Indigenismo, Indianismo and ‘Ethnic Citizenship’ in Chiapas

XOCHITL LEYVA SOLANO

For many Zapatista supporters and others with an interest in the armed conflict, the struggle by Mexican Indians for autonomy is indistinguishable from that waged by the EZLN. Although this peasant organization has played a central part in the conflict in Chiapas, to understand this role it is necessary to contextualize it historically. To this end, the analysis examines three areas of that history. First, it highlights some aspects of the relationship between struggles for autonomy, indigenismo, and indianismo. Second, it looks at the role played by indianista leaders in the construction of the socio-political networks that maintained and encouraged Zapatismo at the local, national, and international level. And third, it scrutinizes the relationship between the struggles for autonomy, indigenismo and the politics of identity. The object is to show how and why present-day indigenous struggles for autonomy and self-determination are rooted in ‘old’ quests for ethnic citizenship, which were led initially by earlier indianista organizations and leaders.

INTRODUCTION

For many Zapatista supporters and others with an interest in the armed conflict, the struggle by Mexican Indians for autonomy is indistinguishable from that waged by the Zapatista Army for National Liberation (Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional or EZLN). Although this peasant organization has played a central part in the conflict in Chiapas, to understand this role it is necessary to contextualize it historically. To this end, the following analysis examines three areas of that history. First, it will highlight some aspects of the relationship between struggles for autonomy, indigenismo, and indianismo. Second, it will look at the role played by indianista leaders in the construction of the socio-political networks that

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**Culture, Ethnicity and Citizenship**

The importance of indigenous rights is evident from their centrality to the 2001 Constitutional reform, itself a subject of negotiations – which started in 1994 and were adjourned in 2001 – between the EZLN and the Mexican government. Initially, the latter was under the control of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), and subsequently the National Action Party (PAN). This was a reform to which the state was committed as a result of signing the San Andrés Accords in Chiapas during 1996, stipulating that claims of indigenous groups would be recognized within the democratic system in the form of constitutional amendments. A joint proposal to the legislature would accordingly recommend that ‘indigenous peoples’ be recognized as legal subjects; in other words, that indigenous peoples should be able constitutionally to exercise the right to self-determination at whatever level they considered appropriate. This was immediately contradicted, however, by the accompanying stipulation that it should be done ‘without threatening national sovereignty’.

In December 2000, Vicente Fox, the newly-elected president of Mexico, sent a proposal for a Constitutional amendment on Indigenous Rights and Culture to the Mexican Congress. After much debate and a dramatic intervention by the EZLN in the Chamber of Deputies, the Congress issued a law in April 2001, accepting the multicultural nature of the Mexican nation, and reiterating that indigenous peoples could exercise autonomy as well as self-determination within the framework of a unified nation. In effect, autonomy was limited to the recognition that indigenous peoples could resolve their ‘internal conflicts’ by means of their ‘traditions’ and through their ‘internal forms of government’. Among indigenous leaders, intellectuals and leftwing activists, the consensus was that no concession had been made, and the situation was much as it had been before the ‘reform’. Its limited nature was plain: municipalities, electoral districts, federal states and constitutional laws were required to do no more than ‘take indigenous people into consideration’.

Despite its modest scope, the 2001 Constitutional reform was more than a limited government concession, representing as it did the outcome of struggles waged by indigenous organizations. The latter are part of a process which Bengoa [2000: 13] has characterized as the ‘indigenous emergence in Latin America’, whereby from the 1990s onwards a mainly rural population
has ‘become part of the social and political events of the continent’. It will be argued here that these struggles at the beginning of the twenty-first century by an indigenous Mexican peasantry for autonomy – a conflict involving both the zapatistas and their sympathizers – have their roots in demands for ‘ethnic citizenship’ and networks constructed in the late 1980s.

The concept ‘ethnic citizenship’ automatically directs our attention to Latin American and ‘Latino’ debates concerning the interrelationship between identity, culture and ‘belonging’. The term itself was formulated with regard to rural Mexico by Guillermo de la Peña [1995] so as to refine the concept ‘cultural citizenship’, an idea advanced initially by Rosaldo [1985, 1989]. Thus ‘ethnic citizenship’ has its theoretical roots in ‘cultural citizenship’, each possessing a duality that is seemingly contradictory: universal citizenship emphasizing equality before the law, and cultural specificity which emphasizes socially constructed differences that can be used to claim distinct rights. As many have pointed out, the same dichotomy informs Latino/a identity and political consciousness in the United States.

The citizenship/culture duality recognizes the separate origins of a single identity, an ideological division between universalities and particularities that ceases to operate only if we assume that no universal truth defines citizenship, democracy or rights [Jelin, 1996; Gledhill, 1997; Harvey, 1998]. Rather obviously, all the latter characteristics are themselves historical and cultural products, a specificity that challenges the notion of universality. Equally obvious is the fact that citizenship/democracy/rights are imperfect, subject to construction and transformation, and – in Mexico and other parts of the South – are often linked not to economic or cultural development but rather to a capacity to organize and to open up new political spaces [Harvey, 1998: 229].

Zapatistas, Neo-Zapatistas and the CNI

The development of what are termed here neo-zapatista networks refers to a convergence between the political claims of the EZLN and other groups. This extends well beyond the EZLN itself, but the latter nevertheless drives this process and provides both its political motivation and inspiration [Leyva, 2001]. Hence the neo-zapatista network is neither a specific political movement nor an organization, but rather a broader mobilization that is more fluid in terms of composition and aims. In this respect, it resembles the kind of process in social movement theories, often called ‘social movement networks (or webs)’ [Alvarez et al., 1998]. The metaphor of a network (or web) ‘makes it possible vividly to imagine the multiple levelled entanglements of actors within the movements and the natural-environmental, political-institutional, and cultural discourses in which they are anchored’ [Alvarez et al., 1998: 15–16].

From 1995 onwards, therefore, it is possible to speak of the formation in Chiapas of autonomous neo-zapatista indianista networks. These consist for
the most part of an indigenous peasantry – the majority located outside or at
the margins of the corporate system of the PRI – mobilized under the rubric
of ‘nations’, ‘peoples’, alliances, ‘tribes’, ‘councils’, unions, municipalities,
communities, organizations, committees and forums. Before the EZLN
emerged onto the world stage in 1994, the majority of these organizations
were already operating at a sectoral, local and regional level, and between
1996 and 1998 many of them established political alliances with the EZLN.
These alliances, forever dissolving and reforming, were – like those of the
Zapatistas – also based on the demand for the constitutional recognition of
rights for indigenous peoples.

At the national level, these alliances between organized Indian peasants
and the EZLN found their expression in the National Indigenous Congress
(CNI), an organization which, according to its leaders, functioned as an
assembly, a ‘forum in which to speak’ and a network [Anzaldo, 1998].
Its parameters and connections are depicted diagrammatically in Figures 1–4.

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<td>October 1996</td>
<td>1st National Congress</td>
<td>Mexico City</td>
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<td>November 1996</td>
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The CNI was a social-political network, consisting of indigenous and peasant leaders and organizations that received political support from labour, student, and women’s organizations, anthropologists, leftist journalists and artists [Anzaldo, 1998]. Although it functioned at the national level, the CNI did not include all existing indigenous peasant organizations. Notwithstanding this, it was regarded by a wide spectrum of opinion – the political opposition, the left, the centre-left, as well as the Zapatistas – as representing the claims of indigenous peoples in Mexico.9

Perhaps the most novel aspect of the demands made by the CNI between 1995 and 1999 was that they included claims ranging from specific rights to ones that formed part of a wider struggle, alongside other indigenous peoples around the world against neo-liberal globalization. The object of these demands was direct and open support for the San Andrés Accords that promised a new relationship between Indians, the Mexican State and civil society (see Figure 2). As Bengoa [2000: 24–5] has observed about the indigenous inhabitants of Latin America, historically they have ‘made demands of society and the government...but [these] were not necessarily made in ethnic terms...[that is] the difference between indigenous culture and global or Creole culture. Indigenous demands [today in Mexico and Latin America] combine various economic and material ends with calls to respect cultural diversity and autonomous ethnic “otherness”.

Given this genealogy, it is worth examining the historical development of these demands and the leadership of many of the organizations that participated in the CNI, so as to understand better the continuities/discontinuities of indigenismo, indianismo, the EZLN and neo-zapatista indianistas networks. It is these dialogues that lie behind the construction of demands for ‘ethnic citizenship’, and with it claims for the recognition of specific rights based on ethnic/cultural difference.

I

INDIGENISMO, INDIANISMO AND AUTONOMY

The centrality of indigenous autonomy to negotiations between the EZLN and the Mexican State derive from two interrelated issues. First, the emergence after 1970 of a discourse from within Mexican and Latin American indigenous movements themselves; and second, indigenista debates in post-revolutionary Mexico – that is, of a much older discourse about these movements. By proposing the establishment of a new type of relation between the state and indigenous peoples, the San Andrés Accords went directly to the heart of indigenista politics.
In Mexico (and Latin America) *indigenismo* was the official (or ‘from above’) policy of the state, implemented by means of a number of government policies and institutions. A discourse about the nature of the peasantry, and in particular about its ‘otherness’ in terms of ethnicity, culture and economy, *indigenismo* sought to integrate what it termed the ‘original’ inhabitants of the continent into the existing structures of the nation state. The connection between *indigenismo* and peasant society and agency in Mexico has been the subject of extensive analysis, and the focus here is on the link between them on the one hand, and on the other the EZLN and *indianismo*.10

As outlined by Velasco [2003: 122], *indianismo* refers to an ‘ideological and political movement, the objective of which is centred on the liberation of the Indian, not the liberation of the individual Indian but the Indian as a member of indigenous civilization, who lives in the collective memory of indigenous groups, and rather than having been destroyed, waits patiently for liberation.’ Created in opposition to the civilizing project of the west, therefore, and thus in relation to and as a reaction against the *indigenismo* of the years 1940 to 1970, the *indianista* concept of an Indian civilization emerged as a result of a dialogue with contemporary anthropologists, at the margins of Latin American leftist thinking [Velasco, 2003: 121–43]. Indian civilization, in the opinion of the *indianistas*, offers an alternative version of the future that contrasts with the civilizing project of the west, and which accordingly needs to be liberated from its current subjugation within Latin American nation states. In order to realize this objective, a strategy was needed in which recuperation, re-valorization, and re-Indianization went hand in hand with demands for the recognition of ethnic groups as political entities [Velasco, 2003: 123–4]. This process was to accompany the struggle for acceptance in the wider Mexican context of different cultures, languages and institutions. By asserting that ‘indigenous peoples should simply fight for the right to difference in relation to the rest of the so-called national society’, *indianismo* guided the political practices of those organizations that formed part of the *indigenista* movement in Mexico.11 This prefigured the discourse that in later years would become the lexicon of struggle for indigenous autonomy, and which in the years between 1995 and 2001 was inserted onto the Mexican political agenda as a national priority.

*Indianismo as ‘From Below’ Identity?*

*Indianismo* has been defined as those organic ideas that, because they came ‘from below’ and were not imposed ‘from above’, transcended the official *indigenismo* of the corporate state and the ruling PRI.12 This ‘from below’ project forced the Mexican government to change its policy, and to implement what was called ‘participatory *indigenismo*’. At the same time, leftist groups such as Línea de Masas [Bizberg, 2003: 222] began to establish
contact with indigenous organizations and influence their project, which is what happened in Chiapas. There were other external influences as well. In the late 1980s, therefore, the *indianista* discourse ‘started to blend with Latin American leftist discourses as a result of the support that the Sandinista government gave in 1987 to the formation of a system of regional autonomy [in Nicaragua].’

It is important to emphasize the distinction between these two constructions and thus perceptions of the indigenous Mexican peasantry. Hence the contrast between *indigenismo*, defined by some members of Indian organizations as the ‘paternalist ideology of an authoritarian State’, and *indianismo*, which by contrast was regarded by them as ‘an ideology of independent and democratic Indian organizations’ [de la Peña, 1995: 19]. However, the definition of *indianismo* was neither univocal nor universal. For example, at an international level, a document published in the early 1990s by the World Council of Indigenous Peoples used the term *indigenismo* as synonymous with ‘ethnic-cultural organization’, while *indianismo* was defined as ‘socio-cultural grouping’ [Sarmiento, 1998: 288]. It would be easy to view them as separate discourses, and set a dichotomy featuring official *indigenismo* versus *indianista* resistance.

Such a dichotomy would, however, be analytically limited, since the development of and relations between *indigenismo*, *indianismo* and the indigenous movement were rather more complex. Not only did they emerge in parallel with one another, therefore, but there was as a result a process of ideological cross-fertilization and superimposition. In other words, to regard them as distinct and mutually incompatible ideologies would not be correct. In order to understand the origin of ‘ethnic citizenship’, it is necessary to recognize the dialogic nature between them all. The tangled nature of this ideological skein can be illustrated by one particular instance.

In the late 1990s, at the peak of the influence exercised by the Zapatista movement, the Mixe leader Adolfo Regino [1998: 237] stated that the Constitutional reform of 1992 ‘did not reflect the views of indigenous peoples, nor could it be seen as a step towards solving the serious problems that they are facing’. However, not all *indianista* leaders had been excluded from the constitutional debate of the early 1990s. Thus the 1992 reform had itself been promoted by a Tojolab’al leader from Chiapas who, as a representative of the Democratic Revolution Party (PRD), had canvassed support for this particular initiative from political parties in the Mexican Congress as well as amongst *indigenista* and *indianista* organizations. Although the Tojolab’al leader encountered serious objections from all sides, from his perspective the reform was important because it would ‘strengthen the strategy of Indian struggle’ [Ruiz Hernández, 1999: 21–6] through the creation of a legal instrument recognized at the international level.
Between 1989 and 1993 new *indianista* organizations emerged in Mexico, and grouped around the fierce debate over the celebration of the quincentenary of the ‘discovery’ of America. As part of the ‘Continental Campaign of 500 Years of Indigenous, Black and Popular Resistance’, the ‘Mexican Council for 500 Years of Indigenous and Popular Resistance’ was created [Sarmiento, 1998]. In 1994, ex-members of the Mexican Council were still discussing the reforms to Article 4 of the Constitution and its corresponding laws when the EZLN took up arms and declared war on the PRI government of Carlos Salinas de Gortari. This led indigenous and peasant organizations and leaders to reconsider their strategies, demands, and alliances. In the middle of the heated debates between EZLN and the Mexican government, leftist journalists asserted that the San André’s Accords represented a ‘clear rupture’ with official *indigenismo*. At the same time, when Zapatista sympathizers, who were unfamiliar with the history of the indigenous movement, encountered the CNI they considered it to be an organization parallel to and separate from the EZLN that only supported the latter.

These instances underline the misperceptions about the linkages and genealogy of the Zapatista movement in Chiapas. Rather than being distinct ideologies/organizations, therefore, both *indigenismo* and the CNI formed an organic part of the neo-zapatista networks, which gave zapatismo strength and depth at the national and international levels [Leyva, 2001]. Thus, *indigenismo* could be seen as the dialogic counterpart to *indianismo* and the indigenous movement of the 1980s and 1990s. And all these misleadingly separate entities should be viewed in turn as the combined progenitors of the discourse about ‘ethnic citizenship’ and ethnic/cultural difference that structured both the internal dialogues which took place within *indianista* neo-zapatista networks and then informed the negotiations between the EZLN and the Mexican government.

II

*INDIANISTA LEADERS AND ETHNIC CITIZENSHIP*

Following the 1910 Mexican revolution, indigenous intellectuals from within the clientelist structures of the PRI and the state apparatus made the first calls for indigenous representation. Over half a century later, however, it was the political intermediaries of independent peasant organizations who ‘constructed their “Indian-ness” as an element of [cultural] resistance in contrast to their predecessors, who had accepted the values of *indigenista* discourse’ [de la Peña, 1995: 5, 14]. Defined by de la Peña as new demands for ‘ethnic citizenship’, these were made in the 1980s and went beyond the ‘simple revitalization of the fragmented and unrelated cultural aspects of a basically
political collective identity’, to become central in the struggle by indigenous peasants for ‘social, civil and political rights’.\(^\text{17}\)

**Teaching/learning about ‘Indian-ness’**

Chiapas is not that different from the national pattern identified by de la Peña. It is well known that in the Altos region of Chiapas the first intermediaries, or ‘brokers’ of the twentieth century, were young peasant leaders (*agraristas*) who spoke Spanish and were led by the *cardenista*, Erasto Urbina. They were the first key actors in the newly established National Revolutionary Party (PNR), which later became the PRI.\(^\text{18}\) In the second half of the twentieth century, as a result of bilingual education programmes implemented by the Public Education Administration (SEP) and the National Indigenist Institute (INI), indigenous teachers (*maestros*) and promoters replaced the *mestizo* municipal secretaries who dominated the local councils in the Altos. By 1962, many bilingual teachers occupied public offices in municipal governments ruled by the PRI. These brokers were the first to use their ‘Indian-ness’ for a political purpose [Pineda, 1998: 279, 290–93] as well as the first in their localities to participate in the state party system. Although four of the nine municipalities in the Altos were still governed by teachers in 1999, by then these brokers were no longer affiliated solely to the PRI. At that conjuncture they also belonged to the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD), the PAN, the Workers’ Party (PT), and the Democratic Party of Chiapas (PDCh).\(^\text{19}\)

From the 1970s onwards – and above all in the early 1980s – another kind of indigenous leadership surfaced in Chiapas, emerging from peasant organizations not affiliated to the PRI. These peasant leaders were directly linked to the agrarian struggle, both against big landowners in Chiapas and against the PRI government. Many of them were ‘aculturated’ Indians, some were politicized through *samuelismo*, others had been educated by *mestizo* leaders into Maoist or *guevarista* ideologies.\(^\text{20}\) Yet others emerged as ‘natural leaders’ of their rural communities, and had been influenced politically by other indigenous leaders through participation in opposition political parties (Communist and Trotskyist, for example).

It was not until 1988, however, that the first claims to ‘ethnic citizenship’ – understood as culturally differentiated rights – emerged in Chiapas. These demands were slowly given form within the umbrella organization, the Independent Front of Indian Peoples (FIPI). The latter had its roots in the Union of Tojolab’al Peoples (which, in turn, was affiliated to the Independent Central of Agricultural Workers and Peasants, or CIOAC) and in the Supreme Tojolab’al Council [Ruiz Hernández, 1994, 1999; Chirino and Flores, n.d.; Burguete Cal y Mayor, 1989]. A language of rights did not emerge immediately in those organizations, the initial demands of the
Union of Tojolab’al Peoples centring rather on control over transport franchises [Burguete Cal y Mayor, 1989: 63]. It was only after this that a discourse about ‘Indian power’ and ‘indigenous regional unity’ was constructed within an ideological framework that contrasted ‘Indian civilization’ to ‘the West’.

Around this time FIPI stated in its statutes that its goals were ‘to fight for the recognition and full exercise of the ethnic rights of indigenous peoples’, which presupposed changes in the Constitution that would legally recognize their existence. To this end, FIPI demanded recognition ‘of the legal statutes of distinct ethnic groups’. Included in this demand was the ‘recuperation of our ethnic territories, the right to autonomy, official recognition of Indian languages, the right to Indigenous education, the strengthening of Indian culture and identity, political representation, and freedom of organization for Indian peoples’.

The Politics of Culture and Tradition

Many Tojolab’al Indians in the municipality of Las Margaritas framed their demands within existing forms of association: ejido unions, Indian councils and party committees [Chirino and Flores, n.d.; Burguete Cal y Mayor, 1989]. Regionally, the Tojolab’al members of the CIOAC had led a bitter struggle against large landowners and their descendants who formed part of the governing class [Burguete Cal y Mayor, 1998]. But until 1994, such indianista organizations remained a minority current among the ‘independent movements’ existing in Chiapas. It was not until 1991 that FIPI gradually began to gain support and alliances in the Altos, thanks to the local impact of the Continental Campaign of 500 Years of Indigenous, Black and Popular Resistance [Sarmiento, 1998; Burguete Cal y Mayor, 1998; Ruiz Hernández, 1999].

As a result of the influence of this movement, a discourse about ‘ethnic citizenship’ gained ground among ‘expelled Indians’ [Gómez Núñez, 1999: 192–3]. They fought a twofold struggle, both against the Indians who had expelled them from their communities and against ladinos in San Cristóbal, the city to which they had migrated. This spread of claims to ‘ethnic citizenship’ was also due to the emergence of a handful of indigenous NGOs in the mid-1990s, which promoted artistic projects as a form of ‘cultural resistance’. Some of these were concerned with the rediscovery and conservation of indigenous literature, others with indigenous sculpture or theatre (as actors and producers), and yet others were photographers who explored their ethnic identity in visual terms, as a means of asserting ‘pride’ in their culture. By 2001, there were even young indigenous urban video-makers proclaiming autonomy and self determination through resistance and rebellion [Leyva and Koehler, 2004].
In Chiapas, ironically, the initial claims to rights based on cultural specificity were formulated by Indians who were ‘more integrated’ into national culture. In terms of the latter framework, the Tojolab’ales and Zoques might be classified as ‘less traditional’ than, for example, the Chamulas, Zinacantecos and Lacandones, Indians known for their attachment to traditional dress, language and a specific religious system. By contrast, the Tojolab’ales have been perceived as culturally more integrated as a result of having worked on the *fincas* [Gómez and Ruz, 1992] or on the *ejidos* [Hernández Cruz, 1999: 171–2]. In this respect it is important to stress that it was Tojolab’al *ex-finca* peons from the municipality of Las Margaritas who first raised their voices in defence of the social, civil and political ‘rights’ of indigenous peoples; in other words, it was they who were the first to give shape to this specific discourse. These ideas then spread to other regions of Chiapas and Mexico, where they fused with similar ideas that had been circulating in Mexico and the rest of Latin America from the late 1980s and early 1990s.

It was no coincidence, therefore, that in Chiapas the first indigenous representative of an opposition party to hold a seat in the Federal Congress was a Tojolab’al from Las Margaritas. Nor was it surprising that it was the Tojolab’ales who introduced the notion of ‘indigenous rights’ onto the agenda of ‘independent’ peasant organizations in Chiapas. They were the first in working to construct ‘Indian power’ within a Communist Party affiliated union (the CIOAC). While they were doing this, the EZLN was operating as a clandestine guerrilla organization with a *guevarista* touch (Subcomandante Marcos, cited in Le Bot [1997: 68–78, 239–62]), and the leaders of the Union of the Unions were seeking governmental support for agricultural production and commercialization [Leyva and Ascencio, 1996]. The important role of this particular indigenous group is further underlined by the fact that one of the most popular Zapatista leaders is a Tojolab’al from the municipality of Las Margaritas.

That some Tojolab’al leaders (members of various organizations and leftist parties) claimed autonomy and the right to self-determination did not make them superior or inferior to others, only different because of the language and strategies they used in their struggles, including building international alliances. The latter created new fields of action and social networks beyond Chiapas, with organizations and leaders that sometimes appeared more *indianista* than Mexican Indians (for example, Bolivian and Peruvian peasants’ leaders). Another factor that favoured the evolution of new socio-political networks of an *indianista* character was the formation of unions, committees, councils, campaigns, meetings and assemblies in different parts of the country. Even in the 1990s, however, these communications were not yet based on cyber-networks, although recently indigenous leaders and
organizations have started to use the internet as a form of communication and political linkage.

III

BEYOND INDIANISMO AND INDIGENISMO: THE POLITICS OF RECOGNITION

Despite the differences between indigenous movements throughout Latin America, and notwithstanding the specificity of their political situations, from the 1990s onwards these organizations – as José Bengoa [2000] and others have observed – have shared the same quest for ‘recognition’. This suggests the presence of a new discourse about an old identity, a process whereby indigenous culture has in effect been re-invented. What currently exists, Bengoa [2000: 126–34] argues, is nothing less than a hybrid ideology, produced by the global economy and linkages in which Indians now operate, and to which the EZLN and indigenista neo-zapatista networks have responded.

The indigenous discourse that has emerged from Chiapas is a manifestation of this claim to ‘recognition’. Not only does it posit the existence of cultural authenticity and tradition, therefore, but it also identifies peasants as its bearers. The gulf between what is a rich history and the current plight of its inheritors – their experience of social, economic and ethnic marginalization and discrimination – cannot but provoke indignation. The latter in turn gives rise to and informs the legitimacy of indigenous claims for recognition [Honneth, 1996: xii, xix]. By defining themselves as victims, therefore, the indigenous peasantry of Chiapas create a twofold ideological space: on the one hand for an internal reaffirmation of cultural self-esteem (= pride in existing selfhood), and on the other for claims made against a variety of external ‘others’ (national, international) to recognize this politically.

The Mexican case illustrates what Taylor [1994] has called the two directions in which the politics of recognition can go in a democratic context. One is grounded in the vision of universalism, the other in particularism. Thus the 1992 reforms added to article 4 of the Mexican constitution supported the continuation of the universalist principles of equal citizenship.24 By contrast, demands put forward by ex-indigenista organizations such as the Pro-Autonomy Indigenous National Assembly (ANIPA) increasingly move in the opposite direction, claiming as they do recognition for the particular needs of individual members of specific cultural groups, who form part of collectives.

For those believing in particularism or communitarianism, universalist claims are overridden by ethnic citizenship.25 In the case of Mexico during 1996, however, the tension between these two identities surfaced in the San Andrés Accords. Whereas one paragraph maintained that ‘the rights and
guarantees to which indigenous peoples are entitled should be observed [by the state], a second declared that the Accords would encourage legal reforms based on ‘the fundamental legal principle of the equality of all Mexicans before the law and judicial institutions,’ adding that ‘no special concessions or privileges were possible’.\(^{26}\) This highlights the degree to which the Mexican constitution has been unable to – and perhaps cannot – reconcile the antinomy between identities that are universal and particular. As a result, neither side has realized its expectations: those of the indigenous peasantry for cultural/political recognition have not been met, nor have those of the Mexican government for legitimacy.

**Indianistas and Neo-Zapatistas**

More than *indigenismo* or *indianismo*, claims to autonomy and recognition have enabled Zapatista peasants and other organized indigenous people in Chiapas and Mexico at large to establish links with international networks. One could therefore ask two questions. First, from where did claims to ethnic citizenship adopted by *indianista* leaders in Chiapas emerge? And second, if *indianista* leaders/organizations were the precursors of claims for ethnic citizenship, why did they not have a global impact similar to that of the EZLN after 1994?

In answer to the first question, one can say that dialogues with critical anthropologists, committed lawyers and international activists favoured the creation of a discourse around ideas of resistance, negotiation and rights. As one of the leaders of FIPI has stated [*Ruiz Hernández*, 1999: 24]:

> The Mexican Academy of Human Rights (AMDH) had an important role in promoting a human rights perspective among indigenous leaders. From 1987 onwards, the AMDH, chaired by Rodolfo Stavenhagen and Mariclaire Acosta, implemented an educational programme on international and indigenous law headed by the lawyer Teresa Jardí and aimed at indigenous leaders in Mexico and Central America. It was there that I learned about the defence of our rights through the legal system and where I met colleagues, now close friends, from indigenous organizations throughout Mexico and Latin America. From that encounter alliances were made, which have started to bear fruit.

The formation and solidity of the alliances was witnessed by this writer in 1999, when indigenous members of parliament from Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Nicaragua and Peru, attended the ‘International Meeting of Indigenous Peoples and Political Parties’, held in Oaxaca and organized by indigenous leaders of ANIPA [*Leyva*, 2002].
In the early 1990s, while *indianista* Tojolob’al leaders and their counterparts were calling for defence of their homeland and their human rights, other Indians in Chiapas were involved in peasant struggles for land, or were clandestinely preparing an armed uprising. While some movements organized big marches or land occupations, members of *indianista* organizations were attending international meetings and building alliances at the national level. They also attempted to persuade the Mexican Socialist Party (PMS) to lobby for constitutional reforms [Ruiz Hernández, 1999], or to win municipal control through the electoral system [Hernández Cruz, 1999]. By 1995 this early human rights activism made *indianista* organizations pillars of autonomous neo-Zapatista *indianista* networks centred on the CNI [Leyva, 2001].

The second question is: why did *indianista* organizations not have the same impact in the 1980s and 1990s that the EZLN had, even though they emerged before the EZLN and gained a national and international presence? The answer to this is threefold. First, the EZLN emerged at a time when trans-national human rights networks were already consolidated (on which see Keck and Sikkink [1998] and Leyva [2001]). Second, the EZLN based part of its success on a policy of alliances in which the ‘old’ *indianista* organizations that preceded them had a prominent place. And third, after 1994 the EZLN transformed its armed strategy into a highly inclusive politics, a strategy that many *indianista* organizations lacked. The latter, in short, failed to establish inter-ethnic alliances with the non-Indian population.

Hence a central goal of organizations such as FIPI was to consolidate ‘Indian unity’ at the regional, national and continental level. Such an approach encouraged the idea that *mestizos* were political enemies, who should be excluded, fought and defeated. Although FIPI tempered this exclusionary politics somewhat, by forming ethnic-class alliances that – while explicitly excluding *mestizos* – encouraged links with ‘non-Indian exploited brothers and sisters’. Looked at like this, it has been argued [Pozas and Pozas, 1971] that the emancipation of the Indian was not that different from the emancipation of the proletariat.

Both indigenous peasants and *mestizos* have pointed out the negative and exclusionary aspects of *indianismo*. When an earlier version of this analysis was presented at the University of Texas, a Mapuche leader and Chilean anthropologist responded by recounting how he, as an urban Indian, had often been the victim of the intolerance of *indianistas*. As one of the pioneers of the study of democracy in Mexico, and later an academic sympathizer of the Zapatistas, he observed in 2000 that *indianismo* confused the political struggle of indigenous peoples with a fight between races, the fight of ‘Indians against whites’ [González Casanova, 2000: 375]. In Chiapas criticisms of *indianismo* are also widespread, especially from
leaders of peasant and producer organizations, who consider the *indianista* emphasis on the ‘recovery of cultures, traditions and customs’ excessive, and who prioritize access to land, agricultural support and municipal control instead.

Much time and the Zapatista revolt of 1994 had to pass before *indianista* organizations started to build inclusive socio-political networks, in theory and in practice.\(^{29}\) In 1995, under the momentum of neo-zapatismo, ANIPA (which was a continuation of the Mexican Council of 500 Years of resistance, FIPI, and the Guerrero Council of 500 Years of Resistance) emphasized the need to include ‘all ethnicities’ in the fourth level of government that it proposed to create in order to strengthen ‘autonomous’ regions [Ruiz Hernández, 1999: 37].\(^{30}\) A year later, the National Indigenous Congress, FIPI and ANIPA, signed a declaration in which they confirmed the need to ‘move towards a new constitution which guarantees the effective participation of all – [a constitution which would be] an inclusive and plural project’.\(^{31}\)

**CONCLUDING COMMENT**

It has been argued here that the origin of claims to ‘ethnic citizenship’ lies in the dialogue between *indianistas* and *indigenistas*, and that subsequent calls for autonomy made by indigenous organizations and movements emerging from this were tied to identity politics. From the latter sprang in turn the EZLN discourse that imbued the concept of ‘ethnic citizenship’ with even greater power, by combining it with notions of cultural resistance and an ‘other’ kind of citizenship. The role played in this process by (ex-) *indianista* leaders – many of whom later became supporters of the Zapatistas – was that of cultural intermediaries *par excellence*, an ideal starting point for the formation of neo-Zapatista networks which, however, had by 2004 almost ceased to function. Although closely related to ‘cultural citizenship’, the term ‘ethnic identity’ is defined more broadly, its point of reference being ‘Latinos’, who correspond to ‘a historical fusion or mixture of ethnic and racial groups, from native indigenous groups to Africans, Europeans, and Asians’.\(^{32}\) When Mexicans speak of ‘cultural citizenship’, however, the term is used reductively, ethnicity being synonymous with the indigenous ‘other’.

Hence the exclusionary nature of the resulting discourse. In the Mexican context, therefore, ‘ethnic citizenship’ cannot mean anything other than the product of indigenous struggles, or of demands/resistance by indigenous leaders/organizations/movements. A necessary outcome of this ideological conflation (‘ethnicity’ = ‘indigenous’) is that there is consequently no space in the discourse about identity and citizenship for *mestizo* or other ethnic groups – such as, say, the descendants of Chinese or German immigrants.\(^{33}\) Making
‘ethnicity’ and ‘indigenous’ synonymous is clearly not coincidental, but is
directly linked to the complexities of Mexican history – that is, the experience
of colonialism, and the domination and hegemony that has characterized the
development of the nation-state. Hence the continuous occurrence from the
Spanish Conquest onwards of peasant mobilizations that were – and are still –
ethnicized, both by the participants and by those opposed to them.

Indigenous struggle taking the form of cultural resistance, and aimed at
obtaining autonomy, did not start with the EZLN or with neo-zapatismo, and
– it can safely be assumed – will not end with them either. It is equally clear
that the San Andrés Accords do not embody the de facto autonomy which
existed in Chiapas both before and after 1994. Nevertheless, Zapatismo and
neo-zapatismo, indianista organizations flourished during the continent wide
political and ideological mobilization against the quincentenary of the
‘discovery’ of America, and from 1996 onwards ex-indianista leaders and
organizations found their national voice in the movement of the CNI. Instead
of projecting a uniform policy vis-à-vis the Mexican government, however,
the CNI attempted to incorporate the varying perspectives of the organiza-
tions it represented. There are accordingly now many different views about a
whole range of issues: the nature of power and its attainment, the desirability
of political alliances (and with whom), and – most importantly – the
definition of autonomy itself. The result is that indigenous people and their
organizations have not been sufficiently united to achieve enduring political
gains. Neither in the 1992 reforms of President Salinas nor in the 2001
reforms of President Fox has there been constitutional recognition of
indigenous rights to self – determination.

NOTES

1 Because the PRI government ignored many essential aspects of the Accords, the EZLN
suspended dialogue with the Mexican State until the Concord and Pacification Commission
(COCOPA) intervened. The latter consisted of legislators from all political parties
represented in the Mexican Congress. The COCOPA drew up a proposal that preserved the
spirit of the San Andrés Accords that was acceptable to the EZLN and its supporters
throughout the nation. It also met with the approval of Vicente Fox of the PAN who, only
days after taking office as president of Mexico, resumed negotiations with the EZLN.

2 In the section of the San Andrés Accords [Ce Acatl, 1996] entitled ‘Commitments made by
the federal government to indigenous peoples’, the Mexican government undertook to
establish a ‘new relationship between indigenous peoples and the state’.

3 See the San Andrés Accords, cited in Ce Acatl [1996: 35].

4 The law classified indigenous people and territory in a number of different ways: as
‘indigenous peoples’, as ‘indigenous communities’, as ‘indigenous municipalities’, and as
‘indigenous zones’. For the details, see the ‘Report on Indigenous Matters’, published in the
Gaceta Parlamentaria [2001].

5 See also Rosaldo [1985; 1994; 1997], Jelin [1993; 1996], de la Peña [1995; 1999b], Jelin and
Hershberg [1996], Torres Rivas [1997], Flores and Benmayor [1997], Dagnino [1998],
Harvey [1998]’ Assies et al. [1999], Gros [2000], Zárate [2001], and Leyva [2001].
In 1987 the concept ‘ethnic citizenship’ was adopted by the interdisciplinary project ‘Latino Cultural Studies Working Group of the Inter-University Programme for Latino Research’. A good overview of debates within and research conducted by this group is found in Flores and Bennmayor [1997]. The Peruvian historian Rodrigo Montoya [1996] also speaks of ‘ethnic citizenship’, with reference to the right that indigenous peoples should have to use their own language and culture in the context of a wider society.

See, for example, Flores and Bennmayor [1997: 1, 6], and also Leyva, Burguete Cal y Mayor, and Speed [2003: 8]. The latter make the following comparison: ‘It is here that the situation of Latinos and Mexican indigenous people show parallels, notwithstanding important differences in the continent, such as the fact that the claims of some indigenous groups – for example Canadian Indians – are made from a materially secure position, which allows them to locate their demands more within the moral and ethical field. By contrast, in Latin American countries, such material security is often not only absent, but constitutes the basis of the claims that are made.’

For an extended discussion of the neo-zapatista network, see Leyva [2001].

The types of indigenous organizations that participated in the CNI are grouped in Figure 2. See, for example, Sarmiento [1998], Sánchez [1999], Gros [2000], Bengoa [2000], Hernández Castillo [2001], Díaz Polanco and Sánchez [2002], and Ruiz Hernández and Burguete Cal y Mayor [2003].

See Velasco [2003: 123–4].


See Velasco [2003: 136].

The term ‘dialogic’ is used in a Bakhtinian sense. According to Bakhtin [1981] every act of speech or writing is part of a dialogic process – that is, a response to others (who may or may not be present). Any discourse therefore exists only as part of and in dialogue with a previous or an alternative discourse. As Tedlock and Mannheim [1995] point out, all cultural systems and practices are not only continuously produced, reproduced and revised by members of a group, but also in dialogue with other cultures and cultural expressions.

As de la Peña [1995: 6] has observed, ‘ethnic citizenship’ refers to a process for which the formation of indigenous intellectuals is fundamental. These are conceived as cultural and political intermediaries who, in late twentieth century Mexico, contributed to the ‘problematisation of indigenous culture and identity – including their own – as a negative or positive component of public participation’.

On this, see de la Peña [1995: 18, 26].


On this, see Rubin Barnaca [2000].

The concept *Samuelismo* refers to the Catholic catechism as taught by Bishop Samuel Ruiz. Between 1960 and 2000, the Bishop preached a catechism based on a Theology of the Preferential Option for the Poor and for Indians.

See the 1988 FIPI Statutes, cited in Chirino and Flores [n.d].

The term *ladino* refers to non-indigenous people. The concept is polysemic and complex, but for the purpose of this article it is defined simply as the ‘other’ of an indigenous subject.

For the details about this, see Bengoa [2000: 86–117].

These changes were published by the government in the *Diario Oficial* of 28 January 1992.

The San Andrés Accords are cited in Ce Acatl [1996: 36–9]. Indigenous rights include the capacity to use and exploit their territories as they wish, to self-government, and to manage and implement their own development projects [Ce Acatl, 1996: 38–9].

For example, entering alliances with the Zapotecas of the COCEI and with the Nahua of the Guerrero Mountains.

The source for this and the following points are the 1988 FIPI Statutes [Chirino and Flores, n.d.].

Although this was not noted by those who studied FIPI, other problems were. The latter included the lack of continuity between old and new leaders, the unwillingness to enter...
political alliances, and a tendency to build a personality cult around leaders [Chirino and Flores, n.d.].
30 Explicitly incorporating mestiza ethnicity.
31 See Anzaldo [1998: 11], emphasis supplied.
32 On this, see Flores and Bennmayor [1997: 1].
33 This is the view of de la Peña [1995] and Zárate [2001].
34 A detailed study of alliances and disagreements within the National Indigenous Congress can
be found in Espeland [2000], Pérez Ruiz [2000] and Leyva [2001].

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