another tied to neoliberal one. The corporatist state facilitated programs of support which enabled farmers to build livelihoods, however, in combination with assimilationist systems, indigenous peasants were increasingly marginalized. At the same time as indigenous *campesinos/as* relied on state programs for coffee and subsidized corn and beans, indigenous groups, with the support of the clergy began to organize for the right to self-determination. The historical roots of contemporary indigenous mobilizations in Chiapas, although embedded within the 500-year history of resistance, can be traced back to organizing in the 1970s by indigenous communities in collaboration with Catholic clergy members who sought to lay the groundwork for self-determination in religious base communities (known as *comunidades eclesiales de base - CEBs*) (Nash 2001). Although the coffee crisis and neoliberal reforms were watershed moments for indigenous groups, the ability to mobilize around these events was only made possible through the grassroots groups that had been established in conjunction with religious organizing that happened earlier. Between 1962 and 1965 Vatican II articulated new doctrinal tenets for the Catholic Church that emphasized addressing contemporary issues such as poverty and allowed for

the establishment of communal organizations around issues facing the urban and rural poor (González and González 2008).

In 1974, in collaboration with Bishop Samuel Ruiz, the First Indigenous Congress in Mexico was convened. Held in the city of San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas, the Congress marked the 500th birthday of Bartolomé de las Casas and thousands of indigenous delegates (Tzotziles, Tzetales, Ch'oles and Tojolabales) representing 327 communities attended (Harvey 1998:77-78). The meetings were focused on four areas of appeal to the state, specifically: land, commerce, education and health (Stephen 2002:117). The Congress was identified as a turning point by many (cf. Collier and Quaratiello 2005; Harvey 1998; Mattiace 1998; Stephen 2002) as it brought together representatives of the four major linguistic groups and called for unity among the indigenous groups in the state. Stephen argued that this pointed to “the possibility of a new concept of ethnicity that does not focus on individual ethnic traits but is rooted in a common sense of struggle” (2002:118). The religious base communities, the church and the Catholic concept of liberation theology played an important role in bringing these groups together. The religious base communities differ from later organizing by the EZLN and their predecessors in that they were small grassroots organizations that primarily met for prayer support and religious education (González and González 2008). Despite internal differences that eventually caused the Congress to disband (Stephen 2002), it is still heralded today by indigenous groups as the catalyst for resistance.

A number of groups were organized out of or were strengthened by the experience with the 1974 Congress. Unions of *ejidos* began to mobilize for access to land and markets and a left-wing group, the Proletarian Line started campaigning in Chiapas

(Stephen 2002). In the 1970s these efforts were focused primarily on access to government services—demands for infrastructure, access to markets, controlled prices and land.⁷ The lack of government response to repeated demands by the *ejidal* unions led many to begin working with guerilla groups in the area. In 1980 the group *Fuerzas de Liberación Nacional* (FLN – Forces of National Liberation) announced, to their supporters, their intent to form the *Ejército Zapatista Liberación Nacional* (EZLN – The Zapatista Army of National Liberation) (Stephen 2002:134). The organization of the EZLN and their military training were clandestine. EZLN campaigns for membership in the southeast and the highlands alike took on the more innocuous form of health and literacy programs (*ibid*); as a result of this focus young people and women in particular were recruited for armed training outside of the highlands.⁸ These campaigns in the 1980s were important to the early success of the group, however, the collapse of coffee prices in 1989 was perhaps the most important moment of recruitment for the EZLN (Collier and Quaratiello 2005; Martínez-Torres 2006; Stephen 2002) as communities began to feel acutely the loss of income from coffee farming, more and more farmers started to secretly participate in the EZLN.

In the years of formation, recruitment, and training the EZLN had as their base the southeastern jungle. Yet at the same time other groups (such as the *ejidal* unions and leftist parties) took shape elsewhere. In the highlands, indigenous groups continued to experience political and economic injustice, insecure land tenure and conflicts over land. In 1992, in response to the imbalance of gendered land ownership and a particular incident of violence against women seeking land, representatives from a number of communities in the official highland municipality of Chenalhó formed a coalition to

defend women's rights to land (Tavanti 2003:4).⁹ This pacifist group formed a Christian base community and took the name *Sociedad Civil Las Abejas* (The Bees Civil Society, Las Abejas) to symbolize their collective and spiritual identity (Nash 2001; Tavanti 2003). Unlike the EZLN, Las Abejas were not clandestine in their struggle, shortly after their formation (December 1992) they participated in a non-violent protest march from the highland town of Yabteclum to the city of San Cristóbal de las Casas.

Against the backdrop of organizing for indigenous rights stretching back to the 1970s, in 1992 two important events took place that demonstrated the long-standing rupture of indigenous relations with the state. The first was the decision of the government to amend Article 27 of the 1917 Constitution, ending land redistribution and calling for the titling of existing landholdings. The second was the quincentennial anniversary of the arrival of Christopher Columbus in the Americas. An indigenous-led protest against Article 27 reform and the impending approval of NAFTA was held in Ocosingo, Chiapas in January, 1992. In October of the same year, a protest against 500 years of oppression was staged throughout the state (Stephen 2002:136-141). Both point to the underlying issue of the fundamental exclusion of indigenous identities, economies and ways of knowing in Mexico. Both protests highlighted this exclusion and a desire for recognition, on their own terms. However, by the end of 1992, NAFTA was moving forward and so was dissent in Chiapas.

On January 1, 1994 as NAFTA took effect the EZLN staged a public uprising. Armed and wearing masks, the rebels revealed themselves for the first time on what became a world stage, through the seizure of town centers and the occupation of land through the highlands and eastern part of the state. Most visible was their seizure of city

hall in the former colonial seat of San Cristóbal de las Casas. Their declaration of war, as announced in the “First Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle” (1993) stated:

We are a product of 500 years of struggle: first against slavery, then during the War of Independence against Spain led by insurgents, then to avoid being absorbed by North American imperialism, then to promulgate our constitution and expel the French empire from our soil, and later the dictatorship of Porfirio Diaz denied us the just application of the Reform laws and the people rebelled and leaders like Villa and Zapata emerged, poor men just like us. We have been denied the most elemental preparation so they can use us as cannon fodder and pillage the wealth of our country. They don't care that we have nothing, absolutely nothing, not even a roof over our heads, no land, no work, no health care, no food nor education. Nor are we able to freely and democratically elect our political representatives, nor is there independence from foreigners, nor is there peace or justice for ourselves and our children.

But today, we say ENOUGH IS ENOUGH...

Subsequent declarations (at the time of writing, supporters of the Zapatistas are adherents to the “Sixth Declaration” (2005)) demanded democracy, liberty, and justice among other important rights and recognition long denied indigenous peasants by the state. Although the armed conflict between the EZLN and the Mexican army only lasted a few days, the impact of the initial uprising lingered. In the early weeks of 1994, thirty-four official municipalities were declared autonomous and in resistance and the Zapatistas began to develop their own governmental forms alongside the official governments (Stephen 2002:76). Even as these groups declared autonomy they still sought rights and recognition as citizens of Mexico.

In February of 1994 peace talks between the government and the Zapatistas began in the highland town of San Andrés Larráinzar; these talks were moderated by Bishop Ruiz and attended by government and Zapatista representatives, as well as scholars and peacekeepers from around the globe. The peace talks were held intermittently from 1994-

1996 even while the federal government launched new military campaigns against the communities that Zapatistas were based in (Harvey 1998; Stephen 2002). In 1996, the Accords of San Andrés on Indigenous Rights and Culture were signed between government and Zapatista representatives and the Zapatistas withdrew from the public eye while they waited for the Accords to be written into federal law and implemented. The Accords supported the demand for autonomy and stipulated linguistic, territorial and political rights for indigenous peoples in Mexico (Eber and Kovic 2003). However, the government held back the implementation of the San Andrés Accords and they began issuing warrants for the arrest of key leaders of the EZLN. A low-intensity conflict had begun in Zapatista base communities. Critical to the state's strategy was creating divisions in communities through the distribution of goods and services to those community members who offered their support to the government; in some cases arms and training were given in encouragement of community-based paramilitary activity (Stephen 2002).

Through government supply and support, armed conflict in the region and the number of paramilitary groups grew.¹⁰ Between September 1996 and December 1997 in the highlands there was a series of murders and attacks—more than fifty—perpetrated by and against *partidistas* (supporters of the major Mexican political parties; e.g.: PRD, PRI, PAN), Zapatistas and Abejas alike. The violence in the highlands caused the expulsion of families and significant displacement. Las Abejas and the Zapatistas sought refuge in the newly declared autonomous communities in the highlands. By December 22, 1997, almost 250 Abejas had sought refuge in the highland community of Acteal (Tavanti 2003:9), which is located within the official municipality of Chenalhó. On that day

members of a paramilitary group populated by PRIistas (supporters of the political party PRI), called *Máscara Roja* (Red Mask) opened fire on refugees in a church in Acteal killing forty-five and wounding twenty-five men, women and children who were participating in a mass for peace (Stahler-Sholk 1998:63; see also: Moksnes 2004; Stephen 2002; Tavanti 2003). It is important to note that members of paramilitary groups are not generally from outside of the communities that they are threatening with violence. Following the massacre international attention and pressure led to investigation and arrests. Yet many that participated in the massacre were either never arrested or have been released from prison on appeal and live side-by-side with families that lost members in the massacre (S!paz 2012).

The massacre of Acteal reflected the extent to which militarization and violence dominated the government's relationship to Chiapas in the late 1990s and 2000s (Stahler-Sholk 1998; 2010). As a result, the state of Chiapas and the highlands in particular have existed in a state of low-intensity warfare for two decades (Baronnet et al. 2011; Mora 2007; 2008; Stephen 2002). To legitimize this violence political and economic elites actively constructed the Zapatistas and Las Abejas as a threat to Chiapas and Mexico. This warfare is not only in response to the existence of so-called 'rebel' indigenous groups, but is part of the attempted assimilation and integration of indigenous peoples into a neoliberal economy. As Mariana Mora (2008) articulated, the low-intensity warfare practiced against indigenous communities in Chiapas goes beyond armed conflict and is a militarization and racialization of the political, economic and social that is written on the bodies of indigenous people in Chiapas.

Conclusion

The geographical-historical contexts explored in this chapter elucidate how and why the struggle for autonomy emerged in Chiapas, and the ways in which this struggle is related to centuries of colonial processes as well as specific transformations characteristic of the neoliberal era. Both the uprising in 1994 and the massacre in 1997 made visible the very real social, political and economic violence against indigenous peoples in Chiapas. In this chapter I have attempted to give a relevant historical background for the contemporary situation of indigenous subsistence and coffee farmers who are supporters of the Zapatistas and Las Abejas. Indigenous peoples in Chiapas are resilient agents of change; this selected history reflects the complex relations in the highlands and assists with grounding an examination of how politics impact the experiences and practices of everyday life. Having a context for colonial, revolutionary and post-revolutionary legacies as they took shape in Chiapas contributes to a better understanding of the contemporary politics of indigenous knowledge production, land acquisition and participation in social movements.

This history of political resistance and rebellion is a critical starting point for considering how *campesinos/as* affiliated with the Zapatistas and Las Abejas have built economies in resistance to match their politics of resistance. Reflecting on these dynamics requires considering the ways in which Las Abejas and the Zapatistas exist in solidarity with each other. Beyond this connection, they have created wider networks of solidarity throughout Mexico and globally. In the late 1990s international peacekeepers formed a large part of this solidarity (Stephen 2002); however the networks cultivated have grown to include other political, social and economic interests, such as fair trade

groups. In the last decade, the Zapatistas and Las Abejas declared their solidarity with the Oaxacan group APPO (Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca), they have also participated in the international peasant movement La Vía Campesina (the Peasant Way), for example. Connections with international groups working to make trade more fair have been an important component of both maintaining relevance and visibility as well as a critical part of the economic resistance that is practiced by both groups.

Coffee producing cooperatives have become a critical locus for solidarity interactions globally and locally. Following the uprising and the declaration that they would not interact with the Mexican state, a number of Zapatista-affiliated coffee farmers in the highlands split-off from Unión Majomut (which was the largest coffee cooperative in the highlands at the time of the uprising) and formed the Zapatista coffee-cooperative Mut Vitz.¹¹ Las Abejas formed their own cooperative in 1999 (Maya Vinic) and in 2001 another Zapatista supported cooperative was formed, Nueva Luz. Critically these cooperatives have created connections outside of Chiapas and Mexico to assist with the purchase of their coffee. These connections create an important basis for international support and recognition, as well as for cash income in self-declared autonomous communities. In this way demands for recognition by indigenous communities in resistance have changed from making demands on the government to generating their own systems of governance, as well as economic and social ties that seek to bypass the state. *Campesinos/as* in resistance have stepped away from the racialized problematization of their livelihoods and begun to build a “world in which many worlds fit” (EZLN 1996). The empirical analysis in subsequent chapters turns to this process and particularly the ways in which indigenous peoples in Mexico, Chiapas, and the highlands

more specifically have resisted colonial and post-colonial assimilation and economic development, maintaining and cultivating diverse knowledges, practices and economies. Critical to this resistance and persistence for farmers aligned with the Zapatistas and Las Abejas has been the continued production of corn (and beans) for subsistence and coffee for income.

Notes

¹ The INEGI criterion for the category of “indigenous” is residents older than the age of five that speak a nationally recognized indigenous language.

² See Figure 2.2 (2010) produced by the *Consejo Nacional de Población* (National Population Council). The degrees of marginalization are based in progress toward the internationally recognized Millennium Development Goals. Such statistics fail to take into account autonomous rebel education and healthcare programs in Zapatista territories.

³ Statistics from: INEGI 2010; Ministry of Economy 2011

⁴ Mexico and Guatemala achieved *de facto* independence from Spain in 1821 and Chiapas was incorporated from Guatemala into Mexican territory in 1824 (Pedraja 2005:61; Collier and Quaratiello 2005:23).

⁵ Land reform redistributed thousands of hectares of land to peasants in a communal form called the *ejido*.

⁶ Bobrow-Strain (2005) noted that this led to an extreme amount of violence between *ladinos* and indigenous land claimants.

⁷ The lack of secure access to land was felt most acutely, not in the highlands, but in the increasingly occupied areas in the southeast of the state, the Lacandon Jungle.

⁸ Much training was done in the Lacandon and also in the northern areas adjacent to Agua Azul and the ruins of Palenque.

⁹ Additionally, as Nash (2001) argued, the state never fully addressed gender inequities especially in the case of land ownership and voting rights.

¹⁰ The Bartolomé de las Casas Center for human rights reported 12 active paramilitary groups by 1998 alone (in Stephen 2002:172).

¹¹ I was told by the former assessor of Mut Vitz that the cooperative was disbanded in the late 2000s after their processing equipment was confiscated by the government due to lack of tax payments.

CHAPTER III

METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction

During the last 15 years in Chiapas, scientific research has been forced to reformulate how studies are conducted. Debates on autonomy and self-determination, as part of *zapatismo [sic]* and prior to the uprising, have generated concrete effects in the ways in which members of indigenous communities accept or do not accept how research is implemented (Mora 2008:56).

As Mariana Mora notes, research in Chiapas is politically charged, a situation that creates particular possibilities and constraints that must be negotiated by researchers and research participants alike. The previous two chapters of this dissertation introduced the complex political and socio-economic history of Chiapas, as well as the Zapatista and Las Abejas movements. Much of the analysis presented throughout the dissertation seeks to account for the complex political and economic terrains that farmers in the highlands have to navigate on a day to day basis to ‘cultivate’ autonomy and practice food sovereignty while earning a livelihood in an economy still structured around neoliberal principles that discourage such practices. This chapter, in elaborating the philosophical, ethical and practical dimensions of my research methodology, turns our awareness to these power-laden social terrains and considers how they shaped my methodological approach and practice. Before turning to the ethical dimensions of this work, I will first chart out the research questions and main contours of the project.

My original interest in conducting research with highland Zapatista communities was based on questions that concerned how Zapatista-affiliated communities were negotiating transnational fair trade certified coffee networks for gaining cash income, and how this process shaped and was shaped by the broader movement’s critical views of

neoliberal globalization. However, consistent with my role as researcher being “reconstituted” through the process of conducting research (Pratt 2000:642), in my initial conversations with farmers and the Zapatista leadership in 2010, I learned that the more appropriate question was based in an examination of how fair trade coffee and the production of corn provide unique opportunities for putting the politics of the movement in practice. Thus I sought to work with participants in the movement who were also members of fair trade coffee-producing cooperatives, and to focus the research on their negotiation of multiple social, political and economic networks.

My research questions changed following my preliminary work. The broad research questions for this project shifted and were reworked to get at how daily agricultural practices were related to farmers’ interpretations of food sovereignty and autonomous spaces in their communities. At the heart of the proposed project were these questions:

What day-to-day decisions are made by farmers and farming households in self-declared autonomous communities regarding subsistence production versus fair trade production?

How do farmers and communities interpret the concept of food sovereignty in their daily lives and productive practices?

What daily agricultural practices are understood by farmers as contributing indigenous autonomy?

However through dialogue with farmers in resistance and the leadership of the Zapatistas, as well as through preliminary findings, the empirical work in this dissertation was shaped by the more conceptual questions that follow:

How and to what extent are farming practices rooted in a desire to promote autonomy in farming communities? What do these farming practices tell us about how we should theorize autonomy?

What compromises are involved in embracing fair trade certification networks and what do those compromises tell us about the relationship between the rhetoric and reality of fair trade?

What economic practices are used by farmers to provide food for their households? What do these productive practices tell us about the potential and limits of the movement for food sovereignty?

To answer these questions, what I anticipated doing in my fieldwork was observing farmers and speaking with them about how they negotiated every day politics of their membership in broader movements and within their communities. As a result, I approached my research in Chiapas with a desire to collaborate and to conduct this research in an ethical and politically responsible manner; as a result, I developed specific questions in dialogue with participants. This co-development of questions assisted in creating a project that was accountable, and responsive to complex political terrains in the region. It also meant that from the beginning of my study I had limited access to social movement actors as well as places where I could conduct research. The communities that I worked with and the people that I spoke to were determined by their affiliation with social movements and fair trade coffee cooperatives.

Research methods and methodology remain an essential arena where power/knowledge dynamics must be addressed. As part of the critical turn in geography, scholars began to question how the discipline began to deeply consider the politics of knowledge production (McDowell 1992). Research produces significant power/knowledge dynamics that all researchers must grapple with as they develop projects and investigate questions as a key part of their scholarly work. The approach to the methods used for this dissertation are influenced by decolonial methodology and feminist geopolitical theory. Scholarly research is a contested practice (cf. Pratt 2000;

Tuhiwai-Smith 1999) and as a qualitative researcher, I think it is important to reflect upon how we can conduct research that makes visible human experiences that have been largely categorized as marginalized and subaltern without reproducing power relations that colonize knowledge production and reinforce marginalization. The methodology, methods and write-up of this dissertation are an attempt to seriously consider how research is done and how as scholars we produce ‘knowledge.’

There is a significant relationship between contemporary knowledge production, colonization and modernity (Grosfoguel 2011; Tuhiwai-Smith 1999) and indeed, research is often tied to imperialism (Al-Hardan 2014; Bryan 2010; Quijano 2007; Wainwright 2012). Furthermore, the economic, political and social relations enacted during the colonial period operated under a system of power still largely present in contemporary relations between people and states (Quijano 2007). Tuhiwai-Smith enunciates this perspective in her critique of research with indigenous peoples arguing that “imperialism and colonialism are the specific formations through which the West came to ‘see,’ to ‘name,’ and to ‘know’ indigenous communities” (1999:60). It is because of this power dynamic that I identify a decolonial methodology in this research and not a post-colonial methodology, which as argued by Grosfoguel (2011) and others, has tended to imply an ‘end’ or an ‘after’ to colonialism and to colonial power/knowledge dynamics, while in many cases simultaneously reinforcing similar hegemonic relations (cf. Mignolo 2000; Moraña et al. 2008; Tuhiwai-Smith 1999; Walsh 2007). Grosfoguel attributes this problematic to the “Eurocentric myth” stating that: “we live in a so-called “post”-colonial era and that the world and, in particular, metropolitan centers, are in no need of decolonization” (2011:16). Indeed, Walsh notes that “while colonialism ended with

independence, coloniality is a model of power that continues” (2007:229). Decolonial theorists argue that colonial power/knowledge dynamics remain embedded in scholarly work and that an encounter and dialogue which reconfigures knowledge production is necessary.

A decolonized knowledge production is that which attempts to document social injustices and recover subjugated knowledges while challenging paradigmatic racism, sexism and colonialism (see: Tuhiwai-Smith 1999). Thus, I have attempted in this research to move towards a joining of feminist and decolonial epistemology, which rejects what feminist writers have articulated as the ‘god trick’ (cf. Haraway 1988) and universalizing tendencies of knowledge production in favor of a critical, pluriversal dialogue. In order to better understand how the study was conducted, in this chapter I begin by situating the methodology, with a particular focus on positionality and decolonizing knowledge production. I follow this discussion with an explanation of the limits to research and the methods undertaken.

Position and Situation of Knowledge Production

When I arrived in the highlands in 2010, I was acutely aware of social, political and economic differences in my daily interactions. My race, gender, educational attainment, economic status, and U.S. citizenship influenced the way that I was able to interact with people and the way that they interacted with me. This privilege, among other important considerations, made it critical for me to evaluate my position in this research.¹ Since the late 1980s, feminist and post-structural epistemologies have assisted with decentering the positivist tradition in research, and the so-called unbiased researcher through the promotion of reflexive and self-critical examination (cf. England 1994).

Feminist geopolitical scholars in particular have attempted to move away from “disembodied” geopolitical analyses by resituating knowledge and a relational ethics in research (Hyndman 2004:309; cf. Routledge 2002; Sparke 2000). Research is decidedly not a neutral practice (Alcoff 1992; see also: Stephen 2013). As such, I attempt in this research to not only recognize my positionality, but to put into practice self-reflexivity (see: Rose 1997; Routledge 2002). However, I am wary of falling into the trap of simply locating myself and exposing my bias so that I can ‘discover truths’ (Pratt 2000). Instead, in positioning and representing myself and others within this research I recognize that there are many ‘truths’ and that what is recorded in this dissertation is not a version of truth, but a situated knowledge (see: Haraway 1988; 1991), a pluralistic interpretation of something that can be understood in many different ways and that does not fully escape the myriad relations of power at work. It is not only my position as researcher and participant in the research that is at stake however, there is also the issue of representation, which has been long contested (cf. Ortner 1995; Spivak 1988).

In discussing the politics of representation, I am referring to the problem of ‘speaking for others and the practice of speaking about others,’ critical issues that Linda Alcoff (1992) suggests reinforces hierarchies in research. Alcoff notes that “where one speaks from affects the meaning and truth of what one says” and critically that “the practice of privileged persons speaking for or on behalf of less privileged persons has actually resulted (in many cases) in increasing or reinforcing the oppression of the group spoken for” (1992:6-7). Through my dissertation research and writing I am participating in an interpretation of my needs, goals and situation as well as those of others (cf. ibid), which creates the potential for exploitation and ownership over translation and

interpretation. One of the ways I seek to ameliorate the problem of ‘speaking for/about others’ in practice is through cultivating a dialogue and instead, ‘speaking with others’ (Alcoff 1992; Spivak 1988). I also adopt some measure of accountability to both participants and to their ways of knowing and understanding the ideas under discussion (cf. Alcoff 1992; Newdick 2012; Stephen 2013) through a dialogic cycle of sharing the research and via reformulating my questions and receiving critique from participants (which I address more in-depth in a later section of this chapter). As Vivian Newdick pointed out in her work with Zapatista women, working through collective processes creates a space for accountability even as the tensions and contradictions in everyday life and practice are considered (2012:27). Consistent with this a number of my interviews took place with groups of farmers, where instead of having a list of questions to be answered, we discussed the broader questions of my research which participants questioned and dissected, and in many cases collectively answered. My efforts to develop and enact this research in collaboration with a variety of actors in the highlands of Chiapas nevertheless does not absolve my ongoing privilege rooted in my ability to move in and out of communities and the region more broadly at will and to take with me the stories and interpretations of autonomy, resistance, fair trade and so on, of the participants in my research.

As Pratt pointed out in the acknowledgement section of her article examining research as performance, university researchers are in a position of great ‘privilege and constraint’ (2000:650). As academics our knowledge production is influenced a great deal by the power/knowledge system embedded in the academic arena (Al-Hardan 2014). This system, by design, demands that academics be experts and that they produce and

disseminate knowledge in order to participate. In many cases, the trajectory of university or funding institutions dictates what research and methods are deemed valuable. As a university student, funded by university resources, I bring this to my research and I also am part of my research, which necessarily complicates my desire to work towards decolonized knowledge production. Although we may recognize our positionality and attempt to be reflexive and self-critical in our work, neither of these approaches (reflexivity and self-reflection) resolves the problems of knowledge production (cf. Nagar and Geiger 2007).

The power/knowledge dynamics embedded in scholarly work presents many researchers with difficult methodological and ethical challenges. Notwithstanding the responsibility of the researcher to the university, funding agencies and also to the community of research participants, the structure of the academy makes it seemingly insurmountable for research projects to be non-exploitative. Research conducted with human subjects often forms a critical component of university requirements. While fulfilling human subjects protocols, I feel that it is essential to go beyond them in order to create accountable, participatory research, as the Institutional Review Board emphasizes a particular set of concerns which are narrower than those proposed by geographers (cf. Dyer and Demeritt 2009). At the heart of these efforts are my commitments to ongoing collaboration and dialogue with a number of different actors in the communities where I conduct my research. As noted in the introduction to this chapter, in this work I have sought to form collaborative spaces, and to create a dialogue (cf. Azzopardi and Grech 2012) between myself and a diverse array of groups, including coffee cooperative workers, members of the women's weaving cooperative, leadership in the two social

movements and so on. Indeed, my very research questions, which were fundamentally changed through my work with participants in 2010, were from 2011-2013, focused on a discussion of participants' everyday experiences and knowledges of autonomy, fair trade and food sovereignty.

My initial research questions were originally focused on my understanding of what I saw to be a contradiction between social movement political discourse and economic actions undertaken by adherents to the movement; specifically, how selling coffee in the fair trade marketplace (branded Zapatista coffee) fit in with the resistance and anti-neoliberal agenda of the Zapatista movement. However, through discussion, my questions (both the larger research questions and the interview questions) were consistently negotiated and reformulated in a participatory way and one in which, for example, my scholarly engagements on the meanings of resistance was set aside in favor of dialogue about the meanings and practice of resistance in autonomous communities (see Chapter IV). Another critical component of the approach I took to conducting research has been recognizing my role in the communities I work with and accepting the limits placed on my research, which allowed the community members and research participants to have a greater part in shaping how their knowledge and experience was communicated to me and by me. The research constraints, to which I now turn, were the product of experience and dialogue with research participants.

Research Constraints

There are limits to every research project, some great and some small. As I will discuss in more detail in this section, access to Zapatista support communities has been

significantly curtailed by the leadership in the past decade. At the same time, the risk of losing visibility and relevance has been a key concern for both the Zapatistas and Las Abejas. The constraints on my research were imposed both by situation and also by the participants, and it must be pointed out that I do not consider these limits to be negative, but as key part of shaping the research process. In order to understand the limits enmeshed in this project, I first discuss the atmosphere of violence and threat against participants in the Zapatista and Las Abejas movements. This context assists with illuminating the ethical issues surrounding research in dangerous places, the restrictions put on research in these communities and the way that I proceeded to gain permissions, trust and access to communities and potential participants in the research.

Research in the Context of Threat

Following the 1994 uprising by the Zapatistas, a number of foreigners were expelled from Mexico for being “political agitators;” indeed, any person not acting explicitly as a tourist was considered dangerous (Tavani 2003:24). These expulsions had less to do with ‘agitating’ than perhaps with witnessing and reporting, as such, the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI - Institutional Revolutionary Party, which held federal power from 1929-2000) government set out to restrict foreign involvement in Zapatista territories throughout Chiapas State, even expelling over 200 foreign activists up until 1997 (Ronfeldt et al. 1999:83). For several years following the rebellion the Zapatistas sought out international attention and the presence of foreign observers and allies in their communities—largely because the leadership expressed that it was critical to have witnesses and to gain global support for their movement. Thus they resisted the

state's effort to expel foreigners and saw those expulsions as part of the state strategy to eradicate the 'Zapatista threat' (cf. Stephen 2002).

By the end of the 1990s, the federal government changed its perception of academic work as part of its counter-insurgency against the Zapatistas and their supporters. Following the close of the long-standing period of federal rule by the PRI (2000), a new approach to interacting with the Zapatistas and their support communities was established. This was in the context of renewed negotiations over indigenous rights in Mexico (the COCOPA Law, a version of the 1996 San Andrés Accords). Material published by Mexican and foreign investigators was viewed by the new government as a valuable resource for gathering specific information about the mobilizations of the movement and for undermining the resistance (Ronfeldt et al. 1999; Stahler-Sholk 2001). As a result, the command arm of the EZLN (Zapatista National Army of Liberation) began as early as 2006 (cf. Newdick 2012) to limit scholarly interaction with both the command and within support communities.

The past two decades in Chiapas and specifically in the highlands have been violent ones. Bloodshed, political violence, economic violence, violence against women, hate crimes, intimidation, as well as overt and covert surveillance form an omnipresent segment of the daily life of people participating in a 'pacifist war against the state.' In the official municipality of Chenalhó, where the majority of this research was conducted, uniformed military patrol the main road running between town centers and politically fragmented communities are pitted against each other by government social programs and land privatization making it difficult to navigate the area. Many communities remain under siege and farming families are often displaced as a result of the ongoing violence.²

Marco Tavanti, voiced concern that traditional research methods may be inappropriate in the “violent or potentially violent” context in Chiapas (2005:2).³ Tavanti specifically argues that “it is necessary to go beyond positivistic, quantitative, and individualist approaches to research if we want to understand the narratives of resistance in collective cultures and marginalize groups” (*ibid*). In such zones of conflict there are particular methodological and ethical dimensions of field research (Wood 2006). Indeed, Elisabeth Wood notes that the “ethical imperative of research is intensified in conflict zones by political polarization, the presence of armed actors, the precarious security of most residents, the general unpredictability of events, and the traumatization through violence of combatants and civilians alike” (2006:373). Violence and injustice in place makes neutrality impossible (cf. Stephen 2002); it may even demand that the researcher take a clear position (Tavanti 2005). In such cases dialogue and collaborative relationships are essential to conducting accountable, ethically responsible research.

The outright violence, pervasive military presence and displacement in communities of Zapatistas and Las Abejas became less visible between 2010 and 2013. This however, did not reduce the threat in the highlands (or in other autonomous municipalities throughout the state) it simply made it more clandestine and at times potentially more dangerous. Decreased visibility of conflict does not equate with safety, and the counter-insurgency underway in Chiapas is based in surveillance, intimidation, community divisions and the provision of services by the official federal, state and municipal governments to their allies (Mora 2008; S!paz 2008; 2012). Threats against the Zapatistas and Las Abejas thus continue on a day-to-day basis and form an important part of their daily struggle.

The majority of this violence is hidden from the typical visitor to Chiapas. It may not be immediately apparent that military or police checkpoints are adjacent to self-declared autonomous communities or that new schools, health clinics and cultural centers are built in *partidista* (political supporters of the official electoral parties) spaces that sit alongside autonomous spaces.⁴ These geographies of militarized control and violence have the effect of creating fractious community spaces throughout the highlands. Farmers in support of the Zapatistas and Las Abejas continue to be intimidated into participating in state land titling processes that are designed to usurp their land rights. Because of the low visibility of the violence, denunciations (public censures) of the counter-insurgency and intimidation practices of the government, paramilitaries and individual *partidista* actors by the leadership of both groups are prevalent. Furthermore, displacement, violence and the wrongful imprisonment of a number of supporters dominate public announcements made frequently on the internet websites of both Las Abejas and the Zapatistas.⁵ Notwithstanding frequent military transports passing through communities and contentious land disputes, indigenous communities are further stratified by government assistance programs and development projects, which pit Zapatista and Las Abejas supporters against their *partidista* counterparts. The government occupies space in divided communities and distributes cash payments to their supporters as *campesinos/as* in resistance (who do not acknowledge or accept government assistance) look on.

It is in this climate that access to autonomous communities has become possible again (although official research on the movement has not) and that the membership of the movements desire that they remain visible on their own terms. For the Zapatistas, this

stemmed from a recognition that the presence of regional and international NGOs, peace accompaniers and people who would benefit from learning about the project of autonomy and the struggle. Las Abejas have not limited research or access to their membership.

What this translated to for this project, was a general acceptance of my research and my presence in the communities. However, as the title of this section suggests, such acceptance was not without its limits. As the Zapatistas and Las Abejas continue to carve out their spaces of resistance they also seek to determine what research is valuable to them and for wider audiences.

Restriction of Research

Despite the rejection of research by the Zapatista command (cf. Newdick 2012) the leadership of the *caracoles* (literally ‘snail shells,’ autonomous Zapatista government centers) maintains day-to-day permissions for visiting Zapatista territories.⁶ My research, while initially developed as research concerning the politics of the movement quickly transitioned to research with social movement actors. In 2010 it was made clear to me that the permission I received from the leadership in the highlands could be removed at any time. And although this dissertation is not explicitly focused on the Zapatista movement, the research conducted between 2010 and 2013 is bookended by two important moments in their struggle, in 2010, the reclusive moment of “silence and reflection” and in 2013, the thunderous moment of “one no and many yeses.” These moments signify the limits and bounds of the research conducted for this dissertation, being both an example of the constraint on my ability to work with people affiliated with

the Zapatista movement and one of the importance of the struggle of indigenous peoples in Chiapas, especially how they can remain visible.

In the period of ‘silence and reflection’ violence had escalated in many parts of eastern Chiapas occupied by Zapatista supporters; death threats and kidnappings in August 2010 sent a number of families and the leadership of the EZLN under cover. The communities became closed to me, I was asked to leave. However, on the Winter Solstice in 2012, the Zapatistas staged a silent march on the major cities within each of their five autonomous zones (including San Cristóbal de las Casas in the highlands). The following day they published an announcement heralding their return to the public eye that asked very simply, “Did you hear us?” (EZLN 2012).⁷ They had renewed their commitment to global networking, solidarity and knowledge sharing and had seized control of the shape it would take.

In the climate of low-intensity warfare as well as, inter-community violence and intimidation the Zapatistas have limited the information that can be gathered about the EZLN movement and plans.⁸ No matter what its intent, information gathered on the movement could and can be used against them. In order to understand this threat better I was encouraged by an NGO worker to read the US military counter-insurgency manual by General Petraeus et al., which spotlights academic sources “such as journal articles and university professors” as useful for intelligence gathering in counter-insurgency maneuvers (2007:82). At the time of research, the gatekeeper for officially sanctioned research on the social movement and rebel army of the Zapatistas was the *Comandancia* (command arm) of the EZLN. However, the civilian government centers maintain day-to-day permissions for people to travel in Zapatista support communities.⁹ The more I

worked with members of the movement, the more my questions and research directions changed. Rather than seeing such restrictions as limits, this became an opportunity for collaboration and dialogue with social movement actors. As my conversations with people shifted I developed new ways of interacting with the leadership of both movements.

Critical to obtaining permission from the leadership in the highlands was my status as a volunteer with the only international NGO which maintains an office in a Caracol, the U.S.-based *Escuelas para Chiapas* (Schools for Chiapas). The NGO served as a crucial interlocutor in my introduction to the *Junta de Buen Gobierno* (Good Government Council) in the Zapatistas Caracol of Oventik in 2010. My volunteer work with the NGO was based in providing Spanish-English translation and assistance for tours led by the group for international visitors to Chiapas. Such tours gave me further opportunities to visit Zapatista territories (and communities outside my research area). My connection with Las Abejas and their coffee producing cooperative, Maya Vinic was assisted by early interviews and meetings with member roasters of the U.S.-based coffee importer Cooperative Coffees. Instead of working with the official leaders of the Zapatistas exclusively I established working relations with the leadership of the two coffee cooperatives I was fortunate to work with—the Zapatista cooperative Yachil Xojbal Chu'lchan (New light in the Sky in Tzeltal) and also the cooperative of Las Abejas, Maya Vinic (Mayan Man in Tzotzil). In the case of my work with the Zapatista supporters this meant, in practice, that my research was developed in dialogue with the *Caracol* leadership and the coffee cooperative leadership.

In practice what this ‘gatekeeping’ by the Zapatista leadership consisted of was control of access to communities, meetings and participants. I was invited to participate in certain meetings, ceremonies, gatherings, and field or household activities and I was not invited to others. Never, in any case, would I be permitted to live in the communities, but frequent visits and overnight stays in communal Zapatista spaces (health clinics or cooperative buildings) were acceptable. What communities would be visited and who I could talk with was also a point of discussion as my research progressed. Communities were selected by the leadership of the cooperatives (or in the case of Yachil Xojbal Chu'lchan (hereafter, Yachil), by the leadership in conversation with the Junta in Oventik). In all cases my interviewees were limited to adherents to the two movements (Zapatistas and Las Abejas). In 2010, when I originally discussed my research with workers from the NGO they explained to me that if I was to attempt to interview *partidistas* and Zapatistas (or Las Abejas) from the same community that neither group would trust me and I would likely be the target or instigator of violence. This constraint was also placed on my observation as I did not have free run over the communities I worked in as they are neither homogenous nor spatially organized contiguously by political affiliation. To even wander into a *partidista* controlled area could be a costly mistake.¹⁰

Dialogue and Permission

The proposal to conduct my research was discussed in the Zapatista *Caracol* of Oventik with the *Junta de Buen Gobierno* (2010 and 2012) and the leadership of the Zapatista coffee cooperative Yachil and also separately in the general assembly meeting

of Las Abejas coffee cooperative Maya Vinic (2012). The autonomous government of the Zapatistas gave me leave to travel to Zapatista support communities and to talk with coffee growers and also granted me separate audiences with agroecology promoters for the zone of Oventik and with the leadership of Yachil. I presented my research in Spanish to the assembly at Maya Vinic and the members voted in favor of allowing me to conduct research. In each case, the communities I was allowed to visit and the people I was allowed to talk and work with was determined by Zapatista leaders and per our agreement would retain anonymity. All of my interview questions and guides were reviewed by the Junta in Oventik and, in the case of my formal interviews with agroecology promoters and the leadership of Yachil, interviews were conducted in the presence of the Junta. In agreement with the Junta and with the leadership of Maya Vinic I transcribed all of my interviews and field notes by hand in a notebook, there was no audio recording or videotaping.

In my meetings with both the Junta and the leadership of Maya Vinic I was questioned about the intention of the study. I explained that I wanted to know more about the practice of autonomy in coffee growing communities and about how food and coffee production relate to the struggle of Zapatista and Las Abejas supporters. My intent was to talk to farmers about their work and life in their community and to write about how they understand and practice autonomy in their communities. I reiterated that my dissertation was my own exclusive work (that is, I would not have research assistants within the communities and I would retain responsibility for the products of the dissertation) and that it was concerned with autonomy, not Zapatista or Las Abejas procedures. We also discussed the purpose of the research and about the dissemination. For both the Junta and

the coffee cooperatives, it was critical that I was sharing my research broadly, presenting the dialogues. For the Maya Vinic leadership and members there was an urgency in discussing their struggle and the successes of their coffee cooperative and coffee shop (in nearby San Cristóbal de las Casas). For the Zapatista Junta, it seemed to be more about educating me about how to learn, observe, and interact, how to witness, but also conceal. Due to this, there are some conversations that I participated in and observations that I made that will never be revealed in my scholarly work.

I accept these limits as an important part of the shaping of this research and as a critical component of the methods undertaken. This is not to say that my research departed from traditional scholarly methods of conducting qualitative research, but to iterate the reciprocal process of conducting fieldwork in the highlands with participants ‘in resistance.’ In the section that follows I discuss the methods that were used in this research and the framework that was adopted in designing it.

A Feminist Approach to Fieldwork

Over a decade ago, Dowler and Sharp, when considering the question of a feminist geopolitics, called for a broadening of the methodology of critical geopolitics from deconstructions of political discourses to more ethnographic work focused on the complicated and embodied geographies that are at play in international relations and politics (2001:167, 172). In particular they noted that it was “necessary to think more clearly of the grounding of geopolitical discourse in practice (and in place)...” (2001:171). Critical to this is reflection on the methods (and methodology) used in feminist geopolitical research. It is here that I tie a decolonial framework to a feminist

geopolitical approach. The approach allows me to reflect on the underlying processes of research in the academy that tend to reinforce power/knowledge hierarchies and also to consider my presence as an insider/outsider (Al-Hardan 2014). One of the ways I have attempted to do this as part of my research is to recognize the steps taken prior to fieldwork (within the academy) as well as during the research, including my status as a non-neutral outsider. Beyond dialogue and collaboration I took an ethnographic approach to understanding the everyday experiences of the geopolitics of autonomy. It should be noted that I do not claim that this study is ethnography, as the limits to research made that impossible, but instead, it is an ethnographic approach that provided a more nuanced understanding of everyday food and agricultural practices in self-declared autonomous communities. In this approach I have adopted many ethnographic methods, participant observation, in-depth interviews, and so on, but I have also attempted to, as addressed earlier, negotiate the power dynamics and consider experiences and knowledges as I utilize these methods. In this section I provide an overview of the methods used.

Methods

In her early research on Zapatismo in Chiapas, Lynn Stephen argued that in situations of low-intensity warfare scholars must accept that traditional methods of fieldwork will not always fit the situation and instead we must expand our understandings of what legitimate fieldwork is (2002:23). Given the constraints posed in conducting research in communities in resistance, I undertook traditionally accepted qualitative methods and adapted them to meet the requirements of conducting research in self-declared autonomous communities. Field research was conducted in the official

municipality of Chenalhó for nine months between 2010 and 2013, including a six-month trip in 2012-2013. Three methods of data collection were utilized in this research (Table 3.1):

Interviews	Zapatista supporters Zapatista agroecology promoters Yachil coffee cooperative members (Zapatista) Yachil coffee cooperative leadership (Zapatista) Las Abejas supporters Maya Vinic cooperative members (Las Abejas) Maya Vinic cooperative leadership (Las Abejas) Maya Vinic staff (Las Abejas) NGO staff (Chiapas) Coffee Roasters (Cooperative Coffees, U.S.)
Participant Observation	communities households <i>milpa</i> <i>cafetal</i> coffee cooperatives meetings certification audits processing and packaging Zapatista <i>Escuelita</i> (little school) Specialty Coffee Association of America Meeting
Document Analysis	Zapatista Communications Las Abejas Denunciations Newspapers (Mexico) Fair trade certification white papers and policies Cooperative Coffees website Fair Trade Chronicles social media

Table 3.1: Methods of data collection

In addition to these methods I also took photographs of agricultural plots, when appropriate, and had more informal conversations with people on a day-to-day basis. A number of these informal conversations took place (in a mix of Spanish and Tzotzil) during meals and although they were unplanned and unstructured they form an important component of this research.

Interviews

The purpose of this dissertation is to expound on different ways of knowing, understanding and practicing autonomy, solidarity (via fair trade) and food sovereignty through an examination of the everyday agricultural practices of farmers in communities in resistance. I undertook approximately 63 interviews with 42 participants who identified as farmers, coffee cooperative workers, coffee roasters, or affiliated NGO staff. The mismatch in these figures demonstrates that I interviewed some participants on multiple occasions, which reflects the dialogic approach of the project, the changing nature of the questions as well as the fact that the research was conducted in three sets of travel. Additionally, in some cases, interviews were conducted with a group of farmers. Research that was acceptable within the communities limited my interviewee pool to adult members of coffee growing households that are affiliated with the Zapatistas and Las Abejas—no *partidistas* were interviewed. Interview guides were made up of open-ended questions, were reviewed by the *Junta de Buen Gobierno* in Oventik, and per restrictions on recording, were transcribed by hand as field-notes. All interviews in Chiapas were conducted in Spanish and translated by the author; interviews in the U.S. were conducted in English.¹¹

The interviews conducted in the highlands form the backbone of this research and I would like to focus on how these interviews took place to provide context for the process. While in the highlands, interviews were conducted in a number of different spaces, in the field, in the household, at the coffee cooperative, or even on the porch of an *abarrote* (micro-grocery). In some cases conversation flowed easily, in other cases conversation was strained by language difficulties (Spanish is the second language of the

majority of participants in these conversations, myself included) and thus were slower and more tedious. People were generally open to discussing mundane agricultural practices, coffee cooperative politics and their struggle for autonomy. More difficult to discuss was the long-standing conflict, violence and displacement within the highlands. People were wary of discussing past or present conflict in the communities; even when it became part of the stories being told, interviewees were careful to close the story on a positive note, “but things are different now,” for example. At all times participants freely discussed the “bad government” (what the official Mexican government bodies are generally referred to). Indeed, many jokes were made at the expense of the Chiapas government slogan “*¡Hechos, no palabras!*” which translates to “Deeds, not words!” and is assumed by many to be a direct attack on the resistance of the Zapatistas. That said, many of my conversations with *campesinos/as* focused on how to ask particular questions, for example the question “what do you think about autonomy?” may seem reasonable within the context of the research, however, such a question would be met with silence or a simplified “I don’t.” And so I discussed with people how to ask about autonomy, what type of questions I should ask about the struggle and what they wanted to tell me about how the community works. This formed an important part of the dialogue I had with participants and assisted with keeping me accountable to different ways of thinking about the same ideas.

Participant Observation

Between 2010-2013 I visited coffee-producing communities in the autonomous zone of Oventik in order to understand how agriculture and food production operated as

spaces of resistance and how they were critical to the construction of autonomy in the highlands. I spent time with the coffee cooperatives as well as with community members in their own community spaces. Interviews with farming households were supplemented with direct observation of household, farming and community activities. Such participant observation included working in the *milpa* or *cafetal*, or doing daily activities around the household, such as putting out coffee beans and *frijoles* (beans) to dry on the concrete patio. Shared meals were also a prevalent form of less-formal interaction. At other times I would walk or be in a vehicle with *socios* (coffee cooperative members) traveling to another community, to market, or even to the city of San Cristóbal de las Casas.

Participant observation undertaken with the coffee cooperatives took many forms as I participated in meetings and audits, and followed the coffee bean from field to export. I was present for a number of meetings that were led by the leadership and I also was fortunate to participate in the four-day Fairtrade International audit of Maya Vinic. My observations at Maya Vinic were more lengthy and took on different forms as the cooperative has a processing unit, a cooperatively run *abarrote*, and a roasting facility as well as a café in the city of San Cristóbal. Whereas Yachil was just beginning to build a central location for the dry processing of coffee in late 2013, and as my opportunities for observation were mediated by the Junta in Oventik, I had limited occasions to participate in the daily activities of the cooperative as a unit. In all cases, observations and informal conversations were recorded as field-notes and were later transcribed and analyzed to understand how activities relating to the production of coffee and within the coffee cooperative related to and helped to produce broader discourses of autonomy, solidarity and food sovereignty.

In addition to these activities undertaken in communities, I also participated in the inaugural Zapatista *Escuelita* in Chiapas, as well as in the United States at the 2012 Specialty Coffee Association of Americas (SCAA) annual meeting. My participation in the Zapatista *Escuelita* in 2013 was a helpful space to think through the topics from my interviews and to close my trips to Chiapas. While the meeting was helpful to me in terms of developing my thinking, it should be noted that none of my conversations with the Zapatista leadership at the *Escuelita* are being used as part of this dissertation. Finally, my attendance at the SCAA meetings in Portland in 2012 was timely, as it coincided with the height of protest regarding the split of Fair Trade USA from Fairtrade International and I was able to participate in a number of conversations about what these changes meant for certification in general, for small farmers and for the broader fair trade movement (see: Naylor 2014).

Documents and Other Second-hand Sources

Documents were used to corroborate data collected in the course of interviews and participant observation. Fairtrade International's certification documents helped illustrate what was expected from cooperatives and farmers seeking to maintain fair trade certification. I additionally consulted Zapatista and Las Abejas *communiqués* and *denuncias* during and following the research period to assist with identifying events in participating communities and also to have a record of the movements' public actions. Mexican news was also consulted while in the field and during the period of data analysis to collect the 'official' and 'critical' opinion being publicized; I primarily conducted

online analysis using the keywords “Zapatista,” Las Abejas,” and “fair trade” drawing from two main sources, *La Jornada* and *Cuarto Poder*.

Concluding Thoughts

Beyond the identification of the methods used, in this chapter I have attempted to discuss my approach and methodology for the research and write-up of this dissertation. In particular, I wanted to put the decolonial in conversation with feminist geopolitics to better articulate how to understand the more pressing issues involved with conducting this type of research. Furthermore, conducting research with groups under threat and in areas of conflict presents further hurdles. Rather than consider the limits imposed on the research as obstacles, I attempted to demonstrate how these limits formed part of the dialogic nature of the research and how embracing the approach to research that was created in conversation with the participants supported my efforts to be self-reflexive and accountable. The next three chapters will draw from this methodology in discussing the empirical work for this project.

Notes

¹ Consistent with the argument of Lugones and Spelman (1986) that providing an autobiography does not serve to fully acknowledge my position or provide me with a disclaimer, I attempt instead to analyze the system within which I am conducting research (cited in Alcoff 1992:25).

² Even in February 2014, I received reports that displaced families from communities adjacent to Acteal had not been able to return to their homes and instead called upon members of peace organizations in San Cristóbal de las Casas to accompany them to their coffee fields for the harvest.

³ In focus groups facilitated by Tavanti in the early 2000s different meanings of violence were related. Violence was attached to the 1994 uprising and also to the Acteal massacre (1997) and the ongoing counterinsurgency. Violence was also conveyed by groups as their displacement by large companies seeking land, when coffee prices were below the costs of production and also the harassment, detention and wrongful imprisonment of social movement supporters (2005:7-8).

⁴ For example, between my visits in 2010 and 2012 the state government built a primary school just outside the gates of the Caracol of Oventik and in the last decade the road from San Cristóbal to Chenalhó has become the *Ruta Maya* (Mayan Route) and has cultural centers for indigenous men and women to work and sell crafts. These government sponsored stores, health clinics and schools are rarely open, however.

⁵ The most famous case was that of Alberto Patishtan who was jailed for 13 years for allegedly killing 7 police officers (BBC 2013). The imprisonment of Zapatista and Las Abejas supporters stands in contrast to the lack of arrests and the release from prison of people who have perpetrated violence against Zapatista and Las Abejas membership. The case of the paramilitary members that carried out the atrocities of Acteal stands out, as 52 of the 79 incarcerated for their participation have been released and live alongside the survivors of the massacre (S!Paz 2012:4-5). Even the police are often implicated in illegal acts, non-responsiveness to violence and in evidence tampering; a former bishop of Chiapas asserted that “the police are accomplices of those who commit robbery, murder, kidnapping, and forced disappearances” (Raúl Vera López quoted in ibid:4).

⁶ Vivian Newdick in her 2012 dissertation clearly states that her proposal to conduct research in a Zapatista Caracol (Morelia) was rejected in 2007. Other dissertation research has been similarly rejected, see: Giovanni 2014:95, also Caracol Morelia. To my knowledge, the last Zapatista approved research project was conducted by Mariana Mora in 2003 in the autonomous municipality of 17 de Noviembre in the northern autonomous zone of Roberto Barrios (see: Mora 2008).

⁷ This reemergence culminated in the organization of the *Escuelitas* “little schools,” which were opportunities for people from all over the world to be invited by the Zapatistas to come to Chiapas and learn about the Zapatista project of autonomy. The first little school was held in August of 2013 and the second in January of 2014. However, following the brutal killing of a *votán* (guide, title for the ‘teachers’ in the little school) by paramilitaries in the autonomous zone of La Realidad in May 2014, activities related to the little schools were briefly suspended and then reinstated as the Zapatistas once again changed the face that they present to the world. In an announcement made at a commemoration of the life of Votán Galeano (who was murdered), the mouthpiece of the movement, Subcomandante Marcos ceased to exist, so that Galeano could live on.

⁸ This stands in contrast to Las Abejas, who are very much in the public eye (they issue denunciations with great frequency and stage marches at least monthly) and do not have a system of governance on par with the Zapatistas.

⁹ For example, to receive an audience with the Junta, one must arrive at the entrance of the Caracol, surrender a piece of official identification, and answer questions of the guards. The Junta then gives permission to proceed from the Caracol into support communities. I received a memo from the Junta to present to the autonomous municipal president upon my arrival in the community.

¹⁰ A story was related to me by an international NGO worker, which explained this better. This worker had been patronizing different *abarrotos* (micro-grocery shops) in a highland community and was asked by a Zapatista family to only buy from certain shops. When the worker asked for an explanation, after some days of hesitancy, a family member answered that buying from some of the other shops, which were run by *partidistas* contributed money to funds for the purchase of weapons that are used to threaten Zapatista supporters in the community.

¹¹ In some cases, when interviewing in a group-setting my questions were translated to Tzotzil by a bilingual Spanish-Tzotzil speaker and a group response in Spanish was transcribed. This is a very common method of communication in Zapatista-affiliated communities in interviews including two or more people (see also: Mora 2008:68-69; 280; Tavanti 2003:25).

CHAPTER IV

AGRICULTURE AS AN AUTONOMOUS ACT: THE MATERIAL PRACTICE OF RESISTANCE AND AUTONOMY WITHOUT BORDERS IN THE HIGHLANDS OF CHIAPAS, MEXICO

Introduction

In 1994 when the Zapatistas staged their uprising in Chiapas, Mexico they wore *pasamontañas* (balaclavas) which served to cover their faces yet also allowed them to ‘be seen,’ drawing attention to demands for rights and recognition by indigenous peoples in Mexico. A critical component of this recognition was ensconced in their simultaneous declaration of autonomy. Their declaration of autonomy echoed the demands of indigenous organizations throughout Latin America that had become increasingly visible and vociferous in the wake of protests in the early 1990s over the 500-year anniversary of Columbus’s arrival in the Americas. Over the two decades following that time, autonomy has become a rallying cry for indigenous organizations and the focus of scholarly analysis of indigenous social movements.

As a topic of scholarly investigation, autonomy is often considered at different scales, individual, communal, regional, for example (cf. Åkermark 2013; Chatterton 2005; Cornell 2002; Díaz Polanco 1997; Esteva 2010; Hodkinson and Chatterton 2006; Sandt 2003; Smith 2004). In studies of space and place it may be treated as territorial control of a bounded space demarcated by borders, and often, it is considered as a relation to the state. Above all, autonomy is understood as self-government and the devolution of power to a minority group over a contiguous territory (Åkermark 2013; Heintze 1998).

In many cases autonomy is discussed as part of oppositional politics enacted by social movements. Demands for recognition and self-determination form a core component of collective action by indigenous groups. Indeed, the concept of autonomy lies at the heart of indigenous politics in Latin America. However, in self-declared autonomous indigenous communities in the highlands of Chiapas, autonomy is a process that is understood in a number of different ways. In particular, it is an everyday practice of resisting state-led politics and economic development while maintaining territory and livelihoods through agricultural production.

In this chapter I examine different ways of knowing and understanding autonomy that are both part of indigenous demands for self-determination and also form productive practices for peasant (*campesino/a*) corn and coffee farmers in the highlands. The struggle for autonomy for *campesinos/as* is not simply a rejection of state governance and neoliberal market structures; it is a process of creating self-reliant and secure livelihoods, as one farmer related to me:

Autonomy is not just a political thing anymore. It is an economic thing and a social thing. It is not about territory with borders, it is about action, about growing coffee, and about having the land for the *milpa* [cornfield]. It is about daily life and how we live, what we do every day. It is about not being told what to do from the outside.

During the course of my fieldwork in communities that have declared autonomy from the state it became clear that the meanings and the practice of autonomy were embedded in farmer understandings of resistance and in their agricultural production experiences. When considering local experiences and narratives against most scholarly accounts of autonomy, the idea that new ways of theorizing autonomy and resistance were needed

was reinforced. I argue that in order to understand indigenous autonomy and resistance in the highlands, it is critical to examine how these ideas are practiced in place.

In this chapter I am concerned with how the process of cultivating autonomy in self-declared autonomous communities in the highlands of Chiapas is understood and practiced. I begin this chapter with a brief discussion of the context in which farmers in the highlands have come to be ‘in resistance’ and the methods that were used in the study. Following this section I delve into current theorizations of autonomy, which define it as self-governance and as a crucial component of social movement politics. Recognizing the common ways that autonomy is deployed and understood, I then turn to the case material, which will highlight different ways of knowing and understanding the struggle for autonomy in the highlands.

Context and Methods

Chiapas is the southernmost state in Mexico, sharing an international border with Guatemala. It is the eighth largest state in Mexico and the 7th most populous (out of 32) (INEGI 2010). The 2010 census completed by the *Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía* (INEGI – National Institute of Statistics and Geography) in Chiapas recorded 4.7 million inhabitants, almost 30% of whom were identified as indigenous.¹ The figure of 30% represents twelve groups, but the majority population is Tzeltal and Tzotzil speaking (INEGI 2010). These groups primarily populate the central highlands and eastern lowlands of Chiapas. The official highland government municipality of Chenalhó, is considered by INEGI (2010) to be one of the most ‘marginalized’ areas in the state (see: Chapter I). The municipality is largely populated by indigenous peasant (as they

self-identify) farmers (*campesinos/as*) who produce primarily corn, beans, and coffee on small parcels of land (1-2 hectares).

Chenalhó is a particularly interesting location to look at issues of food and agriculture because of the turbulent land reform history of Chiapas. People have been fighting for land reform since the Mexican Revolution in the early 1900s, and many scholars agree that land reform was exceptionally contentious and poorly executed in Chiapas in the latter part of the century (Bobrow-Strain 2005; 2007; Collier and Quaratiello 2005; Harvey 1998; Stephen 2002). At the time of the 1992 reforms in preparation for signing the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in Mexico, which effectively cancelled land reform, there were still thousands of petitions by small-farmers for land yet unresolved in Chiapas. This history of struggles for land ties into indigenous organizing and demands for self-determination; the inability to obtain secure sources of land and income in the early 1970s led to organizing in Eastern Chiapas (Stephen 2002). As communal land rights and constitutionally guaranteed land reform eroded in the early 1990s the protests of indigenous-led groups became louder. There is a rich history detailing the organizing and the struggle of indigenous movements in Chiapas, and especially attention to the uprising of the Zapatistas, which I will not delve into here (for more in-depth accounts see: Collier and Quaratiello 2005; Earle and Simonelli 2005; Eber 2001; Harvey 1998; Nash 2001; Stephen 2002; Tavanti 2003). However, I do want to highlight a few key moments from the past two decades that will assist in giving context to the declaration of autonomy by the Zapatistas and their sister organization in the highlands, *Sociedad Civil Las Abejas*.

Sociedad Civil Las Abejas (The Bees Civil Society), or Las Abejas, organized in 1992 in the highlands of Chiapas in response to violence against women seeking land rights (Tavanti 2003). In forming their group and taking their name, Las Abejas sought to replicate the liberation theology approach to Christian Base Communities that spread throughout the region following the Catholic church's interaction with communities after the events of Vatican II (González and González 2008; Nash 2001). The basis of their organization is in the Catholic religion and they take a pacifist approach to conflict resolution. The name of 'the bees' was used to symbolize their work as a group to produce justice and defend rights for all (Eber 2001; Tavanti 2003). By 1993, community-based struggles over land in the highlands and the national reforms stemming from the passage of NAFTA, led to much discontent in communities populated by Las Abejas members (Tavanti 2003). The civil support of Las Abejas for the uprising and subsequent autonomy movement of the Zapatistas was couched in this early discontent.

Although the Zapatistas had been organized for over two decades by the time of the NAFTA reforms, it was the retraction of the constitutional promise of land reform that brought the Zapatistas forward. On January 1, 1994, the *Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional* (EZLN – The Zapatista Army of National Liberation, established in the early 1980s), staged an uprising in a number of town centers throughout Chiapas. Although the rebellion lasted only 12 days, the resistance and demands for rights to land, work, housing, nutrition, health, education, liberty, democracy, peace and justice are still being pursued by the movement (EZLN 1993). These demands are based in reversing the 500 years of oppression of the indigenous peoples of the Americas.

The Zapatistas take their name from Mexican Revolutionary Emiliano Zapata whose cry of “land and liberty” still echoes throughout Chiapas today (Stephen 2002). As noted earlier, in 1994 when the Zapatistas rebelled against the Mexican state, their demands were couched in Zapata’s ideals and were elaborated in the “First Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle” (1993), which stated:

We are a product of 500 years of struggle: first against slavery, then during the War of Independence against Spain led by insurgents, then to avoid being absorbed by North American imperialism, then to promulgate our constitution and expel the French empire from our soil, and later the dictatorship of Porfirio Diaz denied us the just application of the Reform laws and the people rebelled and leaders like Villa and Zapata emerged, poor men just like us. We have been denied the most elemental preparation so they can use us as cannon fodder and pillage the wealth of our country. They don't care that we have nothing, absolutely nothing, not even a roof over our heads, no land, no work, no health care, no food nor education. Nor are we able to freely and democratically elect our political representatives, nor is there independence from foreigners, nor is there peace or justice for ourselves and our children.

But today, we say ENOUGH IS ENOUGH...

Subsequent declarations (at the time of writing, supporters of the Zapatistas are adherents to the “Sixth Declaration” (2005)) demanded democracy, liberty, and justice among other important rights and recognition long denied indigenous peasants by the state. Although the armed conflict between the EZLN and the Mexican army was brief, the impact of the initial uprising lingered. In the early weeks of 1994, thirty-four official municipalities were declared autonomous and in resistance and the Zapatistas began to develop their own governmental forms alongside the official government (Stephen 2002:76). Many groups identified with the resistance and declaration of autonomy made by the Zapatistas, even if they were not as visible, including Las Abejas (Tavanti 2003). Following the uprising, Las Abejas considered their role as supporting the Zapatista demands for autonomy and political-economic transformations while also striving for a peaceful

resolution to the post-uprising conflict (Moksnes 2004; Nash 2010). Even as these groups declared autonomy they still sought rights and recognition as citizens of Mexico (Stephen 2002; Stahler-Sholk 2001).

In February of 1994 peace talks between the government and the Zapatistas began in the highland town of San Andrés Larráinzar; these talks were moderated by Bishop Samuel Ruiz (Diocese of San Cristóbal de las Casas) and attended by government and Zapatista representatives, as well as scholars and peacekeepers from around the globe.² The peace talks were held intermittently from 1994-1996 even while the federal government launched new military campaigns against the communities that Zapatistas were based in (Harvey 1998; Stephen 2002). In 1996, the Accords of San Andrés on Indigenous Rights and Culture were signed between government and Zapatista representatives and the Zapatistas withdrew from the public eye while they waited for the Accords to be written into federal law and implemented. The Accords supported the demand for autonomy and stipulated linguistic, territorial and political rights for indigenous peoples in Mexico (Eber and Kovic 2003). Importantly, the Accords recognized the indigenous populations of Mexico as political actors in their own right and created a foundation for policy changes surrounding rights and cultural autonomy (Stephen 1997a).

The process of bringing the San Andrés Accords to the federal congress was lengthy as it was continually delayed and reworked ahead of a vote. The redrafted version, which was penned in a multi-partisan committee, called the Congressional Commission for Concord and Pacification (COCOPA), was a less-powerful document put forward as a compromise between the government and indigenous groups (Stahler-

Sholk 2004; Stephen 2002). The COCOPA law was accepted by the indigenous groups, but was afterward redrafted in committee yet again, stripping away the most significant components of rights and recognition that had been included in the Accords and in the original COCOPA law. The government version of the “indigenous rights law” was introduced and passed, despite denouncement by many indigenous groups and human rights organizations (Simonelli and Earle 2003; Stahler-Sholk 2004).³ Critically, the diluted rights law removed clauses that would have allowed for collective control of natural resources and indigenous groups as self-governing units within the state but not ruled by the state (Mora 2008). The demands made in the San Andrés Accords were based on devolution of power from the state, but also asked for increased government attention to economic development and government programming in rural areas that had been long neglected (Stephen 1997b). However, after the passage of the ‘indigenous rights law’ in 2001, groups that had worked to bring the Accords to the table fundamentally restructured their demands for autonomy from being rights and recognition granted by the state to the exercise of rights by indigenous people in their own spaces (Stahler-Sholk 2004).

Despite the negotiations for the 1996 San Andrés Accords that sought to institutionalize indigenous rights and peace between the Zapatistas and the Mexican government, the state and paramilitaries have waged a continuous low-intensity war against rebellious indigenous groups (Mora 2008; Nash 2001; Stahler-Sholk 1998; Stephen 2002; Tavanti 2003). At the height of the violence in 1997, 45 men, women and children who identified as part of Las Abejas and were refugees seeking protection in the highland community of Acteal were gunned down at a mass for peace (Eber 2001;

Moksnes 2005; Tavanti 2003; Stahler-Sholk 1998). The horror of Acteal received international attention and elicited a global response. However, there are many other less-publicized incidents of violence and confrontation that took place before the Massacre at Acteal and up to this day.

As a result of the violence against their groups and the government's unwillingness to recognize their right to self-determination, both groups reinforced their declaration of autonomy from the state.⁴ To date neither Zapatista nor Las Abejas supporters participate in state-sponsored politics, and they do not receive any funds, subsidies, healthcare or educational services or any other support from the state. In 2003, the military arm of the Zapatistas retreated into the Lacandon rainforest and five civilian government centers called *Caracoles* (literally: snail shells) were established (Stahler-Sholk 2007). The Zapatista *Caracoles* function as government centers for indigenous peoples and particularly those supportive of the movement. Communities throughout the highlands that lie in the Zapatista autonomous zone of Oventik are populated by a mix of *campesinos/as* in resistance (including Zapatistas and Abejas) as well as farmers with other political affiliations. The mixed nature of these communities poses interesting questions about how autonomy is understood and practiced when there are some residing in these communities who support the autonomy project and some who oppose it.

Working in communities in resistance necessitated a different approach to fieldwork, which was cognizant of the politics, tension and violence present in highland communities and in Chiapas more broadly. I employed a feminist geopolitical approach, which suggests that scholars should consider research as situated knowledge and attempt to examine the multiplicity of experiences in which people experience unequal power

relations as part of everyday life (cf. Dowler and Sharp 2001; Haraway 1988; 1991; Hyndman 2001; Dixon and Marston 2011). This chapter draws on research focused on the everyday practices of *campesinos/as* who claim membership in Las Abejas and the Zapatista movement and who live in the official highland municipality of Chenalhó. In particular I worked with farmers who are primarily affiliated with these movements, but who are also linked up with other groups such as those advocating ‘fair trade’ and food sovereignty.

Conducted between 2010-2013, my research investigated spaces of food and agriculture as sites of resistance in self-declared autonomous communities populated by indigenous Mayan subsistence farmers. The main question guiding this segment of the research was: What daily agricultural practices are understood by farmers as contributing indigenous autonomy? The portion of the study engaged for this chapter was carried out with members of the Zapatista and Las Abejas social movements and included participant observation and interviews in six highland communities. I undertook approximately 63 interviews with 42 participants, in some cases interviewing the same participants on multiple occasions. Additionally, in some cases, interviews were conducted with a group of farmers. Research that was acceptable within the communities limited my interviewee pool to adult members of coffee growing households that are affiliated with the Zapatistas and Las Abejas—no *partidistas* (supporters of the major Mexican political parties) were interviewed. Interview guides were made up of open-ended questions, were reviewed by the Zapatista civil government council (*Junta de Buen Gobierno*) in Oventik, and per restrictions on recording, were transcribed by hand as field-notes. Interviews were conducted with farmers in Spanish.⁵

Utilizing a feminist geopolitical approach allowed me to work with participants to learn how we might consider the day-to-day lived experience of autonomy. I attempted to establish a measure of accountability to both participants and to their ways of knowing and understanding the ideas under discussion (cf. Alcoff 1992; Newdick 2012; Stephen 2013) through a dialogic cycle of sharing the research and via reformulating my interview questions in conversation with participants. As Vivian Newdick pointed out in her work with Zapatista women, working through collective processes creates a space for accountability even as the tensions and contradictions in everyday life and practice are considered (2012:27). Consistent with this, a number of my interviews took place with groups of farmers, where instead of having a list of questions to be answered, we discussed the broader question of my research which then had secondary questions interwoven, dissected, and in many cases collectively answered. This is not an uncommon approach in farming communities that are in support of the Zapatistas and Las Abejas (cf. Mora 2008; Newdick 2012; Tavanti 2003).

Having a dialogue about the politics within the respective movements and how farmers were considering their roles and everyday practices as part of their struggle was a critical component of shaping the direction of this work. Discussion about what autonomy meant, what it looked like and how farmers were enacting it in their communities shed light on different ways of thinking about autonomy that were distinct from participation in a social movement. To better understand farmer interpretations of autonomy, it is first critical to examine the ways in which it is theorized in current research on self-governance and collective action. The section that follows looks to contemporary understandings of autonomy to help ground the discussion.

Theorizing Autonomy

Many studies that define autonomy rely on legal understandings of ‘self-governance’ (cf. Derrick 2008; Heintze 1998; Pickerill and Chatterton 2006) stemming from the Greek roots *auto-self* and *nomos*-law (Böhm et al. 2010:19; see also: Chatterton 2005; Ulmen 1993). Two major themes emerge from this literature, one is autonomy as devolution of power from the state to a minority group within the state and the other is autonomy as a form of oppositional politics driven by social movement action against neoliberal capitalist systems. Within this first theme autonomy is considered an important legal concept that is constructed as a decentralized self-government of a territory by a minority group (cf. Åkermark 2013; Cornell 2002; Derrick 2008; Heintze 1998).⁶ Such examinations of autonomy are bound up in analyses of relations with the state, as Cornell (2002) notes, territorial autonomy is often granted or devolution is acknowledged by a central government. The resulting autonomous government, he further argues “may share most attributes of a state” with sovereignty as the exception (*ibid*:252). Cornell identifies attributes such as territory, clearly delimited and recognized borders, cohesive group identity, state-like institutions, mass media, and approved leadership. In the case of recognition and the ceding of control over territory, Åkermark notes that autonomy becomes an “institutional expression of the internal dimension of self-determination” (2013:7). Again, legal understandings point to autonomy as a territorial concept. Although many scholars are reticent to definitively state what an autonomously governed territory looks like, the foundation of the concept, as examined in this body of work, is based in self-governance of a territory that involves power-sharing with the state (Heintze 1998).

Running through another strand of scholarship on autonomy are accounts of collective action protesting neoliberal globalization (Böhm et al. 2010; cf. Blaser et al. 2010; Chatterton 2005; 2010; Featherstone 2003; Pickerill and Chatterton 2006).⁷ Böhm et al. note:

Recently we have witnessed the increasing importance of autonomy in many social movements across the world. This usually involves a struggle for self-determination, organizational self-management and independent social and economic practices vis-à-vis the state and capital (2010:17).

Autonomy is frequently discussed in the context of social movement activism and group efforts for self-determination; specifically, autonomy has become an important rallying point for what scholars have articulated as new social movements (*ibid*). Recognizing that autonomy had been under-theorized in geography Pickerill and Chatterton initiated an investigation into what they term “autonomous geographies” or “spaces where people desire to constitute non-capitalist, egalitarian and solidaristic forms of political, social and economic organization through a combination of resistance and creation” (2006:730). Their concern with the usage of autonomy as part of anti-capitalist activist practices in the United Kingdom has assisted with expanding the different ways that we might consider the aims of social movements. In particular, their work on autonomous geographies speaks to how alternatives to capitalism can be achieved through a greater engagement with autonomy (2006:743). Critically, the basis for this and other work is social movement action. Böhm et al. argue that social movement demands for autonomy take on many meanings; nonetheless, collective action in favor of autonomy is generalizable to opposition to neoliberal capital, power-sharing with the state, and localized knowledge production (2010:19).

Additionally, much scholarship on social movement demands for autonomy draws from examples originating in Latin America (the Zapatista Movement in Mexico, Unemployed Workers Movement in Argentina, the Landless Peasant Movement in Brazil, and the Afro-Colombian Movement, for example) (cf. Blaser et al. 2010; Chatterton 2005; Lopez 2013; Pickerill and Chatterton 2006). Unlike the U.K.-focused autonomous geographies of Pickerill and Chatterton (2006), many of these movements are focused on rights and recognition stemming from what Stahler-Sholk identifies as a “regional phenomenon of resurgent indigenous identity” (2010:278). A regional focus on Latin America reveals many investigations which focus on collective action for the right (from the state) to self-determination (cf. Díaz Polanco 1997; Speed and Collier 2000; Stahler-Sholk et al. 2008; Stephen 1997a; 2002; Ulloa 2011; Van Cott 2001; Van der Haar 2004). Autonomy or self-determination in this case can be broadly understood as recognition of indigenous practices and rights to internal decision-making (Fox et al. 1999; see also: Pitty 2001).

Demands for self-determination and autonomy have taken shape in many forms in Chiapas and Mexico more broadly. In reviewing the literature, beyond general agreement of defining autonomy as ‘self-governance’ there is a lack of specificity how autonomy is practiced because it has been difficult to characterize in a definitive manner (see: Pickerill and Chatterton 2006; Stephen 1997a). Indeed, Lynn Stephen argued that there are a number of different meanings of autonomy in southern Mexico making it difficult to determine what autonomy is or what it looks like (1997a:77).⁸ Even during the conversations around the San Andrés Accords Stephen found that there was no agreement as to how autonomy would be implemented (*ibid*:91).

Complicating the political disagreements that persist over the nature of autonomy is the absence of research exploring the day-to-day practices of autonomy. Autonomy as constituent of social movement action and resistance to globalization is an important theme that threads through many accounts and has offered important insight into how demands for autonomy are made as part of collective action in particular places. While social movement action is important in theorizing autonomy—and there are undeniably social movements embedded in this work—I think it is important to scale-down from the movement and investigate how actors understand and practice autonomy as part of their everyday lives. The predominant focus on collective action neglects how the politics of autonomy and resistance are practiced (or sedimented) in place (Nelson 2003; see also: Perrault 2008). As Pickerill and Chatterton note in their more nuanced work on anti-capitalist activists usage of autonomy in the U.K., autonomy is contextual and situated (2006:731-732). Nevertheless, current understandings of autonomy remain tightly focused on the demands that groups make on the state and do not draw on the mundane practices that are undertaken by those attempting to achieve autonomy. I argue that autonomy takes on new meaning when social movements are not the foci of the analysis and instead, examinations are centered on the everyday resistance in indigenous communities.

Indigenous farmers in the highlands that are affiliated with Las Abejas and the Zapatistas consider themselves “in resistance” and I was told on number occasions that the most basic element of this resistance was a refusal of the social programs, economic projects and violence of the state. Their resistance is made up of their work in the agricultural fields (and other collective projects) and their participation in their respective

movements. Autonomy is a process that happens through the resistance enacted by farmers on a daily basis. Because of this, it is necessary to discuss resistance in tandem with autonomy. *Resistencia autónoma* (autonomous resistance) as farmers describe it is not a *de jure* relation with the state, but a *de facto* denial of state power. Understanding the resistance of farmers in these communities helps to identify autonomy as a process, not as a thing. This is not autonomy granted by the state over a contiguous territory or granting of rights, this is rebellious self-declared autonomy that is put into practice by myriad actors. Because the Zapatista movement in Chiapas is often associated with anti- or alter-globalization, studies focused in Chiapas invariably tie Zapatista resistance to opposition against hegemonic global forces. While this categorization may assist with understanding wide-scale Zapatista politics regarding neoliberal capitalism, as well as state and corporate practices, it tells us very little about what the politics of resistance look like as part of everyday life in Chiapas. Moreover, there tends to be a reliance on Zapatista communiqués (and especially the writings of Subcomandante Marcos) and the larger politics of the movement, which neglects the practices and understandings of resistance of the larger group populating the movement.⁹

Listening to Zapatista and Las Abejas supporters talk about *resistencia autónoma* led me to reconsider scholarship on “resistance” as an important complement to theorizing autonomy. It is the act of resistance that assists with building autonomy in self-declared autonomous communities. I theorize *resistencia autónoma* as part of the enactment of autonomy in self-declared autonomous communities. Analysis of social movements in geographic research on resistance in many cases is focused on how they network and mobilize through space/time and impact broader political narratives and

policies (Pratt 2009). The importance of studying social movements notwithstanding, taking the movement as the key analytical category for studying resistance has tended toward its reification, eliding the multiple ways in which radical discourses deployed by social movements become imbricated within social practices over time and space (Alvarez et al. 1998; Hale 1997; Nelson 2003).¹⁰ The foot-dragging and sabotage described by James Scott (1985) in his groundbreaking work on peasant forms of resistance assists with scaling down to independent symbolic acts that form part of everyday life. In this chapter, I seek to chart a course between identifying resistance as organized through social movements and through every day unorganized resistance (see: Scott 1985) through decentering the movement (see: Nelson 2003) as the point of analysis. By decentering the movement I am able to take a place-based approach that still recognizes the important networks and flows of power that constitute farmer politics and practice.

Self-declared autonomous communities in resistance are not homogenous Zapatista or Las Abejas enclaves. Being ‘in resistance’ for farmers in politically fractious communities represents another form that their struggle takes. Resistance for Tzotzil speaking farmers in the highlands was translated from the Tzotzil words “stzi’kel vocol” to the phrase “to withstand suffering.”¹¹ This signals that autonomy for *campesinos/as* in resistance is no longer about rights and recognition from the state, but about being able to withstand the state. They are self-identified indigenous *campesinos/as* (peasants) whose knowledge and way of living has been consistently marginalized by the state and the elite. The efforts of the government to destabilize their resistance takes two shapes, first through government efforts to incentivize people away from the support of the Zapatista

and Las Abejas movements and second through low-intensity war. The autonomy being practiced in the highlands is a rebellious autonomy and it is fashioned through resisting both the state's measures of governmentality and its violence.

By linking resistance to everyday practices in this way, *campesinos/as* demonstrate that struggles against the government that are taken up by actors within social movements are not the vision of utopia that autonomy is often painted to be (cf. Pickerill and Chatterton 2006). Only through considering differences, practices and how autonomy is exercised can we move beyond the ‘romance of resistance’ to render the everyday experiences of farmers visible (cf. Casolo and Doshi 2013; Rose 2002; Sparke 2008). Autonomy as a lived experience in the highlands of Chiapas is a multi-faceted process that is known and practiced by farmers in resistance.

Knowing and Practicing Autonomy

Wendell Berry famously wrote that “eating is an agricultural act” (1990:145). This statement assists with making the connection between food and farm. It is an experience of the personal as political. I borrow this idea here, to think through agriculture as an autonomous act. To connect the decisions that are made in the field to the ones made in the household; to attach political significance to the growing of corn for subsistence and coffee for income. The struggles for autonomy in the highlands of Chiapas are not just for autonomous spaces free from government interference and secure access to resources, but also a struggle for pluriversal thinking and understanding of diverse political, economic and social practices. Furthermore, when delinked from the politics of petitioning the state for rights to territory—as is the case in self-declared

autonomous communities—I think what autonomy is and how it is understood is very different from the simplified self-governance and power-sharing it is typically described as being. For example, one farmer reported to me that: “autonomy is the most important part of the struggle. So we talk about the process of the struggle and make it a part of what forms in the mind of a way to understand indigenous life and the resistance.” For men and women as political actors in communities, autonomy takes on a number of different forms, it is about space and it is also about cultivating secure and self-reliant livelihoods in various economic contexts.

Even before abandoning efforts for rights and recognition from the state, Zapatista *campesinas* in resistance voiced the multiple meanings of autonomy in their Revolutionary Law (EZLN 1994). Stephen describes indigenous women’s definitions of autonomy in the Law as “expansive,” incorporating access and rights to modes of production, political rights, rights to their identities as indigenous women, reproductive rights and the right to a life without violence (2002:195-196). Indeed, June Nash (2010) has used this perspective to argue that autonomy is experienced differently by Zapatista and Abeja women in the highlands of Chiapas, as their struggle is waged at the level of the household (see also: Eber 2001). Such demands for economic, political and socio-cultural autonomy are a critical part of the struggle for autonomy in the highlands and the everyday practices that make possible *resistencia autónoma* are linked to the participation of households in productive spaces, specifically spaces of food and agricultural production.

In 2003, the Zapatistas formed centers of civilian governance and they continue to work with other indigenous groups, such as Las Abejas to share knowledge and gather

skills that will assist them in maintaining what they consider ‘dignified livelihoods.’¹²

The governance systems, solidarity networks and autonomous education, healthcare and agroecology programs that are being used by the Zapatistas have been the subject of much academic inquiry. Las Abejas activity has been somewhat less visible as they do not employ the same systems of governance and programming as the Zapatistas, however, their links to solidarity networks and their response to the counter-insurgency in the highlands has made up a critical component of research in the region as well. The literature that examines autonomy in communities in resistance falls into two general categories of analysis—with some straddling both—the first consider the socio-political conditions in deploying autonomous education and healthcare (in Zapatista civilian centers and support communities) (cf. Barnmeyer 2008; Baronnet et al. 2011; Earle and Simonelli 2005; Mora 2008; Stahler-Sholk 2010). The second, as noted in the previous section, are largely focused on social movement resistance to neoliberal globalization (cf. Chatterton and Ramor 2008; Moksnes 2004; 2005; Mora 2008; Stahler-Sholk 2007; Tavanti 2003). These scholarly investigations have been critical to contributing to our understanding of social movement politics and discourses. However, the importance of autonomy as it relates to the maintenance of territory and livelihood are very real considerations that are many times overlooked when focusing on the discourses and agendas of the broader social movements.

Las Abejas and the Zapatistas are in solidarity and live and work alongside each other as they seek to enact autonomy. It is important to note that both also live in deeply divided communities that comprise Las Abejas and Zapatista supporters as well as people who identify with politics which oppose their movements. The situation of divided

communities makes it difficult to define autonomous spaces within the context of bounded territory as there are not enclaves of different groups within communities. The struggle for autonomy is pronounced in the highlands as *campesinos/as* seek to put the politics of their movements into practice while negotiating opposition coming from within and outside their communities.

To ground this in place, I want to draw from a lengthy observation and informal conversation from the summer of 2010 in a highland community to illustrate what decisions are made in the context of *resistencia autónoma* in the everyday.

This morning I could see a large gathering of people at the basketball court in the center of the community. I asked about it and was told that it was the government coming to give welfare to the *partidistas*. Soon I saw people climbing the hill from the court and returning to their homes, each member of the household laden down with bottles of Coca-Cola, cartons of chicken eggs, blankets and for some, rolled up, green, twin-sized mattresses. Later that evening, I asked if the government was giving out these items—they were not, vendors set up in town on these days and offer credit in addition to the government payout for people to purchase such items. The women I was sitting with told me that the government money was very small, but it was enough to keep people loyal to the parties, to not join the autonomy movement. People sometimes leave the movement because the lure of the payments and new items such as radios and mattresses is too great to pass up. However, the government payment is not enough for the purchase of such expensive items and one woman explained that there was much debt between the *partidistas* and the vendors who lent at exorbitant rates. I had wanted to observe these interchanges, but it was not appropriate for me to approach *partidistas* and because of the presence of the government, most members of the movements (Zapatista and Las Abejas supporters) had left early and gone to the fields to work.

The women had risen early (around 4am), per usual, to grind masa to make tortillas, and for *pozol* (corn drink) to take to the fields. We had a cup of hot coffee or warm *pozol* with tortillas and beans for breakfast. Some families have banana palms in their fields and so there were bananas at breakfast as well. Before the arrival of the government caravan, most men had donned their boots, hats and machetes and women had bundled up their smallest children in their *rebozos* (large knitted wrap) on their backs and headed into their *milpas*. One or two families passed through

the communal land holding picking weeds as they went and checking the corn. We walked on the border of one of the family's cafetal and picked a few unripe peaches to crunch on as we made the 45 minute walk to their cornfield. In the *milpa*, the youngest of the children run around, playing. Older children are learning to use a machete, the women are picking fresh beans and bean flowers, the men are 'cleaning' the field with the machete, everyone inspects ears of corn for harvest. *Pozol* was shared around midday. Bags and bundles of corn and beans are strapped to the foreheads of many folks as we walked back to the community. Everyone is excited for *elote* (fresh corn). Upon our return, one of the older boys is sent out with some pesos. He came back with glass bottles of Coke to share around with the meal. We sat on short wooden chairs and discussed the day.

When I asked if it was difficult to see the government in their community an older campesino replied: "the bad government [reference to official state and federal governments] looks for ways to divide people and in their war they bomb us economically. The bad government buys people with bad houses and food; they look to buy-off peoples' consciences. The bad government doesn't know us. We are the resistance. The bad government has gotten to 'unknow' us...we live off our own sweat." I reflected on this while sipping my soda. His son, who was seated next to me said: "this is our war of 500 years. This is the way that they attacked indigenous people first, with the food and the goods of the colonizer, and their education. The government does not see this. They are trying to destabilize our autonomy. They bring in their bad corn and contaminate our community."

While such a scene may seem common in peasant communities in Mexico, this moment also represents many components of the struggle for *campesinos/as* in resistance. It shows the presence of the official state government in self-declared autonomous zones and the ways government services and programs are used as tools of counter-insurgency (cf. Mora 2008). It also demonstrates a key component of governmentality in seeking to lure people away from the resistance movements with cash payment programs. It further indicates how farmers in resistance respond to the presence of the government in their communities, by peacefully ignoring the intrusion. Finally, it is a moment of everydayness that captures the practice and the process of the struggle through the production and consumption of corn. This type of daily activity is helpful to think about

when considering how autonomy is being practiced. During the course of my time in the communities and through the dialogic nature of the interviews and conversations that were had, my inquiries about autonomy were not being shaped as a diagnostic (put differently, I was not trying to determine if they had achieved autonomy or not), but as a way to capture how the struggle is made up of day-to-day activities of *campesinos/as* in resistance. Their resistance is caught up in their everyday work. Daily work in the *milpa* assures claims to land, and a source of food. Without land and without food their resistance could not continue and the process of autonomy would falter.

We must consider autonomy as a lived thing that is understood through a prism of activities and knowledges. For *campesinos/as* in resistance, everyday decisions and the concrete practice of their struggle are based in their communities where they build alternatives to government politics and economics. It is also in the space of the fields, in daily productive practices, cooking and consumption, as well as the harvest. In the highlands there is one cycle of corn per year and one cycle of coffee. The season of corn is May to October and the coffee harvest takes place from December to March. However, the fields are maintained on a daily basis. Thus daily decision-making is based on prioritizing coffee or corn in terms of maintenance. Families work together in the *milpa*. Yet many times I saw the elder men from a household in the *cafetal*, (which under standards for fair trade certification restrict family labor, see Chapter V), while women and young children remained in the *milpa*. Corn is an essential element of community self-sufficiency and cultural and political autonomy, yet it is in direct competition with coffee, which takes up valuable land and time. Coffee too though is an important element of autonomy as it provides a network for farmers both locally and globally. The sale of

coffee also provides much needed cash income for the purchase of items that cannot be produced at home and for the purchase of food in the lean months when the corn and bean storage has run out.

Participation as an actor in a social movement takes time away from the fields as well, the positions that people volunteer for in civilian governance, in their communities and in collective production (such as the women's weaving cooperative or the coffee cooperative) take up precious time. A member of the leadership for an autonomous municipality disclosed that "here we have enough land, but we also have a lot of work for the struggle, if we could always be working in the field we could have enough food." The practice of autonomy for farmers in resistance in the highlands is linked to the production of both coffee and corn and is complicated by their participation in social movement politics. Autonomy is a process that is linked to participation in collective, but also one in which farmers participate on a daily basis through the production, harvest and consumption of corn for subsistence and coffee for income. Farmers also participate through their wider networks tied to collective economic activities (such as cooperative coffee production—see Chapters V and VI). All of these activities exist on a continuum of autonomy processes that contribute to the resistance of *campesinos/as*. Critically, the ability to maintain the resistance, the struggle and to pursue autonomy is based in agricultural production.

As I noted earlier, autonomy is generally considered in relation to the state. And while communities in the highlands have declared themselves autonomous, they have done so without the recognition of the state and also without community coherence. There remain people living in these communities that are not part of the autonomy project

of Las Abejas and the Zapatistas and this cultivates an uneven terrain of autonomy within these communities. For example, when I discussed community support for autonomy with farmers, they agreed that not everyone wanted autonomy, one farmer remarked to me: “there are some who want the government here, not us, but there are some who don’t want the autonomy and there are some who do. There is not a line, there is not a border in the community, we live together.” This is an important point to pull out of my conversations with farmers, that an autonomous community is not a distinct self-governing unit. Take for example this quote from a *campesino*: “there is no border because we have many people and parcels of land in many different places, they are not all together and not all are close to the house.” Such divisions make up an important part of everyday life and practice and become spatially constituted activities.

The political tensions written into the landscape of politically and economically heterogeneous communities profoundly shapes access to and use of productive spaces, and constrains the residents’ ability to navigate their communities. Zapatista and Las Abejas supporters must traverse spaces where people live and work who are *partidistas* (or make explicit choices to avoid those areas). In some cases, supporters of the movement may live in close proximity to households where members of paramilitaries—which threaten non-*partidistas*—reside.¹³ As part of conversations about *resistencia autónoma* farmers described a patchwork quilt of community autonomy where there were farming households who were Abejas or Zapatistas and were in support of autonomy and where there were households that did not participate in these movements and were not in support of autonomy. Autonomy is thus known and practiced by *campesinos/as* in resistance as a process and not as a demarcated space. It is not an autonomy that is

determined by a contiguous, self-governed territory, but one that is written into the landscape in complex and contested ways.

In addition to these uneven political terrains, farmers in resistance must contend with consistent government incursions through economic or infrastructural development initiatives targeted at *partidistas* (and social movement actors alike). Evidence of government ‘improvement’ of indigenous communities dots the landscape. Community health clinics and cultural centers for the sale of hand-made crafts for tourists traveling the government-declared “Mayan Route” map the roads which lead to self-declared autonomous communities.¹⁴ Signs proclaiming state government investments with large price tags, which include concrete floors, rural road paving, and running water are staged prominently along the route. In cases where the state or municipal government has entered communities to do large projects there have been incidents of conflict as territory claimed by the Zapatistas or Las Abejas is integrated into such projects without their consent. For example, a member of Las Abejas explained that they were currently (2013) being threatened by the municipal government over their refusal to allow the construction of a new water line that would run through Abeja household sites to service *partidista* households.¹⁵ This resistance to government ‘development’ projects is a key component of *resistencia autónoma*, a way that the process of autonomy and withstandng suffering can be more clearly seen. Government interaction in highland communities increased dramatically following the 1994 uprising and especially with the introduction of the land titling program PROCEDE (Program of Certification of Ejidal Rights and the Titling of Family Units), which sought to privatize and parcel out communal land spaces to individual title-holders (Nuijten 2003; Stahler-Sholk 2007; Stephen 2002). Another

component of neoliberal governmentality in the highlands (and Mexico more broadly) PROCEDE has been promoted as a way for communal land holders (*ejido* members) to have more economic freedom through land parcelization. Under the new Agrarian Law (1992) that introduced PROCEDE there were three major changes. Land reform (as guaranteed by the Mexican Constitution) was ended, communal land tenure was neoliberalized through making possible individual landholding, and the ability to buy, sell or rent individual plots, and finally through the ability to work with private investors (Nuijten 2004:193). By holding individual title farmers can, in theory, use their land as an investment, as collateral for loans, or even for income through sale in times of great need (Stahler-Sholk 2007).

Farmers in resistance view PROCEDE as a new way to fragment communities and weaken communal decision-making processes. It is also viewed as a method to lure people away from subsistence and communal farming systems as well as away from the social movements. Farmers in resistance are not unique in their dislike of the land titling program (cf. Nuijten 2004), however, in communities where they make up a majority, it appears that they have been more successful at resisting the titling of their landholdings. In communities where Zapatistas and Abejas supporters make up a minority, the threat of PROCEDE is greater and some members of Las Abejas have been forced to align with the community majority in favor of land-titling. In one community that had a minority of Zapatistas and Las Abejas members, PROCEDE was passed in a meeting of the community with state representatives—at the time, the farmers were waiting to receive their paper titles. Farmers in resistance explained to me that it was not what they wanted,

but that they had talked among themselves and had agreed that no one would sell their title.

When prompted about community relations and how autonomy functioned under such threats, the separation between community members and the situation of land were considered a matter-of-fact part of their struggle, their resistance. Often *campesinos/as* would simply respond: “so it is.” The spatial segregation and simultaneous proximity of those opposed to the movement within their autonomous zones was considered a part of daily life. Instead of focusing on a contiguous form of territorial autonomy, for many of these farmers, land and corn were critical components of how they talked about autonomy and how they lived in resistance: “to speak a little about autonomy, it is work and it is life and it is living with people, we are looking for autonomy to live and produce. There’s nothing more than that. It is a way to live and to work.” The experience of autonomy for these farmers is not based in self-governance, contiguous territory, or power sharing with the state. It is in day-to-day living; in the production of food and cash-crops. Without corn and coffee the possibility of resistance and autonomy for these farmers is viewed as diminished. The cultivation of corn for subsistence and coffee for the international marketplace allows farmers to withstand the violence against them, create autonomous processes and to resist the state.

The *cafetal* makes up an important time and space commitment for farmers in resistance. It must be maintained throughout the year and especially before and after the harvest (November and April). As part of their commitment to organic production farmers use compost derived from the previous year harvest debris and farmers “clean” (weed) the fields with a machete and or a hoe at least three times a year. With a hoe, it

takes a family about 1-2 months to clean a one-hectare plot, with a machete the labor-time is counted in weeks. Although coffee production takes up valuable land space and time, it is also an essential agriculturally-based component of how autonomy is practiced in the highlands. One farmer informed me that: “you can’t eat coffee, but you can get a little money for it.” The production of coffee is not unique to farmers in resistance. The landscape of the highlands is demonstrative as almost every household has evidence of coffee production during the harvest (mainly beans laid out to dry on any available surface). However, for *campesinos/as* in resistance it is considered, as one farmer explained, “a window to better money.” The same farmer commented that: “all the work of agricultural production is the base of the life and the struggle for autonomy. The *milpa* is more important, but the production of coffee or honey is important for economics....” It is a strategy for maintaining their struggle and a resource for international solidarity networks (see Chapter V), above all it is a safety net, because although self-sufficiency in food production is a fundamental component of the autonomy process it is often not realized.

Consistently in conversations corn was considered the most fundamental component of *resistencia autónoma*, one farmer explained to me: “our insurrection could not continue without our corn.” Another farmer echoed these remarks, describing to me that “the *milpa* [cornfield] is part of richness and our life, but it is also part of the struggle of our organization, it is a part of our resistance and a part of our autonomy.” Indeed, much importance was put on the significance of the *milpa* by farmers in resistance as one farmer echoed these statements agreeing that “the *milpa* is our life. It saves our lives...” Self-sufficiency in corn production was consistently viewed as the most important part of

their struggle. When discussing autonomy with a group of farmers within a community I received a number of responses that were tied to self-reliance:

We understand autonomy as a big thing, it is many things, we have autonomy in many things and the organization talks about autonomy of the people, it is independence, it is self-determination, it is to not have dependence on outside things...

It is autonomy of our culture and in this culture there are many things. The most important is the agricultural production of the campesino—if we don't have it, if we have to depend on a company, or if we have to buy agrochemicals or seeds.

When we talk about autonomy it is about self-sufficiency.

We can't have contamination of transgenics here, but in many other parts we know that they are experimenting and it's a way to control that territory, they control it with transgenic seeds, but this cannot be autonomy.

Production is the most important thing, to produce, not to buy.

Freedom from dependence on outside interference, influence, and seeds formed a critical component of thinking about what autonomy meant for farmers in this particular community. Always it came back to corn. To discuss corn in a self-declared autonomous community was to discuss autonomy.

Concluding Thoughts

In this chapter I have attempted to ground autonomy, locate the understanding of autonomy in place, and present the experience of autonomy in communities in resistance. As a result, it becomes evident that the localized and productive practices and ways of understanding autonomy are both linked to social movement political discourses and also individual struggles. In seeking to ground autonomy, I evaluated the social movement demands for autonomy vis-à-vis other articulations of autonomy as a political-territorial

concept to consider the missing piece of how such processes and representations are carried out in farmer communities. The politics of autonomy that are declared and negotiated (or not) with the state at the regional and national level are expressed by farmers in self-declared autonomous communities as part of who they are and what they do every day.

In an attempt to be accountable for the research that is presented here, I attempted to form a dialogue around questions of autonomy and resistance. Importantly, following from Nelson (2003) I sought to decenter the movement as the central focus of analysis, literally locating autonomy in the agricultural fields and in community spaces of *campesinos/as* in resistance. Moreover, I endeavored to counter western-centric understandings of autonomy and resistance through locating ‘resistance’ as a Mayan understanding of the struggle for autonomy and to withstand suffering while attempting to create livelihoods in the highlands.

Finally, to examine the experience of autonomy in this chapter, I showed that the struggle is both written in *campesinos/as* material practices and into the landscape through agricultural production. Political geographies locate the state and territory as key actors in autonomy, yet when autonomy is performed in communities in resistance, it is an agricultural practice that has no contiguously bounded territory and is negotiated as part of contentious and often violent relations with the state and other non-state actors. Above all, for farmers in resistance, autonomy is about action. It is about growing coffee and corn and establishing political, social and economic relations that are endogenous to the discourses of their movements (Zapatistas and Las Abejas), but that assists with cultivating secure life and livelihoods.

These perspectives are critical to understanding how the discourses of autonomy are produced and reproduced by *campesinos/as* in resistance. Autonomy is not just an ordering (or disordering—as the case may be) of space, but a pluriversal and productive experience for farmers in the highlands who are linked up with larger social movements. Working with corn and coffee, navigating contentious community spaces, and redefining resistance establish a ‘proximity’ of autonomy for *campesinos/as* (cf. Hyndman 2007). There are a multitude of practices caught up in the project of autonomy in the highlands of Chiapas and many ways of knowing and understanding the same.

Notes

¹ The INEGI criterion for the category of “indigenous” is residents older than the age of five that speak a nationally recognized indigenous language.

² For a more detailed account of these proceedings, see Stephen 2002.

³ For the Zapatistas this culminated in their well-recognized caravan (the March for Indigenous Dignity) to Mexico City in 2001, with 200,000 marching on the central square (*El Zócalo*) and the addresses of the *comandantes* of the movement to the Mexican congress (see: EZLN 2005; Mora 2008; Stahler-Sholk 2004).

⁴ In the case of the Zapatistas this was expressed in the Aguascalientes political centers which were the forerunners to the Caracoles.

⁵ For the purpose of maintaining the anonymity of participants, community and interviewee names are not used here. All interviews were translated from Spanish to English by the author.

⁶ Many of these studies are considering autonomy as a solution to sustained conflict and marginalization of minority groups.

⁷ In some cases studies are talking about completely different settings (cf. Chatterton 2005; Pickerill and Chatterton 2006) yet invoking the Zapatistas, this way of contextualizing autonomy leaves out other important considerations for how autonomy is activated, understood and practiced.

⁸ There is a rich history of indigenous rebellion and demands for self-determination that pre-dates the Zapatista uprising, see: Harvey 1998.

⁹ To some extent this seems to be recognized by the Comandancia, and in May of 2014, in tandem with the denunciation of the murder of Votán Galeano, Subcomandante Marcos stepped down as the mouth-piece of the movement (EZLN Communiqué 2014).

¹⁰ Indeed, Castellanos et al. (2012) argue that indigenous demands for autonomy are not based in New Social Movements but historical rights.

¹¹ This was first explained to me in 2010, in the context of a project that farmers were working on with the U.S.-based NGO Schools for Chiapas. In the intervening time, the first conversations between the NGO and the Zapatista group have been published by Peter Brown in an edited volume on seed saving (see: Nazarea et al. 2013). See also, Heidi Moksnes's work on civil indigenous resistance in Chenalhó (2005: 588-590).

¹² This change is not unlike what Mikesell and Murphy argued regarding minority-group desires to benefit or withdraw from the state as a progression from recognition, access and participation to separation, autonomy and independence (1991:582) Although it should be noted that neither Las Abejas nor the Zapatistas identify as a secessionist movement and continuously express themselves as Mexican citizens (see: Stahler-Sholk 2004; Tavanti 2003). In 2003, autonomy took on a new meaning for farmers in resistance as they repudiated the government and the pursuit for neoliberal-style economic development.

¹³ As an example, we can look to events that took place in an self-declared autonomous community between March and May of 2014 in La Realidad, an autonomous zone outside of the highlands adjacent to the official government municipality of San Pedro de Michoacán. On March 16th, during a health initiative planned in an autonomous community paramilitaries detained a Zapatista truck that was transporting medicine and began an argument about the building materials for the local autonomous health clinic. The members of the paramilitary took possession of the truck. On May 2nd the same paramilitaries entered the community with guns, machetes, clubs and rocks. They destroyed the autonomous school, cut the piping for water distribution to members of the community and attacked supporters of the Zapatistas, wounding 15 and killing 1—Votán Galeano (Personal communication from Escuelas para Chiapas 2014).

¹⁴ Accounts from NGO workers describe such sites as publicity stunts. One worker claimed that the large state health clinic adjacent to the Zapatista Caracol of Oventik was not staffed, supplied or ever open, but provided a ribbon cutting public appearance for the Governor of Chiapas.

¹⁵ Their quarrel with the government led to a member of Las Abejas being singled out for a bribe by the government, which led to discord amongst Las Abejas members in the community as they strived to put together a united front.

CHAPTER V

ASSESSING SOLIDARITY RELATIONS AND DEVELOPMENT FOR FAIR TRADE COFFEE PRODUCERS IN HIGHLAND CHIAPAS

Introduction

Fairtrade's vision is a world in which all producers can enjoy secure and sustainable livelihoods, fulfil their potential and decide on their future (Fairtrade International, 2011:np).

The quote above is demonstrative of the stated goals tied to the fair trade brand.

Yet, fair trade certified products take on different meanings for different actors.

Certification for coffee producers, for example, means a consistent buyer and a known price for the whole season; in short, it means income. Certification for third-party certifiers means the exercise of standards of production behavior in order to maintain a brand. Betwixt these parties exists a social movement to make trade more fair, which is focused on solidarity and awareness (Dolan 2010; Fridell 2004; Naylor 2014).

Nevertheless, as a number of studies have shown, third-party certification in fair trade creates tensions rooted in the reality that while fair trade seeks to promote social, environmental and economic standards, as well as solidarity, uneven relations of power persist, raising the question of fairness in fair trade (cf. Bacon 2010; Dolan 2010; Jaffee 2007; Lyon 2007; 2011; Muttersbaugh 2002; 2004; Naylor 2014; Renard and Loconto 2013). As expressed in a number of scholarly studies, these relations of power impact producers as well as a range of actors with the larger fair trade network, including cooperatives, certifiers, distributors and consumers. In this chapter, I build on existing critiques of the power imbalances in fair trade coffee production to develop a better understanding of what solidarity and the fair trade promise of secure and sustainable

livelihoods means for indigenous farmers in self-declared autonomous communities in the highlands of Chiapas, Mexico.

In discussing the mainstreaming of fair trade, Christine Dolan argued that contemporary fair trade “was established to alleviate poverty and economic injustice through a market-based form of solidarity exchange” (2010:41). The history of fairer trade extends into the early 1900s and contemporary (since 1988), large-scale certification schemes came out of the broader movement to make trade more fair. It is important to make the distinction here between the movement to make trade more fair and the larger fair trade certification system (represented by organizations such as Fairtrade International, Fair Trade USA and IMO’s Fair for Life, for example). Certification and labeling systems were first put into place in 1988 when, working together, farmers and activists initiated the first, third-party certification scheme called Max Havelaar in the Netherlands (Nichols and Opal 2005; Raynolds et al. 2004). Following the successes of Max Havelaar, the Fairtrade Labeling Organization (known as FLO: ‘organized on the concept and practice of solidarity;’ Hudson and Hudson 2004:np) was formed to provide an umbrella for new and emerging certifications and an international fair trade certification label. Transfair USA (now Fair Trade USA) was founded in 1999 and split from FLO (now Fairtrade International) in 2011. Despite commitment to similar principles linked to fair wages, consistent trade relations, community development and environmental sustainability, the linkages of fair trade as a market and as a movement have always been tenuous.¹ Debate over what ‘fair trade’ should be reached a critical moment in 2011 with the divorce of certifiers Fairtrade International and Fair Trade USA (formerly the Fairtrade Labeling Organization and

Transfair USA, respectively). The split, which Fair Trade USA (2012) followed with a new campaign heralding “Fair Trade for all,” caused uproar in the larger fair trade community as activists and farmers alike asked ‘who is fair trade for?’

Thus, in the past decade, the meaning of fair trade has taken divergent paths, one focused on ‘the movement to make trade more fair,’ invested in creating alternatives and fostering solidarity; the other dedicated to standards of certification and growing the market segment (Dolan 2010; Naylor 2014). This is not a clean division and participants in the broader ‘fair trade’ system tread on both paths even as they diverge and intersect. Indeed, notwithstanding this divide, fair trade, as a system of certification is still discursively tied to the movement to make trade fair, and to the idea of working toward solidarity and alternatives to both neoliberal-style development and the unequal relations of global exchange. Often, fair trade certification is offered up as an example of ties that form bonds of solidarity between geographically disparate places and economically polarized groups. In considering the movement to make trade more fair and the certification system one and the same, in many ways, fair trade certification has become a proxy for the ideals of the larger social movement and the certification standards are fetishized, hidden behind a label and a brand (Guthman 2007).

Solidarity within fair trade networks has consequences in producer communities and in their fields.² In exchange for visibility and a consistent income facilitated by solidarity networks, farmers invite standards of production and productive behavior into their fields and communities. As a result, visions of how fair trade products should be produced and certified on the part of differently-positioned actors in these networks sometimes come into conflict, in practice. Networks of solidarity that are built through

certified trading relationships have been critical for fostering long-term connections and knowledge exchange, however, the nuances of how this solidarity works in practice are fetishized as part of the brand. As a result, it is increasingly important to examine how fair trade certification fosters connection and control in production. In this chapter I use fair trade coffee networks as an example to better understand how farmers negotiate their political commitments and their income earning production strategies. I argue that while strong networks of solidarity focused on promoting awareness of struggles in producer communities are important to coffee-producing cooperatives, fair trade certification standards reinforce power inequalities and more critically, through standards and the fair trade premium for development, extend control of development behaviors in farming communities.

This chapter draws on research conducted between 2010 and 2013, that examined the everyday practices of fair trade coffee producers in the official highland municipality of Chenalhó, Chiapas, Mexico.³ The research formed part of a larger project investigating spaces of food and agriculture as sites of resistance in self-declared autonomous communities populated by indigenous Mayan subsistence farmers. This portion of the study was carried out with members of the social movement, Las Abejas who established the Maya Vinic (Tzotzil for “Mayan Man”) coffee cooperative and included participant observation in six highland autonomous communities. In-depth interviews were conducted in two communities, the first adjacent to the cooperative’s storage and community store and the second where the cooperative was founded.⁴ Interviews were conducted with cooperative members in Spanish.⁵ In addition to community-based

interviews and participant observation I was present at a number of cooperative meetings and observed the 2013 Fairtrade International audit of the cooperative.

In this chapter I examine the practices of the cooperative and specifically discuss the experience of the annual fair trade certification audit to tease out the solidarity/control tension in fair trade certification systems. In order to understand how this tension plays out in Chenalhó, the first section of this paper provides a brief history of fair trade, which is followed by an analysis of certification as solidarity and certification as control. The case study follows, first, with a discussion of the wider solidarity network that Maya Vinic is linked to and second, with an analysis of the certification audit. Critical to analyzing how fair trade functions in self-declared autonomous communities is an understanding of the complex politics at work in these spaces. I find that solidarity is an important part of highlighting the politics at work in the highlands, yet it comes at a cost for participating farmers. In considering this case, my concluding thoughts are grounded in encouraging more critical analysis of claims to solidarity and the function of the fair trade development premium in producer communities. It is important to step-away from evaluations of whether fair trade is ‘working’ for farmers and consider what ‘development’ means for producers.

Fair Trade, Solidarity Networks and Certification Standards

As Gavin Fridell (2004) details in his historical analysis of the transition of fair trade as a movement to fair trade as a market, fair trade certification was built on the foundation of creating more equal exchange relations in the world market which extend back to the 1900s. Attempts to make widespread policies for more equal commodity

exchange can be traced efforts made to regulate commodity markets following the First World War and then again in the mid-1900s when a number of commodity agreements were established to ameliorate issues associated with the plunge in primary commodity prices (copper, tin, rubber, coffee, wheat, sugar and cotton) (Fridell 2004:413-414).⁶ World War II brought new attention to the geographies of inequality and the ‘Third World’ was invented through development discourses that located poverty as an object of analysis and facilitated economic interventions that were shaped by Cold War geopolitics (Escobar 1995). At the same time as the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade was tearing down protectionist measures, a case was made by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) that there needed to be a greater “transfer of wealth” from the U.S. and Europe to Latin America, Africa and Asia, through trade (Fridell 2004:414). Despite the charge of “trade not aid,” the focus of this ‘transfer’ in the global arena largely ended up being aid and although focused on intervening in what the Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLA) and UNCTAD called “unequal exchange,” international initiatives fell short of their goals (Barrat Brown 1993; Fridell 2004; Nicholls and Opal 2005).⁷

At a smaller scale, charity groups in Western Europe and the U.S. began importing handicrafts from Eastern Europe and Central America to assist with economic recovery following the Second World War (Oxfam, the Mennonite Central Committee, for example; Nicholls and Opal 2005:19-20). The early success of these smaller scale exchanges led, in the 1970s and 1980s, to community-based groups forming Alternative Trade Organizations (ATOs) which imported goods from small-scale producers who did not have consistent access to the international market (*ibid*). The success with hand-made

crafts led to coffee importing, which quickly surpassed craft sales (Fridell 2004). ATOS grew and multiplied in the 1980s and by 1990, there were over sixty importing organizations throughout Europe alone (*ibid*:417). Up until the late 1980s, ATOS worked to facilitate more equal exchanges between countries and create an alternative to the international system of trade.

While these ATO networks represent a key accomplishment of the movement to make trade more fair, it was during this same time period that producers in—what by this period was normalized as the ‘developing world’—began to feel the impact of neoliberal restructuring. This was especially true following 1982 in Latin America, where the debt crisis led to structural adjustment programs, which among other measures, cut subsidies and other safety nets relied on by small producers (Harper and Cuzán 2005; see also: Harvey, D. 2007). The rise of neoliberal development models and particularly the move towards deregulating global trade contributed to a divergence within the fair trade movement. As Dolan notes, two paths emerged one with “an idealist orientation toward trade justice, structural change, and human solidarity;” and another that had “an instrumentalist focus on certification, standardization and market expansion” (2010:35). These two nodes make up part of a wider fair trade network that is tapped into by producers, consumers, and intermediaries such as importers/traders and sellers. In the case of fair trade coffee, the simplified supply chain and fair trade network facilitated through fair trade certification looks like this:

producer → cooperative → importer → roaster → retailer → consumer

These connections are important in facilitating not only the movement of coffee between geographically disparate places, but also relations between people within the network.

The producer has a relationship with their cooperative, the cooperative has a relationship with their importer and/or roaster or retailer. In this network there are many points of support and many of control. At the basis of this network is an exchange of a commodity (coffee) for capital. In some ways, the certifier acts as an intermediary fostering both solidarity connections and standards for control throughout the network from advertising directed at consumers to mandating production practices in farmers' fields. Certification touches all parts of the network and at times the market and certification standards intersect with the movement to make trade fair (Naylor 2014). This intersection of movement and market assists with articulating participation in 'fair trade,' whether through the movement or the market, as participating in relationships of solidarity (cf. Raynolds 2000). However, at the same time, the split between 'the movement' and 'the market' (as articulated by Dolan 2010) significantly ruptured the potentially transformative nature of so-called 'fair' trade. It is these benefits and ruptures to which I turn in the sections that follow.

Solidarity Networks

At the same time as markets underwent neoliberalization, a 'coffee revolution' was underway in the United States. As 'gourmet' coffee consumption was rising in the United States, a growing number of activists were politicizing coffee consumption by advocating for boycotts against oppressive military regimes in Central America and buying directly from small-scale coffee producers (Bacon 2013). Solidarity networks based in the alternative trade of crafts and coffee (and later other commodities) became a critical component of political movements based in the United States working against

U.S. imperialism and other unjust political and economic conditions in Latin America (Koopman 2008).⁸ Such networks were identified by some scholars as facilitating solidarity not only between producers and political activists (Hudson and Hudson 2003), but also between producers and consumers (Raynolds 2000; see also: Arce 2009, who refers to this as commercial solidarity).

Solidarity is a slippery concept intimately related to concepts of progressive political struggle and activism. Here, I am considering solidarity as social activism or political participation aimed at creating change, which is often associated with the idea of an individual or a collective movement being ‘in solidarity with’ another group. Historically, solidarity movements in the Americas were tied to awareness campaigns and protesting South and Central American dictatorships and military regimes in the 1960s-1980s and also to action supporting historic grievances regarding land tenure and social inequities in the region (Sundberg 2007). Such groups attempted to give an international voice to those whose voices were being stifled in their own countries (Keck and Sikkink 1998 in *ibid*). A number of solidarity movements formed in the 1980s and 1990s in the context of resistance and struggle in places such as Southern Mexico and Colombia (International Service for Peace, the Mexico Solidarity Group, Colombia Support Network, for example) (*ibid*:148). Solidarity is practiced in varied ways, through boycotts, sit-ins, demonstrations, information dissemination, and more recently through purchasing power. Yet solidarity has also been characterized as creating ‘subject-object relationships,’ ‘speaking for others’ or taking on the role of a ‘helper’ (Koopman 2008; see also: hooks 1992; Nelson, D. 1999). Koopman (2008) and Sundberg (2007) alike point out the neocolonial tensions in so-called ‘north-south’ solidarity.

Solidarity is a key frame for movements that support alternative trade networks and fair trade in particular. The idea of distributing and purchasing commodities at more equitable prices for the producer is considered by many as an act of solidarity between privileged consumers and marginalized producers globally. This chapter is focused on how solidarity through certification operates in the areas of production, coffee fields, community spaces and coffee cooperative spaces. It is an approach that highlights the entanglements (or friction; see: Tsing 2005) of participation in fair trade as it is written onto spaces and bodies, rather than—compared to existing literature—investigating whether or not fair trade is ‘working’ for producers. I am not using the movement to make trade more fair as my focal point in this chapter, I am instead focusing on the practices and power relations embedded in participation in fair trade certification systems, particularly how these practices are constituted in relation to networks of solidarity and ideals of development and empowerment.⁹ This is an important point of analysis as farmers negotiate a trade-off in soliciting fair trade certification (Jaffee 2007; Lyon 2011). In exchange for solidarity—participation, knowledge sharing, and visibility—they invite control—production standards, and conventional economic development—into their communities.

Often, fair trade certification relationships are articulated as ‘north-south’ relations bound up in solidarity (cf. Bacon 2010; 2013; Hudson and Hudson 2003; Raynolds 2000; 2002; Raynolds et al. 2004; 2007). Although many authors suggest that fair trade standards reproduce consumer interests, this is often framed as a new form of solidarity network; Raynolds in particular notes that: “by building alternative networks of solidarity between agro-food producers and consumers, fair trade initiatives encourage

the participation of disadvantaged farmers..." (2000:306). Yet what statements such as this mean or how solidarity in fair trade certification is interpreted is rarely expanded on.¹⁰ Solidarity (in the context of a social movement) has been defined as a practice by activists who "seek social change or the transformation of power relations for the benefit of others" (Passy 2001 in Sundberg 2007:147). However, solidarity is simultaneously under-theorized (Featherstone 2012) and invoked quite frequently with regard to fair trade. Scholars seeking to better understand solidarity have generally sought to define it as "political struggle," (Featherstone 2012:5) or "working for social change" (Scholz 2008:56) to mitigate oppression and/or suffering. The social movement to make trade more fair fits more closely with such understandings of solidarity. However, what does it mean when solidarity is tied, as in the case of fair trade, to purchasing and neoliberal market relations? There is a messy intersection between the more cohesive social movement to make trade more fair, individual consumer purchasing of fair trade certified products, and people who straddle the line as wholesale buyers of certified products who are engaging in a market exchange even as they attempt to uphold the integrity of the movement to make trade more fair.

In this chapter I examine how producers experience solidarity in the context of the larger politics at work in their communities and through their interaction with third-party certifiers.¹¹ Concentrating on how producers experience solidarity is an important distinction as many scholars and activists in the wake of the 2011 Fair Trade USA/FLO split and the mainstreaming of fair trade have been concerned with how to maintain consumer solidarity and the core values of the movement to make trade more fair despite the changes in standards and the growing corporate involvement in 'fair' trade

commodity networks (cf. Dolan 2010; Getz and Shreck 2006; Howard and Jaffee 2013; Jaffee 2007; Jaffee and Howard 2010; Low and Davenport 2007; Wilson and Curnow 2012).¹²

Solidarity in fair trade coffee networks is bound up in an imaginary of so-called ‘north-south’ relations that unquestioningly situates a ‘northern’ consumer as the ‘helper’ of a ‘needy’ ‘southern’ producer (Naylor 2014). Working with anti-School of the Americas activists in North America, both Koopman (2008) and Sundberg (2007) observe that activism is sometimes understood by activists as being done on the behalf or for the benefit of ‘others,’ yet contrary to this understanding, both argue that solidarity relations may sometimes reinforce existing inequalities. Koopman contends that “in the U.S., international solidarity is focused on people particularly affected by U.S. imperialism. Ideally this is so that we can better struggle together, combining our different points of leverage to end U.S. empire and build a better world for all of us” (2008:294). Consistent with the concern that unequal power relations persist even within solidarity networks, Koopman is primarily reinforcing that activists (and scholars) should not conceptualize themselves as taking on a ‘helping’ role, but instead create a network of mutual support.

The argument that the ‘helper’ form of solidarity often leads to neocolonial practices is an interesting jumping off point for considering how fair trade certification as a so-called form of solidarity extends and reinforces neocolonial power relations. Fair trade certification offers connections for farmers, to a cooperative, and potentially to the third-party certifier, the importer, and in the case of coffee, the roaster. My approach differs from that of Koopman (2008) or Sundberg (2007) in that I am not focusing on the

experience of the ‘insider’ activist in the U.S. or in Canada in my assessment of how power operates in and through solidarity networks. Instead, I examine solidarity networks using an analysis of the daily lives and productive practices of communities nominally assisted through these broader connections. I demonstrate how solidarity networks facilitate and reinforce modes of control in farming communities through systems of certification, and standards for development, which are discussed in the following section.

Certification Standards

Fair trade certification is a market mechanism designed to guarantee products and regulate particular social, economic and environmental production standards, international trading agreements, access to credit, and pricing. As noted earlier, certification systems are generally considered under the umbrella of the broader movement to make trade more fair. However, the issues raised by the 2011 split between Fairtrade International and Fair Trade USA centered on the changing standards of certification and through such changes the deviation away from the core values of the movement as they related to facilitating structural change in the marketplace. Critically, standards have tended to follow a more ‘free-market’ model in the last two decades incorporating more products, more farmers—including plantation-scale producers—and craftspeople in order to offer diversity in the marketplace. Whereas certification was primarily extended to coffee in the early 1990s, it now covers hundreds of products, some under small-scale, cooperative production, and others under plantation conditions.¹³ In popular media following the split, some claimed that certification standards had been

progressively getting weaker across certifying agencies and others argued that the new standards endorsed by Fair Trade USA, in particular the significantly smaller percentage of certified ingredients needed to maintain a fair trade labeled product, was a form of ‘fairwashing’ (cf. Earley 2012; Neumann 2011; Sherman 2012; Zinn 2012).¹⁴

The arguments against changes in the standards have been primarily aimed at what the label means (cf. Howard and Allen 2010; Howard and Jaffee 2013; Renard and Loconto 2013). That is, how consumers will identify with the fair trade brand considering that, for example, coffee bearing the Fair Trade USA label could be from a small-scale shade grown plot or from a full-sun plantation. Many argue that fair trade standards have suffered a similar fate as organic standards (Howard and Allen 2010; Jaffee 2010; Jaffee and Howard 2010; Naylor 2014; see also: Buck et al. 1997; Guthman 2007). The production of organic food and food products became viewed as new sites of capital accumulation and large commercial interests took on increasingly larger roles in the development of standards for production and distribution. Not only have corporate entities entered the marketplace as competition, they have taken steps to shape the market. Indeed, the meaning of the fair trade label has become fuzzier as more powerful parties become involved (Jaffee and Howard 2010). However, while the standards may have grown weaker in terms of what can wear the fair trade certification label and therefore be identified (and consumed) as a fair trade product, the standards governing producers and producer practices have not been weakened.

Contemporary fair trade certification agencies are gatekeepers and standard setters. They control the certification of producer products and of importing agencies. Fairtrade International (FLO) is one of the oldest third-party fair trade certifiers, they set

standards and they have an audit arm, FLO-CERT, which reviews and grants certification to producers and traders. The standards for production for small producers are reviewed every five years in consultation with “stakeholders” and in compliance with International Labor Organization (ILO) and ISEAL (Code of Good Practice in Standard Setting) conventions (FLO 2012). Crafted to assist with sustainable development, the standards are requirements for production and are concerned with a number of practices from sourcing and management, environmental protection and the maintenance of biodiversity, labor conditions and child protection, to development potential and democratic participation. An application for fair trade certification with FLO is €525 (FLO-CERT 2013:4).¹⁵ Once the application and initial review is completed there are additional certification and audit fees that are paid by producer organizations.¹⁶ FLO also is responsible for setting a minimum price for a fair trade product and a fair trade premium for community development. The price is set with consideration of labor hours, inputs and production/processing/export costs and the premium is set in relation to the price and is designed to act as a safety net. FLO and other labeling organizations operating at this scale are run as businesses and as part of their goals intend to assist smallholders with organizing and building “thriving businesses” (FLO 2013:5).

Being figuratively tied to the movement to make trade more fair and to the discourses of solidarity and social/economic/environmental justice is very powerful for fair trade certification agencies. Although standards are invited by farmers in exchange for a price, they are still systems of control that, as Sarah Lyon argued, cause farmers to adapt their distinctive livelihoods to standards that are universal in nature (2011:124). The argument that certification standards (be they organic or fair trade) fosters new

relations of power in coffee producing communities is not a new one (cf. Jaffee 2007; Lyon 2011; Muttersbaugh 2002; 2004; Renard and Loconto 2013); however, such accounts tend to be focused on the policing that happens within communities, the exclusion of producers from cooperatives and/or the imbalances in who participates in standard-setting. Building on these arguments, I want to examine how the ‘helper’ solidarity of fair trade certification functions as an extension of control in farmers’ fields. In particular, I am considering how farmers negotiate a tacit acceptance of neoliberal-style economic development in return for a price.

Fair trade certification is grounded in the idea of perceived differences; it is mired in binaries, north-south, consumer-producer, wealthy-poor and so on. Fair trade certifiers advertise commodities and farmers in the same breath, selling not only a product but the knowledge of production and producer livelihoods.¹⁷ Operating as a neoliberal fix (Guthman 2007), certification wears a social justice and solidarity message while simultaneously operating through the very market that proponents argue it is insulating producers from. And although scholarship on fair trade certification has shifted from ‘fair trade is a panacea’ to more critical examinations, Dolan argued that “the moral authority of Fairtrade silences critique and allowed for a mystification of the functions that Fairtrade performs for the political economy of neoliberalism” (2010:41). Fairtrade International argues that certification is “giving farmers more control over their own lives” (FLO 2008 in Wilson 2010:85). And while this fits squarely into Koopman’s (2008) critique of the ‘helper,’ it also masks the power embedded in certification systems and standards that play out, not only in discourse and knowledge production, but in the territory of farmers’ fields and communities.

Maya Vinic

For farmers aligned with Las Abejas and Maya Vinic the connection and control through fair trade certification forms part of their everyday politics and agricultural practices. Farming families in the highlands have been cultivating coffee for cooperatives or as *libres* (producers not tied to a cooperative) for decades. The introduction of fair trade certification in conjunction with farmer demands for self-determination in the past twenty years, however, has reshaped the spaces of farming communities in the highlands. In the years leading up to and especially following the 1994 uprising of the Zapatistas in Chiapas,¹⁸ highland communities experienced fragmentation and conflict over land rights and access to resources (Delfín-Fuentes et al. 2011). In 1992, the *Sociedad Civil Las Abejas* (The Bees Civil Society) was organized in response to land conflict and injustice against women (Tavanti 2003). Their group was formed out of a need and desire to work collectively in spaces that were increasingly being torn apart through outmigration, land conflict, state-sponsored violence, and divergent community politics. Although *Las Abejas* are clear to make their organization and broader social movement distinct from the Zapatistas, their identities and trajectories are intimately bound and they consider themselves in partnership with the Zapatistas.¹⁹

Chiapas is a resource rich state that has a large population of indigenous Maya and is home to a number of indigenous social movements including the Zapatistas and *Las Abejas* (the Bees). Coffee is produced throughout the state with the majority being cultivated by small-scale producers in the highlands. The highlands are an area that is almost exclusively populated by indigenous Maya groups (primarily from the *Tzotzil* and *Tzeltal* language groups) that are affiliated with a number of different (and sometimes

competing) political interests. Following the Zapatista uprising (1994) and the demise of the peace-talks and failure of the Mexican State to legislate the indigenous rights accords (the San Andrés Accords, 1996) a number of communities declared themselves autonomous from the state (Nash 2001; Stahler-Sholk 1998). These self-declared autonomous communities are not homogenous, they are populated by people with different political and economic agendas and not everyone in the community embraces autonomy.

Following these events and the increased militarization of the highlands, tensions in the official highland municipality of Chenalhó were heightened (Nash 2001). Between September 1996 and December 1997 there was a series of murders and attacks—more than fifty—perpetrated by and against *partidistas* (supporters of the major Mexican political parties; e.g.: PRD, PRI, PAN), Zapatistas and Las Abejas members alike (Tavanti 2003:9). The violence in the municipality caused the expulsion of families from their home communities and significant displacement as Las Abejas members (and Zapatistas) sought refuge in the newly declared autonomous communities in the highlands. By December 22, 1997, almost 250 Abejas had sought refuge in the highland community of Acteal (*ibid*), which is located within the official municipality of Chenalhó. On that day members of a paramilitary group populated by *PRIlistas* (supporters of the political party *Partido Revolucionario Institucional*), called *Máscara Roja* (Red Mask) opened fire on the refugees in Acteal killing forty-five men, women and children, and wounding twenty-five others (Stahler-Sholk 1998:63; see also Tavanti 2003).

Because of this tragedy, which was perpetrated at what would have been the start of the coffee harvest, many Las Abejas members had to flee their homes and abandon their *milpas* (corn production plots) and *cafetales* (coffee production plots). However, the overwhelming response of civil society and international human rights organizations made possible the gradual return of farmers to their land and in 1999, Las Abejas formed their own coffee cooperative called *Maya Vinic* (Tavanti 2005:15). The benefits of establishing the cooperative were threefold; first, as noted by Tavanti (*ibid*), it provided a shield against the threat of declining coffee prices, second, it extended and solidified solidarity network assistance established in the aftermath of the Acteal Massacre, and finally, it created an internal network for knowledge gathering and material assistance for coffee growers who were part of the autonomy movement and were no longer willing to claim any form of government aid. Since the establishment in 1999, *Maya Vinic* has expanded their production beyond coffee to honey and now has a membership of 640 *socios* representing 52 communities.²⁰ Equally critical, *Maya Vinic* has established long-term relations with coffee buying groups in the U.S., Europe and Japan. In 2001, *Maya Vinic* received FLO certification and the U.S. group Cooperative Coffees—an importer and wholesaling cooperative—purchased their first certified coffee for export.

Ties of Solidarity?

As noted earlier there are number of nodes in the certified coffee network and within that network those directly connected to each other tend to have closer ties (the cooperative and the wholesaler, the farmer and the cooperative and so on). In this way solidarity ties diffuse along the network from activists within the movement to make

trade more fair and purchasers of fair trade coffee and become less strong as they move through the network toward the producer, the nature of that solidarity changing as it reaches producer communities. Here I want to draw out two key points about how solidarity is extended through the network as it filters from the U.S. (in particular) to Acteal. First, the connection between Maya Vinic, Cooperative Coffees and specifically the member roasters Just Coffee and Higher Grounds is strong and it permeates daily operations during the coffee harvest. Second, the *socios* (farmer members of Maya Vinic) maintain a connection to Maya Vinic and in particular, to the annual price paid for coffee delivered.

Above all the relationship between Maya Vinic and Cooperative Coffees is based in fair trade certification. However, as many small-scale organizations involved in fair trade certification, Cooperative Coffees has one foot in the market and the other in the movement to make trade more fair. In the wake of the re-branding of Fair Trade USA, Cooperative Coffees, along with other groups, reaffirmed their commitment to the broader movement to make trade more fair, which included “working with small-scale coffee farmers” and cultivating an “alternative model for trade” (Cooperative Coffees 2010:np). An employee of Just Coffee explained to me that in order to emphasize and publicize their commitment to the ‘real fair trade,’ in 2013 Cooperative Coffees launched a social media campaign and multi-site tour of coffee growing cooperatives called the Fair Trade Chronicles.²¹ Representatives from Cooperative Coffees and their member roasters Just Coffee and Higher Grounds (who retail the coffee) traveled to Chiapas to meet with Maya Vinic and see what fair trade meant in the communities they had been working in for over ten years. The updates from the Fair Trade Chronicles were

distributed through social media and used images and stories from the past and present to forecast the future of fair trade solidarity. The reaffirmation of their commitments serves the dual purpose of distinguishing the Cooperative Coffees label as serving what they deem the “real fair trade” and in maintaining the visibility of Maya Vinic.

As the Chronicles unfolded and were shared by Just Coffee and Higher Grounds, the importance of the connections between Maya Vinic, as an organization seeking recognition not solely in the marketplace, but more importantly in the human rights arena was discussed (see: Treter 2013). Following the massacre at Acteal, international human rights activists descended on Chiapas and over time coffee growers in Acteal were accompanied into their fields so that they could harvest their coffee with less fear of violence. Eventually with the creation of their cooperative in 1999, farmers found a space for their product that was more secure than selling to the *coyote* (colloquial term for middle-person). Following the trade relationship initiated with Cooperative Coffees, Maya Vinic coffee was available to new roaster members in the U.S. Both Higher Grounds and Just Coffee bought Maya Vinic beans as part of their initial purchases through Cooperative Coffees. All three organizations maintain websites and social media outlets, which privilege the story of Maya Vinic and make visible the threat against farmer members of the growing cooperative (see Image 5.1, next page).²² In the past both roasters have branded and sold in packages blends such as Just Coffee’s Mexican origin ‘Solidarity Blend’ and Maya Vinic exclusive packages including ‘Maya Super Dark,’ and Higher Grounds ‘Mexican Maya Vinic.’ Maya Vinic’s coffee is not blended into obscurity, but it is placed front and center for retailers and consumers.

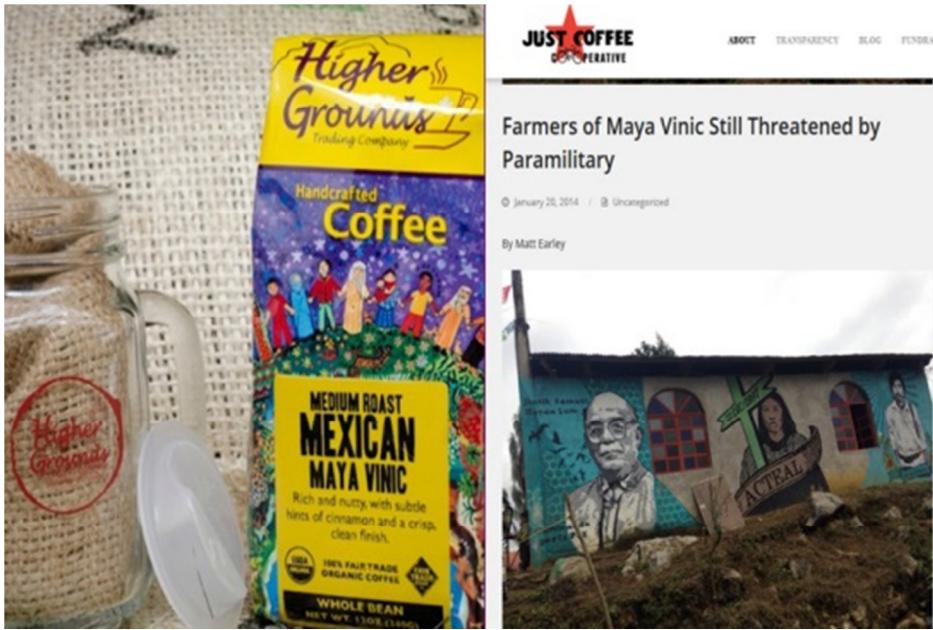


Image 5.1: Maya Vinic, single-origin coffee from Higher Grounds Trading Co. (left); Maya Vinic blog post from January 2014, from Just Coffee Cooperative (right)

The connection here is not simply between a buyer and a seller, but between a group in the U.S. that aims to work toward creating more equitable trade relations in coffee purchasing and a group in Chiapas that is seeking visibility and security to sustain their lives and livelihoods. Third party certifiers such as FLO enable these connections through the certification label, setting a price and standards for the relationship. This does not stand out as a particularly different example when compared to other fair trade coffee brands. What does stand out is the way that the leadership of the cooperative discusses the relationship and how it filters (or not) to their members.

The leadership of Maya Vinic is very strongly connected with Cooperative Coffees and their member roasters. When the price of coffee dipped to the fair trade price floor in 2013, the president of Maya Vinic got in touch with Cooperative Coffees and explained that the price change was a hardship to the farmers, who had experienced a significantly higher price in 2012, and asked could anything be done about it.

Cooperative Coffees agreed to a fifteen cent (in USD, equal to almost two pesos) per kilo increase in the premium paid at the end of the harvest. This goes to the cooperative, and the president of Maya Vinic related to me that it was also passed on to the farmers at the end of the season as a one peso premium per kilo. This is one example, but the other more important piece is recognition of their right to self-determination and their resistance. At a time where violence continues to displace people and when international interest turns to other places, the connection to the coffee buyers in the U.S. is deemed crucial to Maya Vinic for maintaining the political visibility of their struggle. It was explained to me by one of the leadership members as, “our coffee sells and it sends a message that we are still here.” The production and sale of coffee has become a critical link in international solidarity networks.

Another component of solidarity experienced by Maya Vinic through their broader fair trade network is the facilitation of community development projects, both those mandated by the fair trade premium and through other donations. A development plan is a requirement for fair trade certification with Fairtrade International (which I will discuss more in depth following this section), yet it is difficult for Maya Vinic to put into practice because of the politics in their communities. Projects that have found success, such as the Chiapas Water Project, have been those which are facilitated through outside donations (not from the fair trade premium) gathered by Just Coffee and Higher Grounds.²³ These projects have been successful largely due to their development in conversation with producers and completed in communities that have a majority membership of coffee producers that are aligned with Las Abejas and Zapatistas. Their most recent project, in a community north of Chenalhó called Aurora Esquipulas, assisted

100 families (sixty claiming membership in Las Abejas) in gaining access to spring water through a system of water tank reservoirs (Treter 2013).²⁴ The fundraising for this \$7,000.00 project was done in the U.S. and according to the non-profit, the story of Maya Vinic and Las Abejas was told and retold as a way to solicit donations. This project stands out as an example of solidarity relations that filter through the fair trade network, from retailer to producer. However, in many cases the connection does not filter to the producer and the main relationship that the producer maintains as part of the larger network is to the cooperative (Maya Vinic) alone.

Solidarity relations between the cooperative and the roaster/retailer are generally only visible to producers through the tangible benefit of income. While fair trade certifiers extol the solidarity relationships facilitated through certification, the farmers' connection within such relations is obscured. In interviews with Maya Vinic leadership and with farmer members (called *socios*), price and availability of money was consistently referenced as the most important part of fair trade. The (then) president (2010-2013) of Maya Vinic explained to me:

when Maya Vinic was first started there wasn't any money, it was just a place to sell your coffee. Now there is a fund, which allows us to pay when coffee is delivered. Before, if we didn't have the money right then, sometimes people would go and sell to the *coyotes* so that they could get cash right away.

But this appears to be the extent of farmer connections to the cooperative. When asked about the benefits of belonging to a fair trade cooperative the responses I received from the *socios* were always tied to the price. One *socio* claimed that: "Fair trade is good for the *socios* because it is *más tranquilo* [calmer], you don't have to go and look for a buyer, the cooperative buys and the price is better than the *coyote* who robs you." Critical to

gaining a better understanding of farmer relations to fair trade solidarity is that the overall connection expressed by the *socios* is with the cooperative, not with their buyers or as some scholars argue, with consumers. In this estimation fair trade certification is not part of the equation. Indeed, other *socios* remarked similarly, explaining the importance of the cooperative following their experience under threat and as refugees, one farmer in particular noted: “we were displaced people, my family between 1998 and 2001 because of the violence, but we came back to our place and we joined our organization [Maya Vinic] and began producing again.” The principles and solidarity connection of fair trade does not factor into the importance of the cooperative for the majority of the *socios* that I spoke with. The existence of the cooperative is the main concern of the farmers—

...our organization is good, because even though the price changes in the world we have our price of Maya Vinic and we have the cooperative and the organization, which is better and it is much better than the *coyotes*.

When discussing coffee production under fair trade certification it always came to price and the ability to have someone to sell to. The coffee growing cooperative may have a solidarity relationship with the coffee buying cooperative and their member roasters, but for the most part, the farmers have a relationship to price. This is important because farmers see the trade-offs in entering the fair trade marketplace as a change in labor, trade and community relationships as it relates to price alone.

However, the farmers are not unaware of what fair trade certification is—in fact although some farmers told me that fair trade was not something that they generally concerned themselves with, for example, one *socio* noted: “We don’t think about fair trade, we don’t talk about it very much”—other farmers were quick to explain to me that fair trade is not really ‘fair:’

They say it is fair trade, they say that, but this year it is a really low price, 30 pesos for organic...The coffee is a lot of work and it takes a lot of days, but the price is really low. If we need to buy something at the store or get medicine the price keeps increasing. But the coffee price does not go up. We here, when we have a meeting of the *socios* we want to talk about being able to provide for our families. We want to feed our families. This is what we said, we need a better price.²⁵

Again, the conversation returns to price and the ability to sell their coffee. Indeed, it seems that the claims made by third party certifiers about improving the lives of farmers are not, in reality, tied to fair trade certification but to their participation in a cooperative. Being a *socio* has historically been beneficial for farmers in Mexico more broadly and is not a unique claim for third party certifiers in this case (cf. Jaffee 2007; Martínez Torres 2006; Stephen 1997). Additionally, farmers began to describe the hardships endured as part of participating in the fair trade certification system—hardships that beget very little return.²⁶

Farmer concerns are significant because fair trade certifiers consistently market solidarity as a crucial part of fair trade relations which impact producers dramatically. Yet the word solidarity is used by third-party certifiers to describe diverse issues ranging from combating climate change (through environmental standards) to purchasing chocolate. Certifiers and their buyers describe solidarity as a way for consumers to ‘empower’ producers. In a recent press release Fair Trade USA offered this quote from one of their wholesale buyers “we are aiming to help people consume healthier, higher quality food while standing in solidarity with the global poor...the poor want jobs not handouts;” the CEO of Fair Trade USA concurred, “American consumers have so much power, and they want to use that power for good” (FTUSA 2013:np).²⁷ Embedded in the neoliberal market, to purchase a commodity at a higher than market price is devised as a

solidarity relationship—even when the price of coffee on the international market is the same as the fair trade price (as it was in 2013). However, the price for farmers in Maya Vinic is a critical component of being able to maintain a subsistence-based lifestyle, not to shift to being full-time commodity producers. Yet, certification is devised as part of an international business and empowerment tool-kit, which enables farmers to build businesses and develop their communities. Thus what solidarity is and how it is practiced differs dramatically throughout the fair trade network.

Standards for Development

Development in the case of fair trade producers is economic development aimed at providing ways that, as Nicholls and Opal argued, “the world’s poor can earn enough to become *rational economic actors* and begin thinking about diversifying their income and switching out of primary commodity production” (2005:54, emphasis added). In essence, certification is promoted as an avenue to decrease subsistence production and increase production of cash crops. In the wake of state-sponsored violence following the Zapatista uprising, the coffee crisis, and the continual failure of neoliberal-style economic development in their communities, members of Las Abejas and Maya Vinic declared autonomy from the state and disavowed neoliberal capitalism. Part of their “pacifist war against the state” includes the refusal of any government sponsored programs or assistance. Rather than be part of the development plan of Mexico, which they argue is concerned with the elimination of indigenous peasants, farmers in Maya Vinic have used a combination of subsistence farming (corn, beans, and squash) and coffee production to maintain their livelihoods.²⁸ Their interaction with the fair trade marketplace through the

cooperative has, however, in some ways allowed conventional development strategies to infiltrate their communities.

The coffee cooperative is an important legacy of the pre-neoliberal era in Mexico, when farmers relied on credit and inputs from the state coffee agency, INMECAFE (1973-1990). As Jaffee notes the stable prices and credit offered by the agency created a deep dependency that small producers felt acutely when it was deconstructed in the wake of the International Coffee Agreement collapse (1989) and neoliberal reforms (2007:50-51). Participation in a cooperative that is fair trade certified exposes farmers to similar paternalistic approaches (credit, stable pricing, input support) and new standards for production at the same time. Fair trade certifiers have to some extent filled the void left by INMECAFE in Chiapas (and other coffee producing regions in Mexico more broadly) yet certification brings additional standards for productive practices and community development that the state agency did not. Thus farmers negotiate a tradeoff between having a consistent buyer and a known price and having autonomy in their productive practices and efforts to secure the livelihoods they desire. In practice, fair trade certification brings third-party certifier control over the territory of farmers' fields while also enforcing a 'will to improve' in farmer communities (see: Li 2007). This control through fair trade certification is evident in everyday practices of farmers as they seek to uphold standards, develop their production as a business, and commit to community development. Lyon's (2011) observation that farmers upend their very livelihood strategies is a poignant reminder of this fact. In looking at the politics that play out in Acteal, new dimensions of these hardships can be seen.

In the time leading up to and during the coffee harvest (December – March) Maya Vinic *socios* visit their *cafetales* almost daily. The organic and fair trade standards for production require a more hands-on approach to production, which requires more attentive weeding, pruning, mulching and attention to runoff or other incursions from nearby plots. The standards mandate what can and cannot be produced in a coffee plot, how it can be produced and who can produce it. *Socios* adopt practices which are mandated by third-party certifiers and enforced by the cooperative. Regulations for pest (and if not organic, pesticide use), soil, water, waste, and biodiversity management form important productive practices that are enforced in farmers' fields. Labor conditions, especially regarding family and child labor are painstakingly explained at cooperative meetings and employed in the field. The required practices and the restrictions on family labor have fundamentally changed the way that farmers produce coffee. The territory of the *cafetal* has become a regulated space, standardized and controlled through third-party certification. The standards for production are disseminated from the cooperative to the members and through cooperative governance and member policing, the standards are upheld or members are no longer able to sell to the cooperative until they demonstrate compliance.²⁹

There are already longstanding leadership relations through their organization Las Abejas, as a result this form of governance through the cooperative does not constitute a major shift. Indeed, participation in a social movement and producing coffee have continued to present trade-offs for subsistence farmers. Producers commit time to participating as social movement actors and they also dedicate scarce land and labor to the production of a non-edible crop. The control of their coffee fields through

certification standards exacerbates existing tensions between food crop production and coffee production. In addition to controlling farmers' productive practices, certification also reduces the time that can be spent in their *milpa*, producing food for their family or displacing non-allowed labor (such as children under 15) from the *cafetal* to the *milpa*. Farmers, especially those in leadership positions continually remarked that they had less time for the *milpa* because of their work in the *cafetal*. This trade-off is a precarious one, as the production of food for subsistence is a critical component of the autonomy movement of Las Abejas and their ability to maintain their territory.

Third-party standards themselves are an important locus for economic development in fair trade producer communities; however, the fair trade premium that is given every year to be used toward a 'development plan' extends the reach beyond the fields and into their homes and their communities. The narrative embedded in the development plan is of an empowered producer who has a secure livelihood and invests in their community. One of the main goals of FLO is to promote business and economic development in producer communities; and the standards have guidelines describing the "requirements that are unique to Fairtrade and [that] intends to lay the foundations for empowerment and development" (2011:28). The leading way that this goal is to be realized is through the dissemination of a premium, which is an extra payment to Maya Vinic for use to improve their product and to complete development projects within their member communities. In FLO's published guidelines for "development potential" the requirements for development and reporting are layered for every year the cooperative has been certified, yet FLO is careful to dispense project design and monitoring to the cooperative. Every year there is an audit completed by FLO with all of the organizations

it certifies, which evaluates the implementation of the standards and development plan, and every year Maya Vinic must pay to bring an auditor to their communities. The responsibilities of the auditor are to review the financial documents of the cooperative, view randomly selected coffee plots from amongst the membership, meet with the members in select communities and discuss the plans for future community development.

In the 2013 fair trade audit conducted by FLO with Maya Vinic, the auditor was responsible for checking financial transparency, enforcing production standards, explaining the benefits of fair trade to the membership, and suggesting ways to improve community standards. The audit visit took place over 4 days; the offices of Maya Vinic were inspected as were a number of *cafetales* and meetings were held with members in their communities. The most intriguing thing about the audit was that on the one hand, the auditor talked about the social and community benefits of fair trade, about the maintenance of livelihood and the use of the social premium for community needs, while on the other hand, the auditor explained the need for careful documentation, the difference between a *socio* and a “free” producer in terms of income and the importance of improving the quality of the product. These two potentially competing narratives demonstrate that third-party certifiers have a particular idea about how fair trade certified cooperatives should run and what fair trade producer communities should look like.

In 2013, the auditor was primarily concerned with the cooperative’s documentation—“there needs to be more consistency in the documents,” or “you need to revise/regulate/update your documents”—but mostly the auditor was concerned with the *socio*’s documentation. In every meeting with members in their community the auditor asked to see the documentation of their harvest and their receipts from the cooperative for

the year. Out of three separate community meetings, on the first day of the audit no community was able to produce sufficient documentation for the auditor. Unable to comply they were told:

You need to save your receipts for five years so that we can check every year. At the very least you should have them from the past three years.
You need to find somewhere safe to put them *where they won't be eaten by rats*...it is an obligation you have for the fair trade certification.³⁰

The members took this to heart and before the next set of community meetings word had spread. The next day, when asked to produce their receipts, many members came forward with their documents. Other comments from the FLO auditor over the same time period confirmed that FLO looks to its farmer organized and run cooperatives as for-profit businesses and asks them to function as such. The auditor reiterated the point about documentation, stating that the *socios* “should know how much they are producing each year and the difference so that they can improve their product.” In so doing the threat of the loss of certification (and the consistent buyer and price) becomes tied to the improvement of their economic behaviors. These interactions point to a ‘helper’ form of fair trade in which the certifier is ‘enabling’ empowerment even as the mechanism is through standards which control producer practices.

Certification is also linked to small producers’ ability to create improved conditions in their communities. The guidelines for the required development plan for small producers state that: “all people involved in the production of fairtrade products can benefit and demonstrate solidarity with their communities” (FLO 2011:29). What this means in practice is less clear however. Highland communities are heterogeneous and in many coffee-producing communities where Maya Vinic producers live, there may be producers from other cooperatives or other farmers with drastically different political

leanings (*partidistas*). This makes it very difficult for Maya Vinic to deploy community development projects with their social premium. In the 2013 audit by FLO of Maya Vinic, the leadership proposed three development projects that had been decided on democratically in the general assembly meeting: 1) to purchase a truck for the pick-up of *socios* coffee; 2) to expand their offices; and 3) to install a drain in the newly built cooperative community kitchen. The representative of FLO said that the premium needs to be used toward the betterment of the product and for the community and that these were not community-oriented projects.

Community-wide projects tend to be sites of conflict in Chenalhó. Investments are made by the cooperative or by the government in certain sectors of the community and such territories become contentious. During the latter part of my 2013 visit the cooperative was fighting with the municipality over a pipeline that had been laid over the territory of a *socio* to serve *partidistas*. The government claimed that it had paid for the property and was unwilling to halt the project. In another example related to me in 2010, pavement had been laid through a site that was used by members of the Zapatistas without a request for permission. Such sites become zones of conflict and have the tendency to heighten tensions in communities rather than ‘demonstrating solidarity.’ When I asked about fair trade development projects such as the non-profit sponsored Aurora water project and what the premium was being used for in communities in Chenalhó, one of the cooperative members explained to me that the numbers of families that are members of Las Abejas are fewer than of other organizations in communities in Chenalhó and so it is very difficult to do community projects, either they are not feasible because of conflicts over territory or they are not able to gain permission to put projects

into practice because of political differences within the community. To emphasize this he pointed to a water vessel that had a label stating that it was a project of fair trade, and said “we have to buy individual water vessels for families instead of doing a big community water project, we can’t use the premium for that.”

The standards set by FLO and the recommendations of the auditor in 2013 point to an understanding of producer communities that is fundamentally flawed. FLO sees producer communities as homogenous, and economic development plans as universally beneficial. The FLO auditor remarked that: “in fair trade you have a stable price and you have the premium. In the case of the social premium it should be for the improvement of the product and for the benefit of the community.” Never mind the fact that Maya Vinic has members in fifty-two different communities in the highlands and that they typically are the minority members of such communities. In some cases they live alongside *partidistas* and people intimately connected with the paramilitary group that perpetrated the 1997 massacre against Las Abejas. Thus, even as farmers push to uphold, both political commitments to Las Abejas and the cooperative more broadly, they are being pulled by standards for development that do not take place and power dynamics ‘on the ground’ into account.

Concluding Thoughts

Despite dominant narratives that construct neoliberal development as inevitable and without alternative, farmers in Acteal continue to maintain subsistence livelihoods that are bolstered by interactions with coffee cooperatives connected to the fair trade marketplace. In order to have cash income for the purchase of food in lean times and for items that they cannot produce at home, farmers aligned with Las Abejas have made a

trade-off between their politics and practice, in that they struggle for autonomy but continue to engage in market-based livelihoods that are linked to global exchanges. The case of Maya Vinic reinforces findings that fair trade is not a panacea for producers and also demonstrates that certification is problematic.

Analyzing how fair trade is practiced and performed as a part of larger politics throughout the larger network assists with understanding what shapes the relations of power in Acteal. As more critiques emerge examining who benefits from fair trade it is clear that solely assessing certification as economic development through solidarity is not enough. If, as many critiques infer, fair trade certification is another facet of the neoliberal market, then the answer to the question of whether fair trade is ‘working’ for farmers is made apparent. If we are to understand solidarity and how farmers are interacting with the market and what type of market relations are important for small-producers, we must start asking different questions.

New lines of inquiry must be opened up where solidarity can be reexamined and theorized in the context of place-based politics and with attention to how it may (or may not) reinforce uneven power relations. Moreover, trade and economic development should be evaluated as constituents of the fair trade label, which in essence has branded ‘impoverished’ economic development subjects. Fair trade certification has assisted in exposing the friction in attempting to create a market-based solution to a market-based problem. Such solutions are couched in an understanding of who small-producers are and who they could or should be that is mired in discourses of development and solidarity which emanate from those who retain economic power. If we are to begin asking different questions, we must step outside this model.

Notes

¹ Questions of the effectiveness of a market-driven social movement have been raised in light of the mainstreaming of fair trade products (cf. Fridell 2007; Jaffee and Howard 2010; Lekakis 2012; Low and Davenport 2005; Schmelzer 2010; Wilkinson 2007).

² It should be noted at the outset that in this paper I am not discussing a particular solidarity movement per se, but a market-based system of certification that has been tied to the movement to make trade more fair, which is consistently identified as a movement in solidarity with small farmers and craft-workers.

³ The official municipality does not map onto the declared autonomous area, which extends beyond official borders and bears a different name.

⁴ For the purpose of maintaining the anonymity of participants, community and interviewee names are not used here.

⁵ All interviews were conducted in Spanish and translated to English by the author.

⁶ For a more detailed historical analysis of fair trade, see: Barrat Brown 1993; Fridell 2004; Nicholls and Opal 2005.

⁷ It should be noted that during and following the first meeting of UNCTAD (1964), a number of countries in Latin America were experimenting with Import Substitution Industrialization, which in some cases changed the balance of trade in the world arena.

⁸ Importantly, this includes responding to the collapse of the International Coffee Agreement in 1989 and the subsequent and devastating coffee price crisis (cf. Bacon 2008; 2010; 2013; Jaffee 2007).

⁹ This is consistent with Lise Nelson's (2003) argument in favor of 'decentering' the movement as the key point of analysis and instead examining the place-based politics of participating in social movement networks.

¹⁰ Bacon's (2013) analysis of innovations in coffee producer-cooperative-roaster relations stands out as an excellent example of how a particular solidarity network functions within the fair trade network.

¹¹ Consumers and other purchasers of fair trade certified goods are facilitating a solidarity that echoes more closely what Sara Koopman identified as "good helper" activism, which mirrors "colonial patterns, even as it works against empire" (2008:284).

¹² At the 2012 Specialty Coffee Association of Americas Meetings (Portland, OR) the main concern was how to differentiate labels to assist consumers with understanding what each label stood for and what practices were supported.

¹³ There is a distinct set of standards that was established by FLO to accommodate plantation produced products such as tea and bananas. Fair Trade USA has recently piloted certification of coffee plantations. In response to the changes in fair trade certification a new regionally based Producers' Symbol (*Símbolo de los Pequeños Productores*) was established in 2011 (Naylor 2014; Renard and Loconto 2013). Additionally, in the highlands of Mexico there has been an increased use of *certificación por la palabra* (word of mouth certification) by coffee cooperatives that are linked up to other social movements such as the Zapatistas.

¹⁴ Notably, the first drafts of Fair Trade USA's "multiple ingredient product policies" lowered the minimum fair trade content threshold to 25% for the product seal and 10% for the ingredients seal (Zinn 2012:10).

¹⁵ \$698 USD at time of writing.

¹⁶ There are initial certification fees for the organization, the product(s) and for processing facilities. They are based on the number of members, products and paid workers. The organizational fee based on member numbers ranges from €1,430-3,470 (\$1,901 - 4,615 USD), the product fee is a per product price of €180 (\$239 USD), and the processing facility fee based on workers employed ranges from €210-620 (\$279 - 824 USD). There are also annual fees assessed for each, in the case of Maya Vinic, the cooperative is responsible each year for an organizational fee of €2,410, an annual product fee for coffee and honey at €180 each, and a processing facility fee of €180 (totaling €2,770 or \$3,684). Finally, there is the annual follow-up audit fee, which is based on time and expenses of the FLO-CERT delegate and charged at €350 (\$465 USD) per day (including travel and reporting days), plus travel costs (FLO-CERT 2011:4-10). The 2013 audit for Maya Vinic took place over 4 days.

¹⁷ This type of fetishizing and so-called ‘de-fetishizing’ has been discussed and debated at length (cf. Freidberg 2003; Fridell 2007; Guthman 2007; Hudson and Hudson 2003; Lyon 2006).

¹⁸ For more detailed accounts of the Zapatista movement see: Collier and Quaratiello 2005; Earle and Simonelli 2005; Harvey, N. 1998; Mora 2008; Stahler-Sholk 2007; 2010; Stephen 2002.

¹⁹ In an interview with one of the founding Las Abejas members I was told: “we are in solidarity with the Zapatistas, they are our brothers and sisters in the struggle, but we are very different, we did not take up arms, ours is a pacifist organization.”

²⁰ Numbers are from the 2012-2013 coffee harvest. Additionally, of the 640 *socios*, 76 are women, 511 are producing only coffee, 108 are producing both coffee and honey, 21 are producing only honey.

²¹ For more information see: fairtradechronicles.com

²² Cooperative Coffees’ alliances with cooperatives in Chiapas, Mexico since 2000 have been based in solidarity with movements against neoliberal globalization and the state. The first connections were made with the Zapatista cooperative Mutz Vitz (now disbanded) and a newer group Yachil Xolobal Chul’chan (New Light in the Sky).

²³ A joint initiative of Outside the Bean (non-profit arm of Just Coffee) and On the Ground started in 2005.

²⁴ It is important to note that this impact is significant for the 60 farming families in this particular community, yet they make up less than 10% of Maya Vinic’s total membership.

²⁵ Farmers received thirty pesos per kilo for parchment (dried) coffee. At the time of research USD to Peso conversion was 12:1. Thirty pesos is roughly equal to \$2.50.

²⁶ In 2013, the price of fair trade coffee was the same as the world market price, for certified organic fair trade coffee the price was 30 pesos per kilo (a reduction of 16 pesos from 2012).

²⁷ Never mind the fact that the “people” who get to consume ‘healthier’ food in this case are inherently the wealthy non-farmers.

²⁸ It should be noted here that the highlands experience a great deal of pendulum migration (short-term migration for wage income and return to communities), but that it was reported to me that in families supportive of Las Abejas the number of people leaving the community to seek work in urban areas or even outside of Mexico is far fewer than in non-member families.

²⁹ In 2013, 48 *socios* failed their internal inspection and 11 were sanctioned (unable to sell to the cooperative).

³⁰ Author's emphasis. I think this characterization of why farmers might not have their documents reifies the fair trade certification frame of small producers as a 'project' of economic development.

CHAPTER VI

FOOD SOVEREIGNTY AND DIVERSE ECONOMIES IN AUTONOMOUS COMMUNITIES IN THE HIGHLANDS OF CHIAPAS

Introduction

Since the introduction of the concept, food sovereignty has been taken up by social movements, state governments, non-governmental organizations, and civil society more broadly, becoming a critical narrative for assessing the global politics of agriculture. The term emerged in the early 1980s as part of an attempt by the Mexican state to achieve greater self-sufficiency in food production (Edelman 2014). However, it was not until the mid-1990s that the concept of food sovereignty gained traction as a social movement agenda through appropriation by the international peasant movement La Vía Campesina (The Peasant Way) (Martínez-Torres and Rosset 2010). As articulated by La Vía Campesina and other grassroots organizations, the food sovereignty movement exposes the power relations at work in the global food and agricultural system. Advocates argue that it is a call for a democratic redistribution of that power and more equitable access to food as a basic human right (Wittman et al. 2010).

The definition of food sovereignty has been fluid since the 1990s, changing as groups adopt the terminology while developing and building new alliances (Patel 2009). The first definition put forth by La Vía Campesina in 1996, articulated food as a basic human right ensured by the state:

Food sovereignty is the right of each *nation* to maintain and develop its own capacity to produce its basic foods respecting cultural and productive diversity. We have the right to produce our own food in our own territory (emphasis added).

In highly politicized language, here, food sovereignty is a petition to the state to shift its focus to small-producers and away from a global-industrial food production and distribution model, which tends to privilege large producers, corporations, export-led growth, and imports of scarce food items. However, in 2007, a new definition was put forward by La Vía Campesina which shifts away from the state as the focus of action to achieve food sovereignty:

Food sovereignty is the *right of peoples* to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their *right to define their own food and agriculture systems*. It puts those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies rather than the demands of markets and corporations. It defends the interests and inclusion of the next generation. It offers a strategy to *resist and dismantle the current corporate trade and food regime*.... (Nyéléni Declaration; emphasis added).

As Patel pointed out, there are some contradictions inherent in this definition as it encompasses *all* producers and consumers while failing to articulate who is the guarantor of such rights (2009:666).¹ Beyond definitional issues, struggles over how to define food sovereignty are directly related to different understandings and strategies concerning how to achieve it and at what scale—through international agreements, national legislation, or regional methods. The conceptual tensions in the evolving definition put forth by Vía Campesina above lie at the heart of the argument articulated in this chapter. With competing ideas of rights, resistance, and the role of the state, how is food sovereignty to be understood and put into practice?

Although initial scholarly engagement with food sovereignty was overwhelmingly positive, as part of a critical dialogue initiated in 2013, important criticisms of food sovereignty advocacy have emerged (cf. Akram-Lodhi 2013; Bernstein 2014; Burnett and Murphy 2014; Edelman 2014; Hospes 2013).² Many agree that at first glance, food

sovereignty is a desirable goal. However, even those who recognize its potential have offered important critiques, Haroon Akram-Lodhi argues that “as a concept its [food sovereignty] depiction of an alternative is not a depiction grounded in the messy compromises of the here and now but rather in a fully-fleshed-out depiction of another world...which is possible to build, and now” (2013:4). He explicitly states that although ‘another world’ is appealing, simply offering an outcome or potential endpoint is an incomplete account. Missing from such accounts is how food sovereignty is to be accomplished and by what means.

This critique raises important questions about how food sovereignty is to be realized. As a *movement*, food sovereignty has been an important rallying point for exposing problems within the contemporary food regime and responding to the regulation and control of agricultural resources under the World Trade Organization (cf. Martínez-Torres and Rosset 2010; McMichael 2009). However, as a *concept*, food sovereignty has become entangled in complex set of economic and political circumstances which have rendered its transformative power negligible. One of the key reasons for the seemingly diminishing potential of food sovereignty is its continual positioning as a radical alternative to neoliberal capitalist food and agricultural systems (cf. Wittman et al. 2010).³ An example of this is historian Jim Handy’s argument that:

Capitalism was dedicated to divorcing producers from any right over the good they produced and encasing those goods in ever larger, ever more disconnected, ever more monopolized and ever more destructive markets. Food sovereignty challenges all of that because it demands that we rethink what was at the very centre of this transition; it demands that we treat food not simply as a good, access to which and the production of which is determined by the market, it demands that we recognize the social connections inherent in producing food, consuming food, and sharing food (2007 in Wittman et al. 2010:4).

Handy's argument is common among scholars and advocates promoting food sovereignty—they position small-holders and peasant producers against an absolute capital. This narrative implies that there are not production-consumption systems in existence currently that navigate impersonal and far-flung marketplaces while simultaneously activating social connections within food production. Paradoxically, such an approach neglects the existing food production-consumption strategies of peasants in particular, which embrace the core ideas of food sovereignty while negotiating relations within the conventional marketplace.

This chapter provides an analysis of how communities are putting into practice the ideas contained in food sovereignty in the absence of national legislation, effective international treaties 'compelling' policy change, or cohesive regional efforts. I examine how indigenous peasants who have declared autonomy from the state endeavor to put into practice the rights ensconced in the 2007 declaration of food sovereignty. Such endeavors form part of an endogenous economics, which is continuously remade as part of the values and ideas of the economic actors putting it into practice (see: Ekins 1997). It is also an important part of the politics of indigenous *campesinos/as* which is critical of neoliberal capitalism, yet also engages the neoliberal market as part of their strategy to reach international networks and maintain local economies.

It is important to investigate those spaces where the friction of compromise within economic exchange is occurring as the goals of food sovereignty are put into practice. In this chapter I examine the interstitial spaces of economic practice and step outside the widespread scholarly analysis of food sovereignty as the radical alternative to neoliberal capitalist food systems and instead consider its practice as a diverse economic space (on

diverse economies see: Gibson-Graham 2007; Gibson-Graham et al. 2013). The main argument that I make in this chapter is that conceptualizing food sovereignty as a set of practices dichotomously positioned against neoliberal capitalist models neglects spaces of economic activity that exist alongside and through capitalist economies.

To investigate diverse economic spaces, in this chapter, I examine every day productive practices in politically fractious communities where farmers produce corn for subsistence and coffee for income in ways that are intimately bound up in their engagement with broader politics and economic networks for indigenous autonomy and food sovereignty. My analysis moves away from the national-scale debates over who guarantees food sovereignty and the narrow focus of the concept as juxtaposed as ‘opposite’ of neoliberal capital and scale down to community level processes. In particular, I consider efforts to cultivate secure access to food and agricultural resources in self-declared autonomous, indigenous communities in the highlands of Chiapas, Mexico. Creating secure access and more egalitarian distribution of food and agricultural resources at this scale is not limited to the broader goals of food sovereignty, but also to remaking economic relations through diverse economic interactions and through the production of diverse economic spaces. Drawing from empirical work with *campesinos/as* (peasants, as they self-identify) aligned with the Zapatista indigenous social movement, I examine the economic practices of farming families to determine how the ideas of food sovereignty are appropriated and incorporated into daily activities in self-declared autonomous communities ‘in resistance.’

This chapter draws on research conducted between 2010-2013, which is focused on the everyday practices of *campesinos/as* who are part of larger social movements and

who live in the official highland municipality of Chenalhó, Chiapas, Mexico. The research formed part of a larger project investigating spaces of food and agriculture as sites of resistance in self-declared autonomous communities populated by indigenous Mayan subsistence farmers. This portion of the study was carried out with members of the Zapatista movement and included participant observation and interviews in two highland communities. Interviews were conducted with farmers in Spanish.⁴

This contribution considers how the goals of food sovereignty are being enacted by peasant farmers in resistance and in relation to diverse economic networks and anti-neoliberal politics. To contextualize this study I begin with a critique of food sovereignty which informs my analysis of peasant production and diverse economies. To situate this in the economic and political practices of farmers in resistance, I then focus on the politics of autonomy in the highlands. Finally, I turn to how food sovereignty is appropriated in self-declared autonomous communities to examine how diverse economic spaces contribute to more secure sources of food and income in these places.

Food Sovereignty

The narrative of capitalist modernity has overwhelmingly regarded the peasantry as an historical anachronism, or as a receding baseline of development. Neoclassical economic theory and orthodox Marxism alike have reproduced this ontology, on the grounds of scale economies and/or marginality to a revolutionary class politics, respectively (McMichael 2008:205).

In order to better understand the ‘messy spaces of compromise’ that a food sovereignty agenda might encounter as it is enacted, it is important to first assess the promises and pitfalls of food sovereignty for peasant farmers as they are addressed in the literature to-date. In this section I specifically address the importance of food sovereignty

as a concept that makes peasant food and agricultural production visible. Next I return to the critique of realizing food sovereignty made by Akram-Lodhi (2013) and using the work of J.K. Gibson-Graham (1996; 2006) I attempt to draw out the problems of positioning food sovereignty against global neoliberal capitalism.

Food sovereignty has been mobilized by the transnational agrarian movement La Vía Campesina, both as a response to neoliberal globalization and as an attempt to address the shortcomings of previous frameworks, which focused on increasing national food supplies (right to food), and an individual's economic access to food (food security) to ameliorate the problem of hunger (Fairbairn 2010:27). Broadly speaking, the movement for food sovereignty is an attempt to disrupt the global industrial-capitalist food and agriculture system and is thus viewed as more radical than previous approaches, including the 'right to food' and 'food security.' Food sovereignty proponents envision a democratized food system that operates differently from the neoliberal model, which has positioned small-scale producers at the bottom and corporate entities at the top of a hierarchical system. This positioning of peasant farming systems in the neoliberal market neglects the important role of 2.5 billion small-scale producers who have developed sophisticated farming systems that promote polyculture rather than monoculture and are more productive than conventional systems (Altieri 2009; Altieri and Nicholls 2008; Gliessman 2007). Equally important, critics of global food systems who promote the concept of food sovereignty highlight small-producers as the population most consistently at risk of hunger and malnutrition (Pimbert 2009:2-3; see also: Rosset et al. 2006). Thus food sovereignty advocates call for the support, protection and expansion of small-scale, localized farming systems, which puts the needs of the local population first.

Under this broad framework, food sovereignty advocates have made small-scale and particularly peasant producers more visible. Despite the pursuit of ‘modernization-led’ economic development and the hegemonic dynamics of global capital, peasants are still pursuing rural livelihoods worldwide (cf. Akram-Lodhi and Kay 2010a; 2010b; Edelman 2000; McMichael 2006; 2008; Patel 2007; Ploeg 2008), and simultaneously, rather than a retreat of the peasant class, people are defying the urban trend and moving into rural areas to establish and maintain agrarian-based livelihoods (Ploeg 2008; 2010).⁵ Despite the long-term emergence of capital, peasants have forged creative local and transnational mechanisms for asserting their right to a livelihood within the constraints of a neoliberal marketplace (cf. Akram-Lodhi and Kay 2010a; 2010b; Martínez-Torres and Rosset 2010; Ploeg 2008).⁶

Since the 1970s, global-economic restructuring has had a significant impact on the peasant way of life—signaling to some, the death of the peasantry (cf. Collier, P. 2008; Hobsbawm 1994). Over a century ago Karl Kautsky asked if capital was infiltrating agricultural production, destroying old forms of production (e.g.: peasant) and creating new ones (1899 [1988]). In a macro-scale analysis surveying the agrarian question Akram-Lodhi and Kay (2010a; 2010b) suggest that neoliberal agricultural production on a global scale has reframed peasant production strategies in the capitalist marketplace not eliminated them.⁷ They argue that “agriculture continues to be relevant for capital and capitalism in an era of neoliberal globalisation” and that “small-scale petty commodity producing peasant farming still has a role...” (2010a:180). They further note that it is “necessary to understand the diverse and uneven ways in which rural production processes and agrarian accumulation are or are not being transformed by the capitalist

mode of production..." (2010b:266). However, such an argument neglects alternate conceptualizations that move away from the binary of capitalist/non-capitalist; furthermore, it positions capital as the locus, closing out alternate explanations for diverse peasant livelihood strategies. Underlying many of the arguments found in the rubric of food sovereignty is a tendency to romanticize peasant production as operating against the capitalist marketplace (cf. Wittman et al. 2010). For Bello and Baviera the resurgence of peasant production (cf. Ploeg 2008) has been created by "the negative dynamics of global capitalism and empire and seeks to reverse them" (2010:74). These types of approaches speak to the pitfalls of 'capitolocentrism' articulated by Gibson-Graham (1996), as food sovereignty is measured against capitalism instead of as an 'economy in its own right' (cf. Gibson-Graham et al. 2013). This approach to food sovereignty creates a dichotomous arrangement in which food sovereignty is either encapsulated by the neoliberal capitalist market, or is fundamentally restructuring non-capitalist market relations.

As argued by J.K. Gibson-Graham (1996; 2006) capitalism is the privileged form of economy and economic practice globally and all other economic activities tend to be divided into a binary of capitalist/non-capitalist. Problematically, such capitolocentrism—capital being the gauge that other economic activities are measured against (Gibson-Graham 1996:6)—in mainstream development and globalization narratives as well as in radical critiques tends to render alternatives invisible. Gibson-Graham (1996) argued that by rethinking and de-naturalizing the current economic imaginary and allowing for heterogeneity, a new politics of 'noncapitalism' can be produced. In imagining new ways to break-down the discourse of the economy, Gibson-Graham (2006) sought to re-

politicize the economy by representing it as a space that can be both contested and reclaimed.

This diverse economy approach is useful to decentering capitalism and conventional economic development as the prevailing lens with which peasant economic activities are viewed. Within dominant discourses of economic development, peasant producers are viewed as non-capitalist (the myth of subsistence) and needing to be integrated into the capitalist marketplace. By pushing against capital as the organizing principle in self-declared autonomous communities in Chiapas, Mexico, a whole range of activities are made visible. The agricultural and economic practices in the highlands (sale to fair trade markets, subsistence farming, cooperative production of goods and so on) force a rethinking of economic imaginaries and a “dislocation” of capitalocentrism (Gibson-Graham 2006:59). This is due to the diversity of practices and economic relationships that take place in self-declared autonomous communities, which cannot be fully captured by locating activities as only ‘capitalist’ or ‘peasant.’ Before delving into these activities the section that follows provides a context for the creation of diverse economies in self-declared autonomous communities in the highlands of Chiapas, Mexico.

Chiapas and Self-Declared Autonomous Communities

An important site to examine the politics of food sovereignty at the local scale is the highlands of Chiapas, Mexico, where *campesinos/as* in resistance draw on a number of different strategies to maintain their livelihoods. A key component of this is their participation in broader networks and social movements, which I will discuss in more

depth here. This section highlights the context in which these farmers declared autonomy from the Mexican state in the 1990s and how they have used a combination of different systems of production as part of their struggle.

Chiapas is the southernmost state in Mexico, sharing an international border with Guatemala. Chiapas is the eighth largest state in Mexico and the 7th most populous (out of 32) (INEGI 2010). The 2010 census completed by the *Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía* (INEGI – National Institute of Statistics and Geography) in Chiapas recorded 4.7 million inhabitants, almost 30% of whom were identified as indigenous.⁸ The figure of 30% represents twelve groups, but the majority population is Tzeltal and Tzotzil speaking (INEGI 2010). These groups primarily populate the central highlands and eastern lowlands of Chiapas. Many in Chiapas live and work in rural areas with scant access to state services, for example, in the official highland municipality of Chenalhó where this research was conducted, the vast majority of inhabitants are indigenous subsistence corn farmers who have been petitioning the state for access to resources for more than five decades. By other official measures, Chiapas is rich, providing significant energy and agricultural resources to the country. Moreover, Chiapas is home to the second most bio-diverse rainforest on the planet, the Lacandon Jungle. Twenty percent of Chiapas' territory is under official protection as federal natural areas and the state is increasingly a target for ecotourism projects (Flores 2014; S!paz 2014). Such ecological richness is measured against extreme poverty in Chiapas, creating a stark contrast on the landscape.

There is a strong history of indigenous organizing and demands for self-determination in Chiapas that I will not examine in detail here.⁹ However, in order to

provide context for a discussion for the diverse economic practices at work, which contribute to building secure sources of food and livelihood in the highlands, I will instead highlight a few important moments related to contemporary mobilization in support of indigenous rights. On January 1, 1994, the *Ejército Zapatista Liberación Nacional* (EZLN – The Zapatista Army of National Liberation), staged an uprising in a number of town centers throughout Chiapas (Collier and Quaratiello 2005). Although the armed insurgency lasted only 12 days, the demands for rights to land, work, housing, nutrition, health, education, liberty, democracy, peace and justice are still being pursued by the movement (EZLN 1993). These demands are based in reversing the ‘500 years of oppression’ of the indigenous peoples of the Americas and are consistent with other indigenous movements for self-determination throughout the region whose core demands include autonomy.

The struggle for autonomy forms a crucial piece in the resistance practiced by actors within the Zapatista movement. After a series of unsuccessful attempts to attain government recognition of their right to self-determination—namely through the negotiations of the San Andrés Accords on Indigenous Rights and Culture (1996)—the Zapatistas and other indigenous groups (e.g.: Sociedad Civil Las Abejas) began to build their own vision of autonomy (see: Collier and Quaratiello 2005; Simonelli and Earle 2003; Stephen 2002; Tavanti 2003). In 2003, the Zapatistas formed centers of civilian government (called *Caracoles*—literally, ‘snail shells’) and autonomous systems of education, healthcare and agroecology training. Farmers (*campesinos/as*) aligned with the movement live in communities that form part of ‘Rebel Autonomous Zones’ (see: Image 6.1). Despite this declaration of autonomy, it should be noted that communities within

these zones are not homogenous, cohesive Zapatista communities. Zapatista supporters live alongside community members that claim similar politics and work with the Zapatistas and also *partidistas* (supporters of Mexican political parties) who are not aligned with the political agenda of the Zapatistas or other groups seeking autonomy.



Image 6.1: Sign outside the Autonomous Good Government Center (*Caracol*) of Oventik

Since the mid-1990s the government has waged a low-intensity war against supporters of the Zapatistas (Mora 2008; Stahler-Sholk 1998; 2010; Tavanti 2003). As a result of state-sponsored violence and their struggle for autonomy, supporters of the Zapatistas do not participate in state politics, or receive any funds, subsidies, healthcare or educational services or any other support from the state. Overall supporters that I worked with in the highlands considered themselves to be farmers ‘in resistance.’ Rather than feed precious resources into building up their armed forces and launching a new offensive (to counter the violence), Zapatista supporters instead created their own structures of governance and economic systems. They have not only created a *de facto* separation from the state (self-declared autonomy), but they are building concrete political and economic systems at the same time. Because of the tension within the divided communities in the highlands, regional and global connections have been an important method for knowledge sharing as well as for nurturing political and economic relationships. These multi-scalar connections

link farmers in the highlands to regional human rights groups, and agroecology centers, and also to international networks such as fair trade certifiers, solidarity groups, and other social movements. Importantly, the Zapatistas—as self-identified, peasant farmers—partner with La Vía Campesina and have attempted to put into practice the ideas behind *soberanía alimentaria* (food sovereignty). Farmers in resistance in self-declared autonomous communities in the highlands are an exceptional example of how the goals of food sovereignty might be put into practice, as they are working to create self-reliant systems that are not dependent on the economic development plan of the Mexican state (see: Naylor 2012).

For farmers in the highlands, a critical component of claiming their ‘right to define their own food and agricultural systems’ is the negation of the ‘narrative of capitalist modernity,’ which positions the peasant as inimical to development (McMichael 2008:205). *Campesinos/as* ‘in resistance’ are reclaiming and redefining economic production practices in their communities, stepping outside of how economic development is known and understood in Mexico. Not only have *campesinos/as* resisted state-led economic development, they have created diverse strategies for subsistence and market interaction. Importantly, I argue, they have created diverse spaces of production and consumption, which appropriate and expand on community-based knowledge. If, as scholars, we view the economic activities of farmers in resistance as valuable only if they are diametrically opposed to the capitalist market, we re-inscribe capitocentric logic that limits our analysis in critical ways. Most importantly, we foreclose understanding how a range of productive practices can be transformative even as they are part of diverse economic spaces shared by neoliberal capitalism. These conceptual blinders thus make it

difficult to produce a fine-grained analysis of the implementation of a variety of strategies as well as, farmer practices and interpretations of economic activities. Farmers aligned with the Zapatistas rarely do waged work and they produce very little for the formal marketplace, yet they participate in a range of economic activities. If we consider diverse economies—that is, those spaces in which concrete economic identities, activities and narratives are being produced in ways that destabilize the knowledge of a ‘singular’ capitalist economy—different ways of knowing and understanding economic practices are made apparent. How people create, interpret and mobilize economies in self-declared autonomous communities helps to understand dynamic approaches to cultivating secure food systems.

Diverse Economies and the Appropriation of Food Sovereignty

One of the major critiques leveled against food sovereignty is that its proponents articulate a radical alternative without specifying the concrete changes necessary to achieve it. Haroon Akram-Lodhi (2013) recently made such an argument by pointing out two fundamental contradictions he sees in trying to build food sovereignty within a capitalist system. First, he argues that there is a contradiction between articulating food sovereignty as predicated on local control of resources by peoples and ignoring structural control of land, water and other key resources (*ibid*:5). Second, he points out that even as food sovereignty is offered as a critique of the existing political economy of food production and distribution, it does not address the political conditions needed to “exercise the autonomy to build food sovereignty” (*ibid*:6). These contradictions point to problems with positioning food sovereignty as way to reconfigure market relations. I

address each of these contradictions in turn through a discussion of how farmers in resistance have approached establishing a resource base and also how they have cultivated diverse production systems.

It should be noted at the outset that I am not holding up the experience of farmers in the highlands as the portrait of food sovereignty, but instead highlighting concrete practices that can assist with considering how we want to think about creating secure spaces of agricultural production and food consumption. This section addresses two ways that farmers in resistance are attempting to realize and reshape the goals of food sovereignty, first through subsistence agricultural production and second, through economic networks that range from communal to global. What is made evident by the practices of farmers in resistance in the highlands is that there are different understandings of what ‘economies’ are and that through a diverse approach (one that is not based in capitalist or non-capitalist divisions), farmers are able to create more secure livelihoods and access to resources.

In one of my first interviews in an autonomous community in the highlands a farmer explained to me the outside pressure to reduce smallholder food production in Chiapas:

There are many problems with farming here in Chiapas, there are problems with the transgenic seeds and the crops grown for fuel. The government wants to turn Chiapas into an export producer. Calderón [Felipe Calderón, President of Mexico 2006-2012] says we should stop growing corn that we can just buy it from the United States.

However, in highland Chiapas (and elsewhere throughout the state), the production of corn and other agricultural goods on small plots is a critical component of community economies and everyday life of *campesinos/as*. It is especially important as a part of the

resistance of farmers who are aligned with the Zapatistas and who populate self-declared autonomous communities. Critical to what farmers have labeled as their “*resistencia autónoma*” (autonomous resistance) is the active occupation of space through food and agricultural production (see: Chapter IV). Communities that are populated by *campesinos/as* in resistance share similar issues as other subsistence and coffee farming communities in the highlands, yet simultaneously they stand out. One key similarity has been the experience of the “lean months” which is described by Bacon et al. in the context of fair trade coffee producer communities as the summer months of seasonal hunger (2014:140). The lean months fall when household food storage has been depleted (or rationed), there is little to no income for the purchase of food, and/or when families have to rely on credit to purchase basic food items (*ibid*, see also: Fernandez et al. 2013).

The difference between farmers who have declared themselves in resistance and those who have not is evident in strategies undertaken to survive the ‘lean months.’ In many coffee-producing areas families may seek income through sending a family member to an urban area or ‘*al norte*,’ rely on government programs (such as *Oportunidades*) or even short-term, high interest money lending arrangements.¹⁰ However, communities in resistance focus on different economies that are intended to keep their young and healthy population in residence, maintain their separation from the government, and reduce unequal labor relations. In one interview, this strategy was explained as an important part of the struggle, “we need people to stay and be productive in the community...the coffee cooperative, for example, it stops migration and it helps with the family and helps to fortify the family base and the economic base.” Such community-based economic interactions help set farmers in resistance apart from their

partidista (supporters of the major Mexican political parties; e.g.: PRD, PRI, PAN) counterparts. In particular it helps create cohesiveness amongst Zapatista political actors and also assists with ameliorating economic-related issues of food access.

Importantly, *campesinos/as* in resistance are accessing resources and building autonomous, democratic networks of production. Strategies to maintain secure food resources in self-declared autonomous communities are also consistent with demands made within the context of the food sovereignty movement, which articulates a system that is democratically controlled and is attentive to the social conditions of production and consumption. Collective efforts to create food secure communities as part of diverse economies also highlight why it is problematic to conceptualize food sovereignty that is either capitalist or against capitalism. To do so discounts the struggle of farmers who embody the resistance against economic systems that are detrimental to the way they want to live.

Land has been a significant issue for farmers in resistance and in order to understand the importance of subsistence farming in self-declared autonomous communities it is crucial to recognize the way that farmers in resistance have gained access to and maintained their territory. In 1994, during the Zapatista uprising one of the main features of the offensive was land seizures.¹¹ The invasions by Zapatista supporters were met with great protest on behalf of wealthy landowners and many peasant farmers were duly evicted between 1994 and 1998 (Bobrow-Strain 2004). However, a number of *campesinos/as* managed to maintain their claims to territory and the negotiations that took place between the government and indigenous leaders in 1996 (San Andrés Accords) assisted with a large scale and unprecedented redistribution of land in Chiapas.

As Aaron-Bobrow-Strain revealed in his work on landowner response to invasions in Chilón, Chiapas, as a redistribution that was aimed at reducing conflict in rural areas of the state, “land tenure in Chiapas underwent a rapid repeasantization and reindigenization rather than privatization and concentration” (2007:4). Invasions and subsequent land redistribution assisted *campesinos/as* with gaining access to key resources and provided a territorial basis for their resistance against (some) neoliberal reforms.

Although autonomy was an important part of the first post-uprising decade (1994-2003) of the movement, it should be noted that demands for resources from the government and government recognition were still a critical component of the Zapatista political agenda during that period (Stahler-Sholk 2007). As Stahler-Sholk (*ibid*) notes in his work on the problem of ‘autonomy without resources,’ resource allocation became a serious dilemma in the post-uprising years.¹² State programs (such as PROCAMPO and *Oportunidades*) became sites of competition as more people contended for shrinking state resources. When, in 2003, the Zapatistas reinforced their demand for autonomy through the creation of the *Caracoles*, the politics of the *de facto* separation from the state included a complete rejection of government programs.¹³ However, access to tangible resources continues to create conflict in self-declared autonomous communities. One member of the Zapatista leadership in the highlands disclosed to me that “the government still attacks us in many ways, through our resources, through the schools, in the fields, in many ways.” However, even as early as 1994, the movement was faced with stepping in to provide basic services and to assist its membership with cultivating viable livelihoods (Stahler-Sholk 2007). As a result there are many production, exchange, and social projects that are undertaken by farmers in resistance in communities and civilian centers.

Collectives (which I will discuss in more detail later), and subsistence farming methods have been essential elements of creating communities that have a more balanced access to and allocation of food and agricultural resources.

In the second decade of resistance (2004-2014), the control of resources has taken on new meanings in self-declared autonomous communities. While farmers have long-recognized that there is a finite amount of land, in this period it has transitioned from being a demand on the state to a critical component of maintaining their resistance.¹⁴ One farmer remarked to me that “really there just isn’t a lot of land...and so we have to be careful with the land and with the water, we have to conserve the water, the forests and the land.” The key way that farmers are attempting to do this is through an appropriation of agroecological methods and knowledge sharing between Zapatista support communities and with civil society partners. A leader in agroecology in one of the communities that I worked with explained to me that prior to 2003, farmers wanted the technology and the chemicals that the government was endorsing, they wanted PROCAMPO (which gave credit to small farmers for the purchase of agricultural chemicals). He continued:

Because of the government programs we believed that this [with chemicals] was the best way to farm. But the effects were never explained. We know now in these years we have had many problems with the economy, with the environment and with politics and because of this we are starting to talk about capitalism and especially the production with and application of agrochemicals as part of capitalism. We talk about not using such products because the best is to work with the earth. Our wealth is in our communities. We are starting to learn how to conserve the earth and there are many ways to do this through compost and covers and ground cover. And the producers are trying to work with the environment because this is best...it is part of the circle of life. In conventional agriculture there are many parts, many machines, trucks, tractors, and there are plastics and fertilizers and many things to buy and process. It is not careful and does not preserve the earth.

When out in the *milpa* (cornfield) farmers would point out different methods that they were using. More than one farmer brought me to their compost pile and explained its importance. Not unlike other farmers in the region (regardless of political affiliation) many farmers in resistance that I spoke with relied on the millennia old polycultural production system involving corn, beans and squash. In the highlands there is only one harvest per year, yet farmers work every day in their fields maintaining their most important staple food, corn. Successful and self-reliant agricultural systems are a critical component of farmers' resistance.

Part of creating such self-reliant systems includes the cultivation of coffee for income and many farmers also divide their time working in their shade coffee plots (called *cafetales*).¹⁵ Both the *milpa* and the *cafetal*, which are rain-fed, demonstrate a remarkable diversity of plants and growing methods.¹⁶ For example, in one *milpa* a farmer would plant a number of varieties of corn, (generally varieties of white, black and yellow), some that mature faster and others that are better for storage. Alongside that corn different varieties of pole beans would be planted (see: Image 6.2).



Image 6.2: Milpa with corn, beans, squash and sunflowers

A farmer explained: “when you grow the beans and corn together the organic material gets turned back in, the bean has much nitrogen, this is basic, this, the corn and the beans is the basic *milpa*, so it is.” In the *cafetal*, two to three different types of coffee plants (which are perennial) might be planted among a variety of shade providing trees. At the border of the *milpa* and within the *cafetal* I was shown banana palms, peaches, and macadamia (see: Image 6.3).



Image 6.3: Looking from the *milpa* to the *cafetal*

A number of farmers keep bees in their *cafetal* as well, providing a source of honey. Outside of their fields and dotted around household buildings were spaces of coffee processing, but also coffee plants for household consumption, small vegetable plots, a tangle of the climbing vine squash called chayote, and in many cases chickens.¹⁷ All of these agricultural goods are produced at a micro-scale and are primarily for household consumption. These products also serve as a basis for barter or a small stream of income. Additionally, these bio-diverse and economically-diverse agricultural production practices are a principal element of the diverse economic spaces that farmers are co-creating. Knowledge sharing with regard to production practices and seed saving assist with the maintenance of secure sources of food which form a core component of food sovereignty as it is idealized.

The cultivation and preservation of their native corn is of particular importance in the pursuit of a secure resource base. A leader in one of the communities explained to me: “our self-sufficiency is through our seed saving and through maintaining the diversity of our seeds.”¹⁸ There is a great deal of conversation around climate change and genetically modified seeds throughout the network of communities in the highlands and farming families continue to seek ways to protect their seeds and to experiment in their fields. Even with agroecological methods and careful storage however, the corn does not last between harvests. One farmer explained this to me as a problem of land: “...it is [hunger] a problem of land because there are very few pieces. There is little land and what land there is, is very small because there are a lot of people.” Other farmers argued that it was a problem of fertility: “the problem when the corn doesn’t last all year and we have to buy corn is because the earth doesn’t produce as much and because the fertility is still being improved.” Beyond issues with land scarcity and reduced fertility, many farmers felt there was a problem of not being able to let the land ‘rest’ long enough to recover its fertility. Farmers associated the declining fertility of the soil with increased problems with insects, which significantly reduced the amount corn that they were able to harvest and store. Furthermore, farming families lose a significant amount of harvested corn as stored corn is subject to frequent problems with rodents (see: Image 6.4). Such issues have led to community-based experimentation with new storage methods as well as idea sharing between self-declared autonomous communities. However, as a result of such shortages, people must turn to income generating activities to be able to purchase basic foodstuffs in lean times.



Image 6.4: Rodent damaged storage corn

As noted earlier in self-declared autonomous communities this takes the shape of collective activities. Even as *campesinos/as* in resistance challenge how their resource base is accessed and controlled (a key component of Akram-Lodhi's (2013) vision of building food sovereignty) they seek additional mechanisms for asserting their rights to productive spaces.

As political actors affiliated with multiple movements operating at distinct scales, the networks established through solidarity, knowledge sharing, and political action have created a foundation for collective production of goods for cash income (including collective agricultural production on communal plots, individual coffee production for cooperatives, and weaving for example). Consistent with the situation of peasant farmers globally, subsistence farmers in communities in resistance are seeking income for the purchase of items that they cannot produce at home (such as soap, salt, medicine). However, such interactions bring farmers in resistance in the highlands into new negotiations of power within the marketplace (see: Chapter V). While not immune from such power struggles, *campesinos/as* in self-declared autonomous communities have used their position as political actors to work democratically in collectives. In the remainder of this section I discuss two particular examples that help explain how farmers in resistance

are harnessing the power of political-economic differences (their position as peasants in resistance) while simultaneously exercising democratic control over ‘community’ resources. Community members that identify as Zapatistas have declared autonomy over their territories, economies and governance and exercise their control over such spaces through community-based collectives. Some of these collectives are designed to meet community needs and others tap into wide ranging networks, such as international fair trade certification. To better understand how the collectives operate I examine how they function as part of the communities while simultaneously tapping into regional and international networks.

Cooperative production of resources and community economies form an important spectrum of resistance for self-declared autonomous communities. A *campesina* conveyed the importance of the collectives to me, stating that: “to resist is to work beyond your home in the collectives, that is a way to get some money and it is not like the *partidistas* who have, for example, the bad government program of *Oportunidades*.” The collectives, which started as early as 1994 (see: Stahler-Sholk 2007:56-57), draw on long-standing community labor arrangements to democratically distribute responsibilities in each collective. These are community-based initiatives that take many forms. Some communities had a wide range of activities, including weaving, metalworking, bread-making, gardening, and agroecology experimentation other communities were limited to one or two activities, such as bread-making and coffee production for the organic and/or fair trade market.¹⁹ It is important to note that participation in some of these activities (metalworking and weaving, for example) is divided by sex, yet in other cases men and women work together in collectives (primarily

those associated with agricultural production). One of the critical components in the creation of the diverse economic spaces of highland communities in resistance is their recognition that to build self-reliant community economies they cannot leave out a significant portion of the population.²⁰ A woman working in an agroecology collective communicated to me that:

the difference between women in our organization and others is very great. It is very different because they do not work for the pueblo. Zapatista women are working, learning and doing for the pueblo, for all and it is a very different situation.²¹

She reiterates that their work is not for the benefit of the individual, but that such work is a way to show their commitment to the struggle and to assist with maintaining their movement as much as their own livelihoods.

On a weekly basis, many *campesinos/as* in resistance split their time between maintaining their own fields and working as part of a collective. A weaving collective in one of the communities gathers four days per week for about eight to ten hours a day and reduces that commitment to three days per week during the corn harvest. This collective operates as many of the others in the communities I visited. They sell or trade their produce at cost to community members and any surplus is brought to Zapatista-affiliated shops to be sold to tourists in the nearby city of San Cristóbal de las Casas or is exchanged with NGOs for sale in international markets. Income that is generated from sales outside the community is used to collectively purchase items. In the case of the weaving collective the women used their income to first replenish their supplies and then to purchase items such as salt or soap in bulk, which are then distributed among their member households. This particular weaving cooperative also established a collective fund for the emergency use of members in need (for transportation to the hospital, for

example). Other collectives, such as the agroecology group use *ejidal* community spaces to conduct experiments that could otherwise be costly and risky for farming families, any produce from this communal area is distributed amongst the community. Overall the collectives make up a critical component of community self-reliance, where the burden of economic interaction and the cultivation of secure access to food and income are shared. A member of the one metalworking collective I met with voiced this in saying, “if we work collectively in our communities we maintain the right to land and to resources, so it is. It is the best way to organize and work.” Through cooperative work *campesinos/as* within the larger social movement are able to put their politics into practice on a day-to-day basis. Such activities make up community economies which transgress scale (tapping into regional and global networks) and disrupt monolithic understandings of economic activities which are attached to neoliberal capitalism.

In addition to community-scale activities a number of farming families in these communities also work as part of larger regional collectives, such as fair trade coffee and honey cooperatives, which give them access to more consistent forms of income and broader solidarity networks. Zapatista supporters formed coffee producing cooperatives out of their movement and they use these connections as critical networks of solidarity (see: Chapter V). It also means that they have cast the net of “self-sufficiency” somewhat wider (as noted by Stahler-Sholk 2007:57); rather than relying on lower coffee prices through community or regionally based *coyotes* (colloquial for ‘middle-person’), farmers in resistance have chosen a consistent buyer and price through international networks. A farmer who sells coffee to the Zapatista coffee cooperative Yachil Xolobal Chul’chan (Tzeltal for A New Light in the Sky) expressed to me the importance of a better price

stating, “in this struggle, it’s very important to create spaces for fair trade, it’s part of our demands that we want a fair price.” Selling in the fair trade market is viewed by farmers in resistance as a “window to better money” but nothing more than that, it is simply another income-earning strategy and economic network. Many farmers reiterated this, calling fair trade “*comercio mas justo*” or “more fair trade,” meaning that it was only slightly better than free trade. However, the connection to fair trade cooperatives for farmers forms an important part of creative livelihood strategies and diverse community economies. One coffee farmer remarked that as Zapatistas: “we resist the programs of the bad government because it is a lie, like the capitalist system. Instead we have the collectives and do work together. Neoliberalism attempts to reconstruct our culture, this is bad and it does not serve us.” It is in these diverse economic spaces that farmers continue to struggle against neoliberal development and the subsuming of their cultural autonomy. And although farmers told me that they are resisting neoliberalism, they have successfully harnessed programs that are firmly embedded in the neoliberal market: organic and fair trade certification (see: Chapter V, for example).

This situation, again calls into question dichotomous framings of economic activities and demonstrates that efforts to attain resources and secure livelihoods are diverse and trespass conventional economic lines between market and ‘alternative’ or between capitalist production and subsistence production. It is these types of diverse, community economies which create what Gibson-Graham et al. articulate as “spaces of possibility” (2013:189). Tying this back to food sovereignty, it is critical that we examine so-called alternatives in their myriad economic forms. The ability to address problems of hunger and poverty is not only bound-up in tearing down unequal, conventional systems,

but about recognizing diverse economies and practices. There are already processes underway that are reshaping the social and ecological relations of economic engagement to provide more secure sources of food and livelihood that will continue to be overlooked if scholarship remains focused on neoliberal capitalist food production-consumption systems.

Concluding Thoughts

There are many who think that money is the answer, but we are looking for another way.

(Zapatista supporter, 2010)

Early in my fieldwork I discussed with *campesinos/as* what it meant to work with international networks for coffee and how that might change the way that the political agenda of the social movement was realized. One farmer responded to me that:

the base of the neoliberal economy is to get people to buy food. But within our economic system production is the base. If a family can produce more than they can eat then they can sell it to maintain the family and here in the struggle there are other types of jobs that have to be worked, it is a process.

It is not an anti-capitalist or an anti-neoliberal approach as much as it is a community economy approach to livelihoods ‘with dignity.’ The economic activities that are put into practice in the highlands are consistent with smallholder “plural economies,” which Pimbert et al. articulate as a combination of subsistence and market-based activities (2001:17). Moreover, these pursuits function similarly to those ‘peasant reconfigurations’ observed by Ploeg, which are a process that exemplifies the contemporary “expression of the fight for autonomy and survival in the context of deprivation and dependency” (2008:7; see also 2010). Nonetheless, the economies of *campesinos/as* in resistance are

diverse and are not referent to only capitalist economies but to community economies as well.

Farming families aligned with the Zapatista movement have claimed control over territory and have established new political, social and economic relations that assist with attempts to remain autonomous from the state. Within these communities is a multi-dimensional expression of the ideas of food sovereignty (cf. Edelman 2014), which is put into practice by actors at the local level while simultaneously connecting up to regional and international networks. If we consider Joan Mencher's appraisal of food sovereignty as a set of ideas that embody new approaches to knowledge production an examination of production practices in the highlands assists with rethinking what food production can look like and what economy means. Mencher notes that:

Food sovereignty can be thought of as a concept having implicit roots in the life and struggles of peasant farmers, and even small and medium-sized family farmers in the west for many years. But today its political implications can be seen as part of the politics of knowledge (2013:10).

Framing food sovereignty in opposition to neoliberal systems is not useful to discerning the practice of food sovereignty and unnecessarily romanticizes the struggle to be food secure, to have control over productive resources, and to maintain a separation from the development programs of the state. In the case of farmers in resistance, food sovereignty is not limited to food and agricultural production, but is a form of a diverse community economy, where men and women as political, social, and economic actors work for themselves, their families, and for '*the pueblo*'.

Much literature on food sovereignty is squarely focused on 'working against' the neoliberal food system and reconfiguring capitalist political-economic relations (see: Akram-Lodhi 2013). Yet, even if utopic visions of food sovereignty are realized (by

some), how is food sovereignty to be maintained? In many ways the food sovereignty movement, while drawing attention to the struggles of smallholder producers also romanticizes their productive practices. Even while food sovereignty discourse and scholarship point to examples of how groups are enacting food sovereignty (cf. Alkon and Mares 2012; Block et al. 2011; Boyer 2010; Desmarais and Wittman 2014; Desmarais et al. 2011; Fernandez et al. 2013), the compromises and friction which exist in building secure and economically varied food systems are many times elided. Self-declared autonomous communities are putting a number of the ideas embedded in food sovereignty into practice, nonetheless, this is done in the context of hardship and struggle. The diverse economies of self-declared autonomous communities are an example of how the friction of participating in a number of different activities takes shape.

In the self-declared autonomous communities in the highlands of Chiapas, farmers in resistance are harnessing multiple methods to maintain rights that have been long-denied them by the state. *Soberanía alimentaria* (food sovereignty) forms part of the international solidarity network and larger politics of the Zapatista movement, but the politics and economic practices that are experienced at the community level are struggles for diverse economic spaces. They are not islands of production, isolated from international, regional, or even neoliberal exchanges, yet they have cultivated a localized, community resource base and collective workspace that allows them to interact with the market in different ways while simultaneously creating their own economies.

The ‘resistance’ that is being practiced by *campesinos/as* resonates with the discourses of food sovereignty as it is directed at the persistence of the peasantry as well as the powerful impact that re-peasantization is having on a global scale (cf. Ploeg 2008;

2010).²² *Campesinos/as* as political actors in their everyday lives have signaled that they want to continue being smallholder farmers and that to do so will appropriate and incorporate agroecological methods, forge collective cash economies, and remain outside (inasmuch as they can) neoliberal development. As Gibson-Graham et al. note, creating diverse economies “is not about producing communities that are the same everywhere...” as is evident from the indicator “diverse” (2013:198). Communities in the highlands struggling for autonomy are not representations of what the highly acclaimed food sovereignty concept looks like in practice, but instead are places where questions can be generated about what kind of economic exchanges, social relations and political processes can be had, which promote secure access and more egalitarian distribution of food and agricultural resources.

Notes

¹This raises a host of questions as to what the ‘sovereignty’ in food sovereignty means, which I will not address here, but is an issue that has been raised by a few (cf. Akram-Lodhi 2013; Edelman 2014; Hospes 2013; McMichael 2014; Naylor 2012) and is a line of inquiry that political geographers might explore.

² The Yale University Program in Agrarian Studies and the Journal of Peasant Studies together sponsored the conference “Food Sovereignty: A Critical Dialogue” between September 14-15 in 2013. The event resulted in a number of professional papers by scholars and activists on the intellectual and pragmatic future of food sovereignty.

³ Food sovereignty is often identified as a ‘radical alternative’ to a neoliberal capitalist food system (cf. Ayres and Bosia 2011; Beuchelt and Virchow 2012; Burnett 2013; Desmarais et al. 2011; Fairbairn 2010; 2012; Holt-Giménez 2009; Hospes 2013; Martínez-Torres and Rosset 2010; Massicotte et al. 2012; Rosset 2009; 2011; Schanbacher 2010; Trang 2012; Wittman 2009; Wittman et al. 2010).

⁴ For the purpose of maintaining the anonymity of participants, community and interviewee names are not used here. All interviews were translated from Spanish to English by the author.

⁵ Peasant-led social movements (e.g.: La Vía Campesina and Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem Terra) are gaining considerable strength as well (cf. Desmarais 2007; Wittman et al. 2010),

⁶ The formation of La Vía Campesina in 1992, created an important social movement to oppose the corporate food regime which has displaced small-scale producers (Fairbairn 2010; Martínez-Torres and Rosset 2010; McMichael 2014). Peter Rosset has argued that food sovereignty moves past other strategies

that focus solely on food supply, which disregard “where the food comes from or how it is produced” (2011:22). Focused on reducing the threat of hunger for those who are at the greatest risk—smallholder farmers—this idea has been important in emphasizing the limits of existing market-based strategies (such as food security) to improve food supply and access.

⁷ Hobsbawm’s (1994) argument has been widely contested (cf. Berstein 2000; Johnson 2004; Kay 2008; McMichael 2006; Watts 2002).

⁸ The INEGI criterion for the category of “indigenous” is residents older than the age of five that speak a nationally recognized indigenous language.

⁹ For more detailed accounts see: Bobrow-Strain 2004; 2005; 2007; Collier and Quaratiello 2005; Earle and Simonelli 2005; González and González 2008; Harvey 1998; Mattiace 1998; Nash 2001; Stahler-Sholk 1998; 2001; 2007; 2010; Stephen 1997a 1997b; 2002; Tavanti 2003; Van der Haar 2004.

¹⁰ *Oportunidades* is a government welfare program that makes cash payments to women in exchange for proof of their children’s attendance at government schools and for attending regular medical appointments. It is estimated that almost 60% of the population of Chiapas is recipient of this government welfare program (Oportunidades Register and Transfer Office 2011).

¹¹ Roughly 1,300 privately owned estates amounting to more than 100,000 hectares—about 6% of private agricultural property in Chiapas (Bobrow-Strain 2004:887). It should be noted that these seizures were the work of Zapatista and non-Zapatista *campesinos/as* alike. For a more detailed account of the invasions and the government response see Bobrow-Strain 2004; 2007.

¹² Bobrow-Strain reported that almost 40% of all land granted through the post-1996 Agrarian Accords was abandoned by the original recipients (2004:899).

¹³ Please note that the autonomy articulated by the Zapatistas is not a territorially demarcated autonomy that involves power-sharing with the federal government, but a patchwork quilt of communities in resistance that maintain autonomy on their own terms as citizens of the Mexican State. See also, Chapter Four.

¹⁴ Not only is there less land-space per person as family generations grow and plots are divided, the Mexican Government plan of PROCEDE (part of 1990s neoliberal reforms) has brought land privatization to Chiapas, significantly changing communal resource distribution.

¹⁵ Please note that coffee is not ubiquitous in self-declared autonomous communities, however, as fair trade coffee farmers were the focus of the larger study that this paper was drawn from, many farmers that I spoke with had a *cafetal*.

¹⁶ For a more in-depth study of *cafetal* diversity in small-holder plots in Central America see: Mendez et al. 2010.

¹⁷ Farmers with more income tended to have more *animalitas* (little animals, as they were referred to). Such *animalitas* included ducks, turkeys, and small pigs. Husbandry of cattle was very rare—I only met one farmer who had a small herd of cattle.

¹⁸ Another farmer considered importance beyond daily life, telling me: “here we try to keep variety in the seeds, we men and women, we talk about the different seeds, the varieties here are many...these seeds have been around for a long time and the seeds from past generations must be conserved, it is part of the culture...”

¹⁹ Bread making activities were largely contingent upon community agreement to dedicate communal land to the growing of wheat.

²⁰ The work of the women's collective has been recognized community-wide as an effort that assists with keeping their communities secure. In one community the women's collective was viewed as the most economically successful. A critical point to take away here is that Zapatista supporters are confronting long-standing patriarchal practices in the highlands and reorganizing their social, political and economic activities to include the participation of both women and men. Reorganizing in this way assists with remaking gender relations in communities, not only between men and women, but also between women as social movement actors (and men as social movement actors).

²¹ This stands in contrast even to their close counterparts, Las Abejas, who primarily rely on the cooperative production of coffee for gaining income and do not have other collectives or community governance structures. While the leadership of Las Abejas includes women, representation in the coffee cooperative is negligible. Of a total of six hundred and forty producers, seventy-six are women and none of the leadership or community representative positions are currently (and never in the past) held by women. When I asked about the lack of women representing the cooperative men consistently answered that the housework and the need to care for children made it impossible for women to work for the cooperative. Paradoxically, this did not preclude the uncompensated labor of women in the cooperative kitchen, where members could take meals when visiting the cooperative in Acteal.

²² For a critical view of the peasant as an actor in global food systems, see Bernstein 2014.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

At the start of this dissertation, I presented a story about the production and harvest of rain-fed corn in the highlands during a drought year. This story illuminated a group of peasant producers and the difficult choices that they encounter on a daily basis. It also served as an entry point for asking questions about the politics of food and agricultural production in the highlands as they relate to autonomy, fair trade, and food sovereignty. I argued that we must view the agricultural activities of farmers who are connected to broader networks and social movements as an integral part of their political struggle and resistance.

A key thread running through the body of the dissertation is the feminist geopolitical approach undertaken to research and analysis. I have argued that there are multiple ways of knowing and understanding the concepts at the heart of this dissertation (autonomy and resistance, for example) and that such knowledges are part of everyday life and agricultural practices. My vision in this body of work has been to elucidate power/knowledge dynamics at work in self-declared autonomous communities in the highlands and how they are written into the landscape and onto the bodies of farmers in resistance. Analysis of my empirical data led to the development of three arguments linked to autonomy and resistance, solidarity and fair trade, and diverse economies and food sovereignty.

The first of these core empirical arguments is developed in Chapter IV, which focuses on re-theorizing autonomy from the perspective of agricultural practices and

farmer's daily struggles. To do so, I 'decenter' the movement as the focus of analysis in order to scale-down to the everyday practice and understanding of *resistencia autónoma* in self-declared autonomous communities. Autonomy is an important agenda of indigenous social movements in Mexico (and Latin America more broadly), however, how it functions, is understood by participants within the social movements, and is practiced day-to-day is rarely addressed in academic work. In contrast to autonomous spaces as they are currently theorized, self-declared autonomous communities do not share power with the state, are not homogenous enclaves of farmers in resistance and are not territorially demarcated spaces. Instead, autonomy in the highlands is a daily practice that was described to me by farmers as a critical component of their resistance.

In this chapter, I make the argument that current understandings of autonomy and resistance elide important interpretations and practices by farmers in the highlands. To further elucidate this, I reviewed autonomy as a concept that is addressed as a social movement demand and as a relation with the state. Observing these broader scale articulations of autonomy exposed an imbalance in how we theorize the concept; missing from such accounts is the practice and experience of autonomy. In the highlands, autonomy takes on meaning outside of the political agenda of social movements that *campesinos/as* in resistance are participating in, becoming personal practice. The process of constructing autonomy, I argued, is bound up in daily agricultural practices that make up the material of the struggle and resistance for indigenous farmers. The cultivation of corn for subsistence and coffee for income is a critical component of this process, which is a material practice of farmers. In discussing autonomy with farmers in the highlands, I

found that there are multiple ways of knowing, understanding and practicing autonomy that we must be attentive to.

The second piece, Chapter V, takes a closer look at coffee production in self-declared autonomous communities. The production of coffee for many farmers in the highlands is an avenue to income for the purchase of goods that cannot be produced at home and for food in times prior to the corn harvest when storage is low. For farmers in resistance, fair trade certification offers a consistent price and buyer for their coffee beans, and additionally assists with maintaining the visibility of the social movements that they are connected with. The solidarity relationship between fair trade producer cooperatives and their buyers in the United States is an important aspect of the ‘pacifist war with the state’ yet it also is a trade-off for producers. As part of their resistance, farmers seek to maintain subsistence lifestyles and remain outside neoliberal-style economic development, which derides peasant production. However, the adoption of fair trade standards ties them to mandates of community development that largely ignore the circumstances of self-declared autonomous communities.

In Chapter V, I briefly discuss the movement to make trade more fair and the broader fair trade certification system as it functions in the contemporary market. To understand this division more fully, I explored solidarity as part of the movement and development as part of the system of certification. The data from my fieldwork was used to describe how solidarity is experienced by different members of the fair trade producer cooperative. I also draw from the third-party audit by Fairtrade International to discuss how economic development is being directed within producer communities. I argue that claims to solidarity through fair trade production/consumption need to be more critically

analyzed as farmers accept a level of control over their productive spaces and practices in exchange for a consistent price and recognition of their struggle. I note that third-party certifiers use claims of solidarity to legitimize standards in producer communities. Such standards are based in instilling a ‘will to improve’ (see: Li 2007) in producer communities and are predicated on a particular idea of what a producer community looks like and how it should “develop.”

The third piece is found in Chapter VI and is focused on diverse economies and the practice of food sovereignty. Food sovereignty has become a powerful concept and rallying cry for food movements whose proponents seek alternatives to the industrial-capitalist model of food and agricultural production. Scholarly and activist writing on how to achieve food sovereignty often positions it as a radical alternative to neoliberal markets. Many contend that small-scale and peasant production systems should be prioritized and are ideal spaces of opposition to neoliberal production systems. However, there are a number of overlapping food and agricultural systems being used by small-scale and peasant producers globally and the realities of these intersections and diverse economies must be incorporated into how we theorize food sovereignty.

My research suggests, however, that the goal of food sovereignty is not served by creating a dichotomy between peasant production and capitalist-based farming systems. Chapter VI examines diverse systems that are already in place and assisting farmers in self-declared autonomous communities work toward the goals ensconced in the food sovereignty model. I argue that the singular focus on opposing capitalist systems limits our understanding of the diverse array of economic activities already being put into practice. This ‘capitalocentric’ (see: Gibson-Graham 2006) focus points to a very limited

understanding of economies, which are in fact being consistently re-appropriated and redefined by a range of actors. Framing food sovereignty in opposition to neoliberal-capitalist systems elides the friction of compromise that exists in attempts to achieve secure access and egalitarian allocation of food and productive resources.

In my dissertation I seek to highlight how farmers in resistance conceive of autonomy, fair trade and food sovereignty in the context of their daily lives and particularly their agricultural practices. In so doing, I hope to provide new ways of thinking about these concepts. As scholars, it is critical that we make attempts to decolonize knowledge and knowledge production. Moving forward it is critical that we give attention to new ways of producing knowledge that records social injustices and is supportive of recovering subjugated knowledges and preventing racist, sexist and colonialist approaches (cf. Tuhiwai-Smith 1999).

In this dissertation, I have attempted to show that overlooking every day, mundane agricultural acts neglects key spaces where knowledge production happens. This research is important for developing new ways to think about and approach autonomy and resistance, fair trade and food sovereignty (both as researchers and activists). Specifically, my work has highlighted distinctions between how such concepts are theorized by scholars vis-à-vis how they are understood and practiced by farmers, offering an intervention in geographic research. This intervention emerging from my research, I hope, builds a foundation for decolonized thinking about, researching, and participating in autonomy and resistance, fair trade and food sovereignty in multiple and varied ways.

This research has made a contribution to geographic literature on autonomy through decentering the movement as the core of the analysis and instead providing insight into how political actors activate political discourses (such as *resistencia autónoma*) as part of their daily lives. It also is a step away from work that romanticizes resistance, scaling down to the daily lives and mundane practices of people who struggle to continue to participate in a number of forms of resistance. Future research on resistance and autonomy must be more nuanced, taking into account not only social movement goals, organized action and subversion, but also the often overlooked everyday practices of actors in their own right (not just as social movement participants). By acknowledging that there are multiple ways of knowing and practicing resistance and autonomy, researchers and activists alike can expand their understandings and accounts, while also creating space for knowledge from below.

Additionally, the research presented in this dissertation offers an important glimpse into how fair trade certification audits impact producers in heterogeneous communities and the issues with promoting so-called ‘development’ plans. Such work will be critical for fair trade scholars and practitioners to consider as fair trade continues to grow and change. It also has important fair trade certification policy implications as it offers insight into how farmers perceive fair trade and community development. Although certification standards are designed in consultation with stakeholders, the research data provided here demonstrates that such consultation does not get at the heart of producers everyday needs. It also shows that the solidarity themed premium is a measure of governmentality that is imposed on farmers and their communities. Third-

party certifiers could better reflect their solidarity goals if the priorities of producers were considered more individually and deeply.

My work has also provided a critical intervention in food sovereignty scholarship. Moving toward creating more secure and democratic food systems and meeting the stated goals of the food sovereignty movement will require messy compromises and diverse economic approaches, some of which link to capitalist markets. Further research on food sovereignty should look at the spaces of friction between conventional, alternative and non-economic practices. I urge scholars to not conduct diagnostic research, which aims at determining if food sovereignty is being implemented or not, but to instead consider the multiple and varied ways that people and communities are attempting to create self-reliant and secure food systems. Such examinations would form a critical body of knowledge that could be drawn on to move the food sovereignty agenda forward.

At the core of this dissertation is an illustration of the experience of people who consider themselves to be in resistance.¹ They are peasant farmers who want to continue to be peasant farmers while also creating diverse, secure, and self-reliant food and agricultural economies. This research provides a glimpse of how. It is a moment in their everyday that exposes ways of knowing and understanding ‘from below.’

Notes

¹ Future research on the impact on *partidista* coffee growers in heterogeneous communities would assist with furthering the impact of this work.

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