

Mayan Lives, Mayan Utopias: The Indigenous Peoples of Chiapas and the Zapatista Rebellion.

by Lynn Stephen

RUS, JAN, ROSALVA HERNANDEZ CASTILLO & SHANNAN L. MATTIACE. *Mayan lives, Mayan utopias: the indigenous peoples of Chiapas and the Zapatista rebellion*. xvii, 306 pp., maps, figs, illus., bibliogr. Oxford, New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003. [pounds sterling]26.95 (paper)

This edited collection is essential reading for anyone desiring a historically complex and ethnographically and politically sophisticated understanding of the roots of the Zapatista rebellion and its impact on Mayan indigenous communities. Perhaps the greatest contribution of this binational collection including Mexican and US anthropologists is its ability to illustrate the differences between and within indigenous communities.

The introduction offers a concise political and economic history of the varied origins of the rebellion--from the plantation agricultural model of the late nineteenth century that sold off approximately one-third of Chiapas's surface area to foreign buyers, to the role of the post-revolutionary corporatist state in initially buying out some indigenous farmers through political patronage programmes that became ineffective in the 1980s. Beginning with the 1974 Indian Congress, new forms of community organization emerged, including women's craft co-operatives, ejido unions, independent peasant organizations, an army of liberation theology Catechists, and others who became the cloth out of which the Zapatista rebellion was woven and also contested.

The book then offers case studies of the differential impact and response to the rebellion at the local level. Jan Rus and George Collier draw on their almost three decades of research in the Tzotzil municipalities of Chamula and Zinacantan to illustrate how local historical differences with regard to economic development and forms of political authority can make a crucial difference in how the rebellion was understood and incorporated. While Zinacantan was less stratified economically and able to provide employment for many locals through the 1990s, economic and political polarization of Chamula preceding the rebellion produced a steady flood of emigration from the municipio not only to Chiapas and elsewhere in Mexico, but to the US as well.

Aida Hernandez Castillo focuses her chapter on the three organized Mam responses to the rebellion. While Mam Jehovah's Witnesses were perhaps geographically the closest to the building of the Zapatista movement in the 1980s and early 1990s, they kept silent and then quietly rejected armed struggle. Some communities and Mam cultural organizations initially participated in civil disobedience supporting the EZLN and enthusiastically joined land take-overs. Organic farmers initially also joined in statewide coalitions that tried to act on some of the Zapatista demands and encouraged the EZLN and other organizations to integrate organic farming practices into their economic development plans. The themes of terror through the occupation of communities by paramilitaries and the pain of community divisions and forced displacement are continued in Jose Alejos Garcia's account of the migration of rural Ch'ols to Palenque in search of labour.

Mayan lives demonstrates the importance of prior systems of governance to the type of impact that Zapatismo has in Mayan communities. In the Tojolabal region, Shannan Mattiace documents how a lack of traditional community structures in the region worked in favour of the creation of a pan-Tojolabal, non-local identity that facilitated an earlier Tojolabal experience in indigenous autonomy. This experience of 'Gobierno Tojolabal' provided a blueprint for other expressions of self-determination in the region and elsewhere in Mexico after 1994. In an examination of an instance of clearly pro-Zapatista organizing, Christine Eber explores how Tzotzil residents in some hamlets of San Pedro Chenalho arrived at a reconciliatory position that joined EZLN base supporters with those of the liberation-theology-inflected movement of 'the Bees'. The chapter portrays the ongoing juxtaposition of exciting new developments such as the incorporation of women into local political processes and the horrifying results of paramilitary

presence.

In her assessment of the regional, communal and organizational transformation in the Canadas region of the Lacandon jungle, Xochitl Leyva Solano suggests that the indigenous communities that were once unified under the structure and practice of the Union of Unions (UU) are less autonomous than they were before 1994. Unified by the cultural and political structure of the comun, the UU resulted in a political homogenization that was possible in part because of a lack of political parties in the region and the fact that it was composed almost entirely of indigenous peoples. With the rise of the Zapatista rebellion, Leyva Solano argues, what had been four or five religious, organizational, and political tendencies all united under the umbrella of the UU broke into five different organizations. In some cases, however, Leyva Solano demonstrates that the structure of the comun which united the UU is more flexible than one might think and can successfully negotiate between different factions.

The final third of the book documents new forms of indigenous self-governance in Chiapas, the specific meanings of indigenous self-determination (*autonomia indigena*), and the lessons of the proposals for autonomy from Chiapas for the rest of Mexico. Araceli Burguete Cal y Mayor provides an extremely useful and detailed comparison of Pluriethnic Autonomous Regions (RAP) organized by various groups from within civil society and Zapatista Autonomous Regions (RAZ). Andres Aubrey provides readers with a close reading of several of the seminal texts produced by indigenous activists. Indigenous autonomy in Aubrey's analysis means 'self-government, the right of peoples in question to define their own identities for themselves, to delimit their own territories ... and to practice self-organization in the management of their own resources and their own self-development' (p. 235). In addition, he emphasizes the importance of self-representation at all levels of government in a new social pact between indigenous peoples and the state. The final essay in the collection, by social and political theorist Gustavo Esteva, emphasizes the importance of how the struggle for indigenous autonomy has been advanced for the first time in Mexican history--from below through a popular movement--and suggests the importance of the lessons from indigenous autonomy in Chiapas for the rest of Mexico.

In sum, *Mayan lives, Mayan utopias* is an outstanding text that offers one of the most complex, honest, and sophisticated analyses of the impact of the Zapatista rebellion on indigenous peoples in Mexico and on the political future of the Mexican nation.

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