

A Tear in the Fabric of the Present

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Everyone is dreaming in this country. Now it is time to wake up . . . The storm is here. From the clash of these two winds a storm will be born. Its time has arrived. Now the wind from above rules, but the wind from below is coming . . . The prophecy is here: When the storm calms, when the rain and fire again leave the country in peace, the world will no longer be the world, but something better.

—Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos¹

Introduction

Written almost two years before the Zapatista uprising of 1 January 1994 by Zapatista spokesperson Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos, the words above speak of a new world, a world ushered in by a storm born of a clash between two winds, the wind from above and the wind from below. What kind of world did the combatants and support bases of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional, EZLN) hope to see brought into being? If as Mikhail Bakhtin states, “Every word is directed toward an answer and cannot escape the profound influence of the answering word that it anticipates,”² then what answer did the cry of “¡Ya basta!”—“Enough!”—which issued from the mouths of the masked guerrillas of the EZLN in the early hours of 1 January 1994, anticipate? What was the nature of the reply that the insurgents and civilian bases of the EZLN hoped to hear?

The Zapatistas’ first public word, the Zapatista declaration of war, was addressed to the Mexican people in the form of “The First Declaration from

the Lacandón Jungle.” In addition to explaining the reasons and aims of the uprising, the declaration also speaks directly to the issue of what the Zapatistas hoped for in terms of Mexican society’s response. Declaring its intention to advance on Mexico City, overcome the federal army, depose the federal executive, and allow for free and democratic elections, the EZLN also called for people across Mexico to support and participate in the insurgency. Despite this call, the shape of the insurgency would ultimately bear little resemblance to the relatively straightforward revolutionary agenda established in this initial declaration. Even more significantly, although Mexican civil society would indeed respond to the Zapatista uprising, it would not be in the way that the Zapatistas had originally called for. Perhaps even more dramatically, the Zapatista uprising and the cry of “¡Ya basta!” would echo far beyond the borders of Chiapas and even of Mexico, entering into a complex and unanticipated transnational dialogue with a diversity of voices. It is upon this last dimension that my own analysis focuses.

In this work, I consider the reasons for and consequences of what I call the transnational resonance of Zapatismo among political activists in Canada and the United States. In the years since the EZLN rose up in arms in the southeastern-most Mexican state of Chiapas, on the very day that the North American Free Trade Agreement came into effect, much has been written by authors within and beyond Mexico about the Zapatistas’ origins, agenda, structure, history, tactics, and ultimate goals.³ Yet in all of this, the question of why their cry of “¡Ya basta!” and their ensuing struggle has resonated so strongly with people beyond the borders of Mexico remains largely unconsidered. This issue is particularly pertinent given the renewed national and international struggle initiated by the Zapatistas in August 2005 through the “Sixth Declaration from the Lacandón Jungle” and the Other Campaign, as well as the contemporary state of the New World (dis)Order.

In this work I focus primarily upon narratives of Zapatismo’s transnational resonance in the north of the Americas, as related to me by activists engaged in alter-globalization, anti-capitalist, and social justice struggles. I engage these narratives to explore what I argue is the fundamentally rhizomatic character of Zapatismo’s transnational resonance, as well as the diverse and unpredictable political consequences to which it has given rise. I employ the term “rhizomatic” as a reference to the concept of the rhizome developed by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in their politico-philosophical work *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1987). As Deleuze and Guattari explain, the rhizome is, strictly speaking, a tuber or bulb possessing both shoots and roots.⁴ Yet it is also a new way of thinking about realities, particularly when

counterposed to the image of the tree or the root. In fact, I would argue that the notion of the rhizome not only provides a new way of thinking about realities writ large but also provides a new way of thinking about such phenomena as social movements and the imagination.

Composed of “dimensions, or rather directions in motion,” the rhizome has no essential essence; it changes as the relations that comprise it change.⁵ Much social movement analysis offers a structural view of social movement activity or a schematic of the organizational pathways and relationships between and within social movements and social movement organizations. As opposed to this, the rhizome offers us a metaphor through which to consider the indirect, informal, unanticipated, and unpredictable dimensions of social movement activity. What the notion of the rhizome encourages is a remapping of how social movements and their organizations fit together, how they interrelate, and with what consequences. This reorients the analytical gaze from questions of resources or successes and failures to a focus on the complexity of sociopolitical struggle and its often unanticipated outcomes.

I argue that transnationalized Zapatismo is rhizomatic, just as its impact upon U.S. and Canadian activists has rhizomatic qualities. This is so because the experience of it has been shaped by dynamics beyond the concrete struggles of Zapatistas in Chiapas or the eloquence and literary flair of Subcomandante Marcos. Indeed, the experience of transnationalized Zapatismo has also been shaped by the actors who have taken up the challenge of communicating it, the technologies employed to disseminate it, and the desires, needs, and socio-political realities of those who have received it. To understand the significance of Zapatismo for northern activists, as well as some of the most powerful and unexpected political effects it has generated, it is necessary to appreciate these phenomena as profoundly dialogic, unpredictable, and nonlinear. This is not simply a matter of competing analytical paradigms. To understand not only how and why radical sociopolitical action occurs but also what it means and what it points toward, the rhizomatic connections relating collectives and individuals to one another must be taken seriously.

Analyzing Zapatismo's transnational impact and consequences via a language and a logic of diffusion produces a political landscape marked by relatively fixed paths of encounter and transmission, inhabited by innovators and adopters who engage each other in more or less rationalistic and predictable ways. By contrast, focusing upon the rhizomatic nature of transnationalized Zapatismo and its consequences for U.S. and Canadian activists reveals a much more complex and potentially powerful terrain of communication, meaning-making, and political alterity. More importantly, such an analytical

perspective allows for political encounters such as those that have occurred between northern activists and transnationalized Zapatismo to be engaged as sites of radical possibility, which in turn are capable of generating their own rhizomatic encounters and effects.

Tracing the Rhizome

The analysis presented here is based on a year of interviews, fieldwork, and targeted participant observation between September 2003 and September 2004 with alter-globalization, anti-capitalist, and social justice activists in Canada, the United States, and Mexico for whom Zapatismo had proven to be powerfully resonant. In Canada and the United States, the resonance of Zapatismo has given rise not only to a diversity of organizations expressing direct solidarity with the Zapatistas but also to forms of political activism that overflow the bounds of solidarity to yield new and unanticipated results.

The collectives, organizations, and individuals committed to alter-globalization, anti-capitalist, and social justice activism with whom I worked in 2003 and 2004 can be grouped roughly into two general camps. Of course, neither of these camps should be seen as distinct or immutable. There is considerable overlap in the ways many of these collectives, organizations, and individuals perceive and conduct sociopolitical struggle. Indeed, organizations and collectives from both camps often work together on various issues, and individuals often cross this artificial boundary both in their interpersonal relationships and in their political work. Nevertheless, there exist differences in analysis, strategy, tactics, and goals that are important to recognize, and it is upon these differences that I ground my groupings.

The existence of these collectives, organizations, and individuals can be read as signifying the material consequences of Zapatismo's transnational resonance. The first, more traditional camp is constituted largely by groups and networks focused upon issues of fair trade, human rights, educational campaigns, and public awareness-raising for the purpose of provoking political action. The second, less traditional camp is comprised of groups, collectives, and networks with an explicitly anti-capitalist orientation grounded in principles of grassroots political action explicitly outside the domain of conventional liberal democratic politics. Much more could be said about the work these activists engage in and the spirit that animates it, but time and space constraints allow only a survey of them here. As for the transnational resonance of Zapatismo that has served to provoke their

emergence, I will explore some of its bases shortly to examine what I consider to be its most radical and powerful implications.

Representative of the more traditional camp are organizations such as Building Bridges based in Vancouver, British Columbia, and Global Exchange, based in San Francisco, California.⁶ Both organizations have responded to the Zapatistas in more familiar solidaristic capacities; Building Bridges through the training and accreditation of human rights observers, who then travel to Chiapas to live in Zapatista communities, and Global Exchange through the building of “people-to-people ties” through facilitating reality tours to Chiapas. Similarly, Zapatismo inspired the work of three “hacktivists” from the University of Toronto to travel to Guatemala and Chiapas in the summer of 2003 to provide their technical expertise to organizations working to support indigenous struggles, a journey documented in the film *Hacktivista*.⁷ In a more explicitly political manner, the Mexico Solidarity Network in the United States, an affiliation of over 90 organizations, emerged initially in the aftermath of the massacre of Zapatista sympathizers in the community of Acteal in 1998 to support the Zapatistas.⁸ MSN has since expanded its focus to include an emphasis on trade agreements and U.S. militarism. In Canada, Food for Chiapas formed in Toronto in April of 1994 to offer material aid and solidarity to Zapatista communities in Chiapas on terms directed by the Zapatistas themselves.

Beyond the more familiar dynamics of solidarity politics, there are also individuals and organizations in Canada and the United States who have felt the impact of Zapatismo and translated its meanings in other ways. Radical filmmakers Big Noise Tactical, producers of such films as *This is What Democracy Looks Like*, *Zapatista*, and *The Fourth World War*, locate a large part of their inspiration in the resonance of Zapatismo.⁹ Filmmakers and activists working with the Chiapas Media Project, a binational project between the U.S. and Mexico, provide the resources, training, and marketing support to indigenous communities in Chiapas, Oaxaca, and Guerrero so that they can tell their own stories about their own struggles.¹⁰ Initiatives such as the Third Intercontinental Encuentro for Humanity and Against Neoliberalism, inspired by the original Zapatista Intergalactic Encuentro held in the jungles of Chiapas in 1996, was to be held in the summer of 2003 in Ontario and would have brought together indigenous peoples, academics, labor activists, people involved in Latin American solidarity movements, and others in an effort to see it realized. Although the Encuentro did not materialize ultimately, the vision that inspired it nevertheless stands as a testament to the resonance of Zapatismo.

Also related to the Zapatista Encuentros is the transnational network of anti-capitalist coordination and communication known as Peoples’ Global

Action.¹¹ PGA has been at the heart of most anti-capitalist spectacles and mass demonstrations since its formation in 1998 following the second Zapatista-inspired Intercontinental Encuentro for Humanity and Against Neoliberalism as a direct response to the Zapatistas' call for a transnational network of communication "for humanity and against neoliberalism." Zapatismo has also proven to be resonant for activists working outside the bounds of any direct linkage with the Zapatista struggle. The smartMeme Strategy and Training Project is a U.S.-based initiative aimed at building grassroots movements and injecting new ideas into culture to intervene in capitalism "at the point of assumption."¹² The project itself is not directly related to Zapatismo, but those lessons and examples have resonated strongly with its founding members. Finally, although the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty (OCAP) is by no means a Zapatista-inspired organization, their commitment to grassroots community organizing and their explicitly revolutionary and anti-capitalist stance demonstrate their affinity with groups such as the Zapatistas, a resemblance which OCAP's own organizers and members assert.¹³

The transnational resonance of Zapatismo is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon, as are the bases upon which it is grounded. In what follows, I will explore some of the most significant of these bases through narratives reflecting upon Zapatismo's resonance provided by some of my research participants. By way of an introduction to this, it is important to realize that these bases are intimately connected to the realities within which activists themselves live and work. Notions of hope, creativity, human dignity, communication, democracy, and what could be termed an intellectual and political cosmopolitanism occupy places of prominence with respect to the landscape of this transnational resonance of Zapatismo. These elements, I would argue, are most certainly present in Zapatismo, all the more so with respect to the communiqués and communicative actions directed toward transnational supporters. However, they also speak to the needs—a powerful rejection of neo-liberalism; affirmation of human dignity; peace; autonomy and interconnectedness; the desire to speak and be heard as well as to listen—and the means—communicative and symbolic rather than violent action—familiar to people struggling within First World or postindustrial societies like Canada and the United States. Less apparent, but by no means always absent, from this perspective on Zapatismo are the complexities of the Zapatista struggle on the ground in Chiapas, the mundane work of building relations of "good government" among the communities and municipalities in rebellion, and the unavoidable contradictions that occupy the sphere of human action.

To a certain extent this discrepancy in the content of Zapatismo between the on-the-ground experience in Chiapas and its transnationalized manifestation indicate almost a double movement with respect to the political imagination of Zapatismo. This is not, however, a matter of labeling one of these movements authentic and the other inauthentic. Much as the impact of Zapatismo has all too often been reduced to Marcos's communicative abilities, valid criticisms of aspects of the international response to Zapatismo have been turned into sweeping denunciations of the international solidarity movement.¹⁴ Resonance and the political imagination are by no means uncomplicated phenomena; they are practices and processes deeply enmeshed in terrains of communication and experience, and as such they reflect the intentions, hopes, and desires as well as the mistakes, miscommunications, and failures of all parties in this encounter. This of course means that power relations and issues of privilege are always present, but it also means that these resonances and their consequences are also not reducible simply to them.

One final point of clarification is in order. Although I employ terms such as "democracy," "autonomy," "liberty," "justice," and "dignity" throughout this piece, I do so cognizant of the plasticity of these signifiers. Rather than using them as if they are markers for some singular, self-evident, transcendental truth, I have invoked them because they appear so often as central demands of movements for radical social change around the world. I have left them open and undefined precisely because each term means something different in the context in which it is deployed and in relation to the lived realities constituting different terrains of struggle. Yet in spite of the differentiation of the content of these terms across space, they nevertheless serve as points of rhizomatic connection among collectives, individuals, and imaginations. When the Zapatistas communicate across geographical, cultural, and political distance with a diversity of others in struggle, they often speak of "dignity," a struggle "for humanity and against neoliberalism," a vision of resistance as an "international order of hope," and the realization of a "world capable of holding many worlds." When they do so, they are not offering a ten-point plan for the construction of a new revolutionary order. Rather, they are speaking allusively to a set of shared desires for radical change—a set of desires whose specific content is nevertheless necessarily different in every place. It is to this landscape of desire, imagination, and hope that these terms point and upon which the rhizomatic consequences of Zapatismo's transnational resonance are situated.

Zapatismo and the Dynamics of Resonance

Before engaging the bases from which the resonance of Zapatismo has emerged among North American activists, as well as existing scholarly analyses of this phenomenon, it is necessary to elaborate briefly on what “Zapatismo” is. Contemporary Zapatismo originated out of the encounter between Mayan communities in the Lacandón Jungle and highlands of Chiapas and the urban and Marxist-inspired revolutionary cadres who arrived in Chiapas in the early 1980s to begin the work of organizing the peasantry for a revolution.¹⁵ By all accounts, however, this encounter resulted not in the revolutionizing of the indigenous communities but rather in the defeat of Marxist dogma at the hands of these indigenous realities, a defeat that actually allowed for the emergence of the Zapatista struggle. Renouncing a teleology of revolution, Zapatismo is instead a project driven by the struggle for justice, democracy, and liberty on the part of the Zapatista communities in Chiapas, who, in the face of the oblivion offered by neo-liberal capitalism and five centuries of colonialism, genocide, racism, and neglect, instead committed themselves to a new path of resistance and alternative-building.

As a movement on the ground in Chiapas, the Zapatista struggle has transitioned from a self-defense strategy against large landowners, their hired guns, and the state to an insurgent guerrilla army to a broad-based movement struggling for indigenous rights, social justice, and autonomy. Beyond Chiapas, Zapatismo has not only rejuvenated the indigenous rights movement in Mexico but has also explicitly sought to connect with what Xóchitl Leyva Solano calls “rebel Mexico,” those individuals and groups struggling against entrenched poverty, elite privilege, systemic abuses of power, and the blatantly anti-democratic nature of the political system.¹⁶ Outside of Mexico, Zapatismo is a radical political imagination and practice that has served to inspire and connect people all over the world who seek a more just, democratic, peaceful, and hopeful world than the one offered by neo-liberal capitalism, elite liberal democracy, and military (in)security.

Does this mean that Zapatismo is a political ideology or a particular repertoire for social struggle? This question is best answered by examining some of the most essential aspects of the Zapatista struggle. As Subcomandante Marcos himself has said, “The EZLN has reached a point where it has been overtaken by Zapatismo.”¹⁷ What does this mean? Firstly, it means that Zapatismo is not identical with the EZLN. The EZLN is the Zapatista Army, which exists to defend the Zapatista communities in Chiapas and is subordinated to the authority of the Zapatista communities themselves. This relationship

is formally expressed through the Indigenous Revolutionary Clandestine Committee—General Command (CCRI-CG), which is comprised of civilian Zapatista comandantes who are in turn beholden to the authority of their respective communities, a relationship that exemplifies the Zapatista slogan, “to lead by obeying.” Secondly, Zapatismo is not a coherent ideology; it is not a codified set of absolute rules or a party line to which one can adhere. Marcos has called Zapatismo an “intuition,” a position elaborated upon by Manuel Callahan in the following way: “Zapatismo is a political strategy, an ethos, a set of commitments claimed by those who claim a political identity.”¹⁸ Zapatismo thus embodies an approach to politics based on the pursuit of democracy, liberty, and justice for all. What each of these terms means, of course, differs depending upon the space and place within which people find themselves, and these meanings can never be fixed even within a specific context because such an assertion would claim a singular and transcendent truth, a notion that the Zapatistas reject. “Walking questioning” is the Zapatista slogan that perhaps best embodies this commitment; it expresses the belief that if one begins with answers and seeks to impose solutions, systems of power and domination are merely reproduced.

Autonomy and interconnectedness are concepts both central to and constantly at play within Zapatismo: autonomy, because dignity is only possible when individuals and communities have the freedom and responsibility to govern themselves, and interconnectedness, because a world that does not recognize existence as shared and interdependent is a world pitted against itself, a world doomed to replicate exclusion, division, and violence. The challenge of creating a new world rooted in social relations that are not power relations and that emerge out of the mutual recognition of dignity is something the Zapatistas have undertaken most seriously. This refusal to claim a “power-over” and simultaneously to affirm a “power-to” create a world rooted in dignity, democracy, justice, and liberty, and can thus be seen as embodying what Subcomandante Marcos means when he calls Zapatismo an “intuition.” It also forms an essential component of what has facilitated the transnationalization of Zapatismo beyond the borders of Mexico.

Echoes That Re-Echo: Bases and Consequences of Resonance

The relationship between Zapatismo and the rise of global anti-capitalism has been remarked upon by several authors including Manuel Callahan, Naomi Klein, Paul Kingsnorth, Rebecca Solnit, and the editorial collectives Midnight

Notes, and Notes From Nowhere.¹⁹ Although it was initially the World Trade Organization (WTO) protests in Seattle in 1999 that garnered so much attention with respect to the emergence of this movement of movements, it has since been much more widely acknowledged by those involved with the movement itself that 1 January 1994 and the Zapatista uprising is a much more significant moment in this history. Within Mexico, the work of Adolfo Gilly, Xóchitl Leyva Solano, Luis Hernandez Navarro, and Carlos Monsiváis, provides excellent insight into the national resonance of Zapatismo.²⁰ My own work on the intersection between Zapatismo and the independent labor movement in Mexico also contributes to this field of analysis.²¹ Outside of the Mexican context, however, the reasons for and consequences of the resonance of Zapatismo have remained largely, although by no means entirely, unconsidered.

Perhaps not surprisingly, one of the first organizations to appreciate the potential impact of Zapatismo was the RAND Corporation in a report written for the U.S. military entitled *The Zapatista Social Netwar in Mexico*.²² RAND analysts have defined “netwar” as “an emerging mode of conflict (and crime) at societal levels, short of traditional military warfare, in which the protagonists use network forms of organization and related doctrines, strategies, and technologies attuned to the information age.”²³ According to RAND, netwar is a form of social conflict involving a “war of the swarm” in which each group or protagonist functions as a node in an all-channel matrix.²⁴ Netwar thus involves many nodes working together without a hierarchical organizational structure—in fact, often with very little structure at all—and without a head that can be effectively targeted by adversaries. I note this analysis here for two primary reasons: first, to acknowledge the fact that a U.S. military thinktank understood the organizational model of the emerging Zapatista solidarity network prior to it being broadly understood in more academic analyses; second, to assert that, although this organizational contribution is significant (no doubt even more so to RAND’s military employers), it reduces the significance of the resonance of Zapatismo to an issue of structure and instrumentality. To appreciate why this resonance has occurred and what it means, it is necessary to understand what this struggle means to North American activists themselves.

Beyond a focus upon networks or even the rhetorical acknowledgement of Zapatismo as a foundational moment or point of reference within the emergent history of the global justice and anti-capitalist movement as it has been related in its own literature coming out of the movement, how have political activists living and working in the U.S. and Canada positioned themselves in relation to the Zapatistas? During our conversation in winter 2004, Patrick Reinsborough,

a grassroots activist and cofounder of the smartMeme Strategy and Training Project, described his own experience with Zapatismo to me:

The Zapatistas are an incredible model for how to do organizing, how to combine local work . . . how to choose your own battlefields . . . They said it was a war of ideas, a war of words, more than a war of guns or bullets . . . The phenomenon they created in terms of the importance of networks, the importance of contesting idea space and that the system really is . . . most vulnerable at its intellectual underpinnings, that we're fighting a pathological system . . . If we can frame the debate and if we can . . . decolonize people's imaginations and give them an experience of the potential of what democracy really means, of what really having control over your own life and your community, having actual freedom and autonomy and sustainability what that can mean . . . It attacks the system at some of its deepest levels, that has opened up a whole new range of possibilities and really . . . without the leadership of the Zapatistas there would be . . . no people's globalization movement in the way that there is today.

For Patrick, the significance of the Zapatista struggle and ultimately its resonance within his own political commitments rested not only upon their rhetoric or their inspiration but upon the clarity of vision, commitment, and innovative strategies they brought to a post-Cold War terrain of struggle. Rather than a mere example of diffusion, the resonance of Zapatismo for activists in the north helped to illuminate new terrains of political action and possibility. The revelatory aspects of Zapatismo have been commented on by other scholars, particularly within the Mexican context,²⁵ but they hold particular significance when one considers the fact that the inspiration and tactical lessons of Zapatismo were received so dramatically outside of their originating context.

In *The New Transnational Activism* (2005), Sidney Tarrow makes the case for the "diffusion" of the "Zapatista solidarity network from Chiapas to North America."²⁶ Tarrow's analysis contributes importantly to appreciating how forms of collective action arising out of specific national "configurations of conflict spread to other venues" through processes of relational (small personal networks), non-relational (generalized communication among people with few or no social ties), and mediated (brokered by a third party) diffusion.²⁷ Fuelling the transnational diffusion of collective action, according to Tarrow, are processes of internationalization and communication that have only accelerated through technological innovation, economic integration, the proliferation of new forms and sources of media, and the increasing importance of international institutions and their nonstate challengers.

Tarrow's analysis is certainly not incorrect in the claims it makes about the channels and forces that have facilitated the diffusion of Zapatista solidarity efforts across borders, but in its focus upon channels and forces other significant elements escape its scope. It is by now a well-worn trope that the transnationalization of the Zapatistas' struggle cannot be divorced from considerations of globalization and the spread of new communications infrastructure. In fact, it has been a common tendency for northern analysts of the movement to focus on the innovative communication strategies of Zapatista spokesperson Subcomandante Marcos and the role of the Internet to such a profound extent that it often overshadows basic realities on the ground in Chiapas. For example, Jerry Knudson suggests the following: "Did the Internet, with instantaneous communication and 'the whole world watching,' short-circuit . . . slaughter in Chiapas? Coupled with the adroit public relations by Subcommander Marcos of the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN), it was as if the conflict was fought on symbolic rather than real terms."²⁸

Of course, although Knudson never mentions it explicitly, "the whole world" was—and is—not watching. Despite a revolution in telecommunications technology, outside of the overdeveloped north, few people have access to telephone in their own homes let alone TV or Internet. More importantly, Knudson's article proceeds to recount a by now familiar refrain that public relations was the main weapon of the Zapatista struggle, that Marcos is a master of media manipulation, that the Zapatistas are Internet warriors, and that the uprising of 1 January 1994 was perhaps little more than a carefully managed public relations stunt designed to draw attention. Such a fascination with the tools of communication not only obscures the very real conditions of organizing and struggle on the ground, but it also assumes that the Zapatista struggle—with its very real costs for the people who comprise it—is akin to a postmodern spectacle designed and deployed for the consumption of conscience constituencies and armchair revolutionaries in the north.

Absent from this analysis is any kind of explicit acknowledgement that, despite Marcos's use of the media to communicate with a wider world, the technology to which Knudson refers is almost entirely absent from Zapatista base communities themselves, many of which lack running water and electricity, let alone TV and Internet connections. Moreover, analyses such as Knudson's regularly overstate the extent to which international—or "world," to use Knudson's own term—opinion has mattered to the Zapatistas and their struggle. Although it would be inaccurate to ascribe no significance to it at all, had the Zapatistas relied upon the fickle attention of an international public, their movement would have been crushed long ago. Knudson extends

this valorization of “world opinion” mediated through the Internet and other (corporate) information and/or entertainment channels by ascribing to it the ending of apartheid in South Africa, deposing of Ferdinand Marcos of the Philippines in a “bloodless coup,” ending of the genocide in Argentina, and compelling of Pinochet and the Sandinistas to honor elections.²⁹ Such an impressive list of accomplishments is only possible when one ignores the realities and histories of struggle on the ground in these places and the committed concrete solidarity efforts of activists internationally. Nowhere in Knudson’s analysis do such efforts make an appearance.

Although one cannot deny the role of the Internet as a vital tool for communication and the dissemination of information (an analysis actually posited in a more sophisticated fashion by the RAND analysts) among activist communities and with respect to a broader (and wired) public, communicative tools should not be mistaken for social action. As Arjun Appadurai has noted with respect to electronic media in a globalizing world, “Part of what the mass media make *possible*, because of the conditions of collective reading, criticism, and pleasure” is the formation of a “community of sentiment,” a “group that begins to imagine and feel things together.”³⁰ Media provides the possibility for the dissemination and diffusion of imaginaries of political struggle, but media is not a substitute for them. Patrick Reinsborough of the smartMeme Project made this point particularly well during my interview with him, critiquing what he considered to be a facile and reductive valorization of technology over movement-building by noting, “tools don’t build a house, carpenters use tools to build a house.”

Issues of communication, political imagination, and the diffusion of hope and inspiration are, of course, absolutely central to the ways in which many northern activists engaged Zapatismo. Rick Rowley and Jacquie Soohen, tactical media activists from Big Noise Films, spoke compellingly about the reasons for the resonance of Zapatismo both personally and more broadly when I interviewed them in the fall of 2004. Rick Rowley, one of the founding members of this collective, found himself in Mexico in 1995, just as the Zapatista uprising was once more shaking the country and the world. Reflecting upon his participation in the national demonstrations that brought an end to the Mexican military’s renewed offensive against the Zapatistas, Rick related a story that explicitly connected notions of personal inspiration and hope with the “invitation” of Zapatismo:

When we marched in the center of Mexico City, in the Zócalo in ’95, we didn’t march the way that people like us had marched in the ’70s and the ’80s, saying,

We're against the war in the south, we support these people down there. We marched and said, We are Zapatistas and the war is right here under our feet. That the Zapatistas have survived and won victories against this First World military armed with sticks and their word because they've managed to tell a story about struggle that's an invitation to people to read themselves in as participants and not as observers on the outside.

The importance of people being able to “read themselves in as participants” in a story of struggle and the intentionality of this invitation are cornerstones of the transnationalization of Zapatismo that cannot be ignored, nor is this experience reducible to technological infrastructure, mass media, or convenient concepts such as frame extension or diffusion. Zapatismo's resonance is a profoundly relational and dialogic phenomenon born out of the communication of a radical and new political imagination, but given form by the specific contexts and their histories within which activists live and work. Zapatismo's resonance has also been facilitated by the fact that its story of struggle and its invitation to participate in that struggle has been amplified by the globalization of experiences of alienation, exploitation, suffering, and insecurity under global neo-liberal capitalism and its imperial world order.³¹

Of course, not all analyses of the role of media in relation to the transnationalization of the Zapatista struggle are as reductive as Knudson's. Both Harry Cleaver and Adrienne Russell, for example, offer analyses that reflect the complexity of this phenomenon.³² In Russell's case, the point of focus is on the intersection of the myths that have been constructed in relation to the Zapatista movement and the communicative infrastructure used to deploy and disseminate them. Russell examines the myth of Subcomandante Marcos as a universal, “timeless,” “uberhuman” figure, the myth of the indigenous peoples of Chiapas as “noble warriors,” paradoxically both “backward” and “advanced,” and the myth of the “neoliberal beast” as central to the constitution of a network identity among international supporters of the movement. For his part, Cleaver focuses upon the “Zapatista Effect,” which refers to the “impetus given to previously disparate groups to mobilize around the rejection of current policies, to rethink institutions and governance, and to develop alternatives to the status quo.”³³ This Zapatista Effect, Cleaver contends, is the result of pro-Zapatista mobilization around the world that itself has been stimulated by the explosive growth in “electronic NGO networks” catalyzed by the Zapatista uprising.³⁴ Cleaver's analysis highlights the profound role electronic communication networks have played in the linking of disparate activist groups, both in support of the Zapatista movement and in a project of resistance and alternative-building to neo-liberal

capitalist globalization. The strength of Cleaver's insights, however, is that they do not reduce issues of mobilization, political innovation, and radical political action to issues of communication, infrastructure, or media.

Radical political practice and imaginations, communication technologies, and mass media have indeed been deeply intertwined with the bases and consequences of Zapatismo's resonance transnationally, albeit in ways that are much more complex—I would say rhizomatic—than analysts have generally allowed. The radical filmmaking collective Big Noise Tactical is certainly one of the most compelling examples of this resonance and its unpredictable consequences. As already noted, the origins of Big Noise Tactical are intimately connected to Zapatismo. Elaborating upon the connection between Zapatismo's resonance and the formation of Big Noise Tactical during our conversation in September 2004, Rick Rowley explained what the Zapatistas' "invitation to people to read themselves in as participants and not as observers on the outside" meant to him and his friends as they traveled through Mexico in 1995:

We all accepted that invitation to become Zapatistas, and we returned to the United States as Zapatistas, . . . looking for what that might mean in the north and trying to learn from their example of struggle . . . [to] take it seriously, not just as an inspiration but . . . to learn from their tactics and their strategy. So . . . one of the things that was most resonant to us at that moment was . . . the famous Zapatista line . . . "our word is our weapon." Armed with our word and sticks against this machine, we're winning. And so we thought about what our word would look like in the north, . . . and we didn't think that communiqués and children's stories and poems in the left-wing papers in the States was the move that would make sense. We thought video made sense as a language that could circulate . . . through these circuits of American culture . . . None of us . . . had any film training, but we got credit cards, and we bought cameras and went down and started to shoot *Zapatista*. And so that . . . was the beginning of Big Noise, that was the beginning of the work that followed, the work that I've done since then. And so we've never thought of ourselves as film makers but as Zapatistas looking for forms of struggle that make sense in the north.

Rick and others at Big Noise Films have found ways not simply to "import" Zapatismo to the United States but to find in its resonance meaning for struggles here. Through Zapatismo's resonance, Big Noise Tactical has engaged in the innovative process of interpreting and materializing this resonance in ways that are capable of moving powerfully and dynamically through the "circuits of American culture."

Jacque Soohen of Big Noise Tactical also reflected upon the resonance of Zapatismo and its consequences for herself and for her involvement in Big Noise during our conversation in the fall of 2004. Building upon Rick's comments about the search for weapons that would make sense within struggles in the north, Jacque elaborated upon the connections among politics, culture, and media and their intersection with Zapatismo from the vantage point of her own experience:

[When] I first met Rick and a few of the other people from Big Noise, they'd just come back from one shoot in Mexico [while filming *Zapatista*] and hearing about [the Zapatista struggle] and just being amazed that . . . you could take that inspiration, the idea of victory, the idea of standing up for something and fighting and winning and then also hearing it through stories . . . You knew that the demos didn't work, . . . that it had to be something else . . . And it had to be something . . . beyond identity politics: . . . taking possession of a history that was both your own and expanded beyond your identity, boundaries that were clearly marked for you inside a world of individualistic capitalism . . . When we finally started screening [*Zapatista*], it began to make sense . . . as a weapon and became something that we decided to keep doing as long as it made sense . . . People were so moved by it . . . We came to realize that it was our weapon that we could use and something we could give over to a larger movement.

These reflections offered by Rick and Jacque of Big Noise Tactical illuminate some of the most interesting contours of the rhizomatic resonance of Zapatismo. Whereas many NGOs or solidarity groups have either disappeared or turned their attention to other issues in the years since the uprising, Zapatismo has inspired activists to search for new ways of practicing politics in their own spaces. Even as neo-liberal capitalism and the political and economic elites benefiting from it have increasingly turned to their own myth-making apparatuses to suppress dissent and to maintain their ideological encirclement, those looking to create alternative political spaces and practices have similarly rediscovered the importance of culture, stories, and myths and have used them not only as weapons of resistance but as tools for creation.

The notion of Zapatismo's invitation to others all over the world to become participants in a shared struggle rather than observers from the outside is fundamental to understanding its transnational resonance. But why was this invitation received and accepted? Thomas Olsen argues that the international appeal of Zapatismo is based upon six essential features:

1. The Zapatistas situated their uprising in globally historical terms as well as in national ones.
2. The Zapatistas helped to redefine a common enemy for the left—neo-liberal capitalist globalization.
3. The Zapatista uprising was tied at an early stage to a criticism of both the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the neo-liberal model of development.
4. The Zapatista uprising signaled for many disillusioned leftists a new hope that history had not ended after all, in spite of the supposed global victory of liberal democracy and neo-liberal capitalism.
5. The Zapatistas did not seek to retreat from globalization but rather to invoke an alternative form of it.
6. Finally, the Zapatistas did not seem to be rejecting liberal democracy but rather calling for its radicalization.³⁵

Olsen also notes that, in order to appreciate the global impact of Zapatismo, it is essential to understand the globalized basis upon which it has operated. Globalization in Olsen's formulation is best understood as marked by four central features: first, the development of a "global consciousness" that took shape following World War II; second, the ascendancy of the neo-liberal model of economic restructuring that has taken place since the 1970s; third, the spread of democracy since the 1980s and the end of the Cold War; fourth, the invention and expansion of the Internet.³⁶

Although Olsen provides some useful insights into the resonance of Zapatismo in his work, particularly with respect to how capitalist and neo-liberal globalizing processes have facilitated the possibility of transnational resonance, he relies almost exclusively upon the twin analytical tools of framing and cycles of protest to demonstrate the impact of Zapatismo globally. In this way, "resonance" becomes entirely reducible to the ability of the EZLN and Subcomandante Marcos to frame their struggle in a way that spoke to issues touching people in other parts of the world as a result of globalizing processes. These connections have become easier to articulate, in Olsen's analysis, because "The primary consequence of the end of the Cold War has . . . been the globalization of democratic and human rights ideas."³⁷ This assertion, of course, is rather more ideological than informative, and to state that the globalization of democratic and human rights ideas has been the primary consequence of the end of the Cold War at the very least attempts to present a tremendously simplified picture of a much more complex reality.

In addition, Olsen's characterization of globalization as an essentially neo-liberal capitalist and liberal democratic movement (not to mention an extremely recent one) obscures not only the profound contestation surrounding what globalization is or means within academic as well as activist debates, it also reduces an indisputably complex phenomenon to characteristics familiar only to a minority of the world's population. To be sure, Olsen offers many valuable points in articulating this analysis; however, his structural, hydraulic approach is precisely what my own analysis seeks to move beyond because Olsen's approach offers only a snapshot of a much more complex and dynamic process. Histories and narratives of political action and the complex and conflicted processes involved in the articulation of sociopolitical subjectivities are vital to the perception of the challenges and opportunities facing political action and radical social change. These dynamics are simply not appreciable within the framing and cycle-of-struggle paradigm, even within sophisticated analyses such as Olsen's. By focusing upon narratives of Zapatismo's transnational resonance conveyed by activists, and upon its consequences for their own political activity and commitments, I aim here to bring these overshadowed dimensions to light.

Beyond the macro-level processes identified by Olsen, how can the resonance of Zapatismo's transnational invitation to people to enter into a common struggle as participants rather than observers be explained? The answer to this question is complex, but at least in part, this invitation was taken up because of the way that Zapatismo intervened in the mythology of global neo-liberalism. As Patrick Reinsborough of the smartMeme Project explained:

... the beauty and the wit and the strategy with which the Zapatistas ... set the terms of their own conflict and intervened in something much deeper than ... state power in Mexico. They intervened in a global system in a way that was creating new spaces [and] ... the power of poetry ... Just these incredibly powerful poetic critiques ... were happening in a very systemic way that incorporates all the different pieces—whether you're talking about an economic critique or a political critique or an ecological critique—but also ground[s] them in a commonsense emotional critique. I think that's something that I've been very attracted to: ... trying to figure out how we translate some of that clarity of vision ... [of] the communities who are being massacred and bulldozed and the places that are being destroyed to feed the insatiable appetite of global consumer society ... ; [and] changing the feedback loop so that those messages, those new ideas are able to reach different parts of society, particularly now in America when so much of the affluence that ... has been perceived as being the reason that

Americans haven't been involved in systemic movements . . . is actually increasingly becoming mythologized . . . It seems like we're . . . [at a] breaking point in the story of global capitalism, and . . . the Zapatistas did an excellent job drawing our attention to it and . . . reminding us where our real power was.

A global systemic analysis framed in the context of a critique that embraced both potent economic and political analyses as well as a profound sense of poetry, imagination, hope, and dignity provided the fuel for the transnational resonance of Zapatismo.

The notion of a systemic and inclusive analysis of the global terrain of struggle emerging at a moment seemingly defined by the defeat of the insurgent left and state-sponsored socialism is a vital element in appreciating the resonance of Zapatismo. This issue was also raised by Dave Bleakney during our conversation in the winter of 2004. A member of the Canadian Union of Postal Workers and one of the North American activists involved in the formation of the global anti-capitalist network Peoples' Global Action, Dave offered the following reflection when I asked him about his initial encounter with Zapatismo and the reasons he felt this movement mattered:

The first time I heard about it was actually when it happened, it was on the news that night, and I'd been feeling pretty down because I thought that the movement in Canada capitulated against NAFTA. [But] here people were saying . . . everything that you have as a people is on the line, and yet there was no . . . meaningful fight other than a few letters and petitions. And politicians have come to learn that they can live through demonstrations, that it's not a big price to pay anymore . . . So I was pretty distressed by that, and when people in Chiapas rose up, it gave me real hope . . . and also an understanding that there was still dignity, . . . that people [who] had very little in the way of money or capital or standard of living had incredible dignity . . . That was an incredible inspiration to know that struggle . . . I was naïvely hoping that it would just spread through the Americas like wildfire.

Although an insurrectionary struggle did not in fact emerge either in Mexico or in the Americas as a response to Zapatismo, the impact of the Zapatista uprising and its radical challenge to the foreclosure of meaningful alternatives at the hands of neo-liberal dogma and hegemony had perhaps even more subversive and significant effects.

Rick Rowley from Big Noise Tactical also emphasized the relationship between Zapatismo's transnationalized resonance and the powerful conceptual

break that the Zapatista uprising represented to activists in other places. In response to a question about the significance and reception of Zapatismo by northern activists, Rick reflected:

In terms of the continent, . . . '93 was a several-decade low point for movements in this hemisphere . . . The resistance movements in Latin America had been . . . successfully destroyed . . . ; NAFTA had just been signed . . . ; Mexico was already bought and sold . . . ; and the union movement in the States, which had been limping along barely, was smashed . . . There was a political horizon in which there was no hope, and there were no actors who you could point to . . . who would give you the least inkling of the possibility of movement . . . So . . . [when] the Zapatistas did emerge, [they] were a tear in the fabric of the present, they were a crack through which it was possible for people to . . . remember again histories of struggle that they'd been taught to forget or had been . . . worn away by the last couple of decades, and to imagine possibilities of struggle and resistance and imagine different worlds that could be built in this world that they . . . had not been allowed to imagine . . . That was the main thing that Zapatismo gave us . . . It gave the lie . . . to NAFTA and the entire worldview it stood for, to the triumphalism of the Washington consensus, and . . . its model of corporate globalization.

In this poetic articulation of Zapatismo's reception and immediate resonance, Rick points particularly toward the importance of Zapatismo as a "tear in the fabric of the present" through which it became possible for activists in the north to remember, reimagine, and reconnect with histories and future possibilities of struggle. The centrality of the conceptual break that Zapatismo facilitated in the face of the ascendance of neo-liberal capitalism is something that cannot be overstated; it is reflected in the written histories of the contemporary global justice movement as well as in many of the reflections of the activists with whom I spoke.

Fiona Jeffries, a scholar, activist, and writer and who had attended the First Intercontinental Encuentro for Humanity and Against Neoliberalism in Chiapas in 1996, reflected on the inclusivity of Zapatismo and its implications for political action in the following way:

That quote, that amazing quote: "Marcos is gay in San Francisco and a student without books and a Jew in Poland and a Palestinian in Israel." . . . That was such a powerful, pluralistic call that was like everybody's got something . . . There's a very few people that are actually benefiting from this situation, we're all being

convinced that this is as much as we can expect to benefit, and we shouldn't ask for anything more, or we shouldn't fight for anything more, we shouldn't fight for freedom, that we should just exist 'cause it could be a lot worse. And so I thought that was amazing, and I think . . . that is their strength: their historical subject . . . is . . . not in any singular being, their historical subject is people's desire for freedom . . . and justice and dignity.

Fiona expresses one of the most powerful elements of Zapatismo's resonance here by asserting that the Zapatistas' "historical subject" is not a particular identity or subject position but rather "people's desire for freedom . . . and justice and dignity." Within such a formulation it is possible for people participating in a multiplicity of struggles to see themselves as vital participants in a shared struggle without subordinating themselves to it.

Friederike Haberman, a journalist, activist, and participant in both the Intercontinental Encuentros as well as the founding of Peoples' Global Action, also reflected on the importance of the Zapatistas' emphasis on inclusivity and their innovative approach to politics when I asked her about the attraction of Zapatismo beyond the borders of Mexico:

[The Zapatistas] stress not only the meaning of capitalism but also of racism and sexism, and . . . they always speak of the excluded and always include all struggles . . . This had been entirely new on the international level . . . [They have also demonstrated] the contradiction [in the debate] between reformism and revolution, [showing] that [neither is] enough . . . [The Zapatistas have said that] we have to start with a new world today in our daily lives, in our social movements. This is exactly what the Zapatistas have done, too . . . I'm sure it's not perfect, . . . but they just started to go on this way . . . You can't have a ready-made utopia because this would always mean to enforce your utopia on other people . . .

Friederike ties many of the key threads and central themes of the Zapatista struggle together here to articulate the reasons for which it resonated so powerfully beyond its context of origin. Inclusivity, nonhierarchical organizational and conceptual structures, an expansive vision of the terrain of political struggle, as well as the injustices faced by people in other places, and an affirmation of the fact that political struggle is a lived and constantly unfolding process rather than a teleology are among the most powerful themes characterizing Zapatismo's resonance among northern activists.

Rhizomes and Resonance

The phenomenon of resonance and the concept of the rhizome, particularly as they relate to Zapatismo's impact on activists and their political imaginations beyond the borders of Chiapas, occupy a rich terrain of action that suggests the emergence of new and radical sociopolitical possibilities and alternatives. Much more could be said about resonance and these rhizomatic possibilities; here I have only sought to illuminate the contours of this transnational terrain of action. The narratives of resonance that I have examined here and the diverse consequences to which they have given rise are rhizomatic because they are the unpredictable products of relational dynamics that are both contextually dependent and fuelled by processes, imaginations, and desires that operate between and beyond any single specific context. Although the concept of the rhizome does not displace more familiar analytical tools within social movement theory, it does allow for a radical and explicit consideration of political openings and possibilities, particularly within a transnational field of analysis.

As I have sought to demonstrate in this work, Zapatismo's transnational resonance is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that has produced an equally complex and multifaceted response from those who have been receptive to it. In fact, many of these responses have taken shape well beyond the familiar terrain of solidarity activism. Instead activists have taken up the challenge and promise of Zapatismo by materializing its resonance in ways that seek to intervene in and make sense within the particular social, historical, cultural, and political context where they live and work. The transmission, translation, and resonance of a political imagination and a political struggle across borders thus cannot be considered in a linear or instrumental manner precisely because these processes speak not only to concrete acts of communication, action repertoires, and strategies of political contestation but to the profound desire to bring other worlds, other realities into being.

As the recent recovery of a diversity of "histories from below" illuminates so well, radical political imaginations and sociopolitical experiments are an omnipresent feature of people's histories.³⁸ In no way are these complex and powerful histories reducible to a fixed set of processes and mechanisms, nor are they merely the by-product of logics of state formation and capital accumulation. These histories and the political imaginations they speak to are testaments to a multitude of desires directed toward the realization of social worlds characterized by liberty, justice, and dignity—visions of possibility marked by all the uncertainty, diversity, and hope these terms imply.

The resonance of Zapatismo is by no means identical to active solidarity with the concrete struggles of Zapatista communities in Chiapas. Nor is this resonance encapsulated by analytical recourse to communication infrastructure or media, vague references to globalization as a politico-social-economic monolith, or even perceptive, but necessarily limited, analyses of the channels through which struggles are transmitted and translated. Although solidarity work is indeed carried out by a wide range of organizations throughout the United States and Canada, the resonance of Zapatismo has also stimulated a tremendous variety of politically engaged action from the formation of transnational anti-capitalist networks of coordination and communication to the production of tactical media aimed at telling new stories of struggle and possibility. Contemporary analytical concepts deployed to examine transnational activism can indeed describe some of the macro-level mechanisms and processes at work in contentious action across borders. However, these concepts do not tell us much about the complexity, unpredictability, and potential of sociopolitical action that is so often invested with and inspired by the intersection of personal and political histories, radical political imaginations, and sociocultural context. Focusing upon the phenomenon of resonance compels us to take issues of history, narrative, imagination, and context seriously.

NOTES

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and Peoples' Global Action (25 March 2004); Fiona Jeffries, writer, academic, and participant in the First Intercontinental Encuentro for Humanity and Against Neoliberalism (13 March 2004); Friederike Haberman of Peoples' Global Action (12 May 2004).

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