Constructing and Navigating Autonomous Self-Organization: Notes and Experiences From Community Struggles in Mexico

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE DIVISION OF THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI'I AT MĀNOA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

IN

POLITICAL SCIENCE

AUGUST 2018

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Table of Contents

Abstract……………………………………………………………………………………...…IV
Acknowledgements…………………………………………………………………………V
Notes on Citations, Interviews and Translations…………………………………………...VI

Chapter 1: Introduction…………………………………………………………………...1
Chapter 2: Located Autonomies…………………………………………………………31
Chapter 3: Community Assembly: The Case of Eloxochitlán de Flores Magón, Oaxaca………61
Chapter 4: Community Radio: Spaces and Networks of Self-Organization and Resistance……91
Chapter 5: Community Self-Defense and Autonomous (Il)Legalities…………………………133
Chapter 6: The Ins and Outs of Autonomy……………………………………………...……..170
Chapter 7: Conclusion…………………………………………………………………...……..192
Bibliography………………………………………………………………………………200

Abstract

This dissertation explores autonomous politics as political resistance, through an engagement with various processes of communal self-organization being carried out in Mexico. Resisting the approach to "autonomy" as a static and separate space that is fully self-determined, this dissertation seeks to explore the complexities and tensions that characterize struggles for autonomous self-organization through their ongoing construction and navigation of internal and external forces.

Through a look at the struggle of the community assembly in Eloxochitlán de Flores Magón, Oaxaca, armed forces of community self-defense and justice in the states of Michoacán and Guerrero, and the community radio milieu that crisscrosses much of the country, this dissertation explores the diversity and located-ness of autonomous processes and struggles in the context of Mexico. It seeks to show how autonomous struggles are located in historical, political, cultural and social contexts that influence their character, thus making autonomy better understood in the plural as "autonomies." Simultaneously, this dissertation investigates the manner in which autonomous struggles of self-organization are constantly working beyond their material locations, in processes of cross-communal and cross-struggle organization.

There, between the located-ness and movement of autonomous processes of self-organization, this dissertation seeks to understand autonomous struggle as ongoing processes of construction and navigation that both rupture yet reinforce their insides and outsides. Through a focus on what might be called the borderlands of autonomies, we can begin to understand the multiple layers of complexity that animate resistance politics and animate autonomous struggles of self-organization specifically.

Keywords: anarchist, Indigenous, autonomous

Acknowledgements

Researching and writing a dissertation is inherently a collective process. It would be impossible to recognize everyone who has made an impact on my thinking and life over the years, let alone on this project itself. I am indebted to you all, whether you know it or not.

I want to directly thank my dissertation committee for providing the support in seeing this dissertation to its timely end: Dr. Kathy E. Ferguson, Dr. Noelani Goodyear-Kaʻōpua, Dr. Jon Goldberg-Hiller, Dr. Njoroge Njoroge and Dr. Craig Howes.

I also want to give massive thanks, and *un abrazo fuerte*, to all of the friends and comrades in Mexico who have shared their struggles with me, and who have taught me so much. ¡*La lucha sigue!*

Note on Citations, Interviews and Translations

All names of participating subjects have been changed that weren't already public.

All translations done by the author are marked accordingly in the in-text citations.

All internet sources have been cited separately in the bibliography.

All quotes from interviews have been cited as footnotes within the text.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Prelude:

In the early morning of January 18th, 2016, a comrade and fellow university student from Mexico City and I made the journey by public transportation to the community of San Lorenzo Huitzizilapan in the municipality of Lerma in the State of Mexico. We traversed two metro lines in Mexico's capital city before embarking on the two-hour bus ride from the Western "*Observatorio*" bus station in route toward Huitzizilapan. The trip temporally coincided with the daily commute of the millions of people in and around Mexico City going to and from work, causing extreme crowding in the metro trains and stations, and making the bus ride a slow one at best due to the stop-and-go traffic.

That day, the Indigenous Otomí-Ñatho community of San Lorenzo Huitzizilapan had a scheduled community assembly to elect a new *comisariado de bienes comunales*, or commission of communal lands, to represent the interests of the community assembly regarding issues of land tenure. A series of assemblies and organizational initiatives had emerged in the community as part of the ongoing resistance struggle against a highway project seeking to connect the two urban centers of Mexico City and Toluca. San Lorenzo Huitzizilapan was one of the communities whose water and nearby forest was directly under threat from the highway construction project and thus had become active in resistance to it.

I'd previously been involved in the neighboring community of San Francisco Xochicuautla, another one of the communities in the proposed route of the highway project—a community that had been in struggle for some ten years exhausting almost all legal means of halting the project. In response to the lack of efficacy of the legal routes, and as a gesture toward

their willingness to use direct action to stop the project, in July of 2015 the community convoked an encampment in their territory on the proposed path of the highway project. As the machines had already come through the forest once, slicing like a blade leaving a path of dead and fallen trees, community members saw it necessary to build a semi-permanent structure on the route, inviting those in solidarity to participate, remaining alert to any further encroachment from the machines or riot police. I was one of the various people, made up mostly of solidarity activists from Mexico City along with local community members, who spent time in the encampment in support of the community struggle in San Francisco Xochicuautla.

The neighboring community of San Lorenzo Huitzizilapan, while struggling against the same project, was engaged in a different battle, trying to oust the political party sponsored *comisario ejidal*, or ejidal commissioner, who had approved the project to pass through the community's territory without the consent of the majority of the community members. After nearly a year and a half of conflict between the community and the ejidal commissioner, Luis Enrique Dorantes, *La Procuraduría Agraria del Estado de México*, or Agrarian Office of Mexico State, agreed to be present and recognize the results of a community assembly on November 20th, 2015. After insufficient quorum arrived to the first assembly, a second assembly was scheduled for December 7th, 2015.

On December 7th, 2015, the Agrarian Office of Mexico State, who had originally convoked the assembly and was to be overseeing and legitimizing authority to certify the assembly's decision did not arrive. Representatives from the Agrarian Office had been involved in a supposed automobile accident, and hence were not able to reach the event. This information was found out later to be false, and just one of many examples of state authorities attempting to obstruct and delegitimize the movement of the community. On that day, despite the lack of

presence of the overseeing and officiating body, community members decided to hold the assembly nonetheless, where they elected a new agrarian commission that represented the interests of the community against the highway infrastructure project. As the Agrarian Office wasn't present, and thus unwilling to certify the results from that day, they convoked another assembly for the day we were present, January 18th, 2016.

We arrived by *taxi colectivo*, or collective taxi, from the neighboring town of San Francisco Xochicuautla, some twenty minutes away. After leaving the taxi behind, we descended the hill on foot toward the office of communal lands where the assembly was to be held. There, from above on the hill, we could already see some five hundred people had gathered within the general area in anticipation of the event. The road was blockaded by a combination of cars and large stones, forcing those present including us to arrive on foot. Behind the blockade below the government building sat a small group of police cars and other police vehicles, waiting for orders from their superior command and following the community action from a distance. Some six other trucks full of riot police were on call nearby, in an intimidation tactic used against the community's movement toward self-organization.

As we entered the plaza in front of the office of communal lands, the majority of the people were standing around sharing conversation and *botanas,* or snacks, from the food carts and vendors present. Different vendors were selling cups of mango, mixed fresh fruits, hats to block the sun, and fried potato chips covered in salsa. Banners were hanging from various fences and buildings: "*Veo hombres y mujeres con hambre y sed de justicia*", I see men and women hungry and thirsty for justice; "*Lunes 18 de Enero 2016: Tierra, Agua, Paz, Justicia Vs. Corrupción, Mentiras, Despojo, Imposición*", Monday January 18th, 2016: Land, water, peace, justice vs. corruption, lies, dispossession and imposition; "*Aquí manda el Pueblo, no violencia*",

Here the people command, no violence; "*La montaña resiste! Huitzizilapan en pie de lucha!*", The mountain resists, Huitzizilapan in struggle. The environment was one both of excitement and tension, as the community was not sure whether governmental authorities would physically intervene to suppress the emerging movement of communal organization.

It wasn't long before a group of women arrived with copious amounts of food: stacks of fresh tortillas wrapped in handwoven towels to keep them warm, along with beans and meat to complete the tacos. People gathered around the women to get their share of the warm food. In a hospitable manner that I've experienced throughout the *pueblos* in Mexico, it was ensured that everyone got a plate, regardless of their role or involvement in the day's activities. My friend and I shared tacos and conversation with a *compañero* we knew from the neighboring community of San Francisco Xochicuautla, who showed his enthusiasm for the movement toward self-organization and self-determination in San Lorenzo Huitzizilapan. It was a positive step, he thought, not only in resistance against the highway construction project, but of community organization in the Otomí pueblos in the municipality of Lerma.

As the call went out over the megaphone attached to the roof of a pickup, around 250 *comuneros* filed into the basketball court that sits above the office of communal lands, where the assembly was to take place. Only those "legally registered" were allowed to participate in the assembly, a point of contention that left various people from the community expressing their dissatisfaction. The "legal registration" of participants was a product of the *Padron Agrario*, or agrarian registration, implemented by the Federal Government in 2003. As a communique from the community of San Lorenzo Huitzizilapan explains, "Fifteen years ago, with the implementation of the *padrón agrario*, only a reduced number of people make decisions that before were taken by the entire community" ("Pueblo otomí-ñätho de Huitzizilapan", 2016, My

translation). Thus, a program initiated by the government in 2003 constricted the traditional processes of communal decision-making, leaving many without the opportunity to voice their opinion.

Of the *comuneros* legally registered and recognized by the state, I was told only a small handful were women, whom I didn't see present that day entering the basketball court to participate in the community assembly. Those unregistered were forced to wait outside, while the registered filed in. Journalists were offered entrance into the assembly to document the day's activities. I was offered access into the closed assembly too, by a *comunero* I had spoken to earlier in the day who was among those legally registered to participate. After I'd told him I was doing research on autonomous practices in Mexico and was there out of interest in the community's movement toward communal elections, he was very adamant about inviting me into the assembly. As a researcher from the United States, I was often treated with certain privileges and seen as something of an authority on these matters—a construction of identity and power that often bothered me throughout my research. Why should I have access to the assembly, when the community members, of which the decisions will directly affect, be excluded? I chose to wait outside, in perhaps an act of solidarity and respect with those outside and for the internal processes of the assembly itself.

After what seemed like a couple hours, as the *comuneros* exited the basketball court, it was announced from up on the hill that the *Planilla del Pueblo* had won the face-to-face election—a group of community authorities intent on defending the forest against the highway project. This was seen as a victory for those in the community intent on defending their forest against the highway project, but even more so as the first few steps in a long road toward the

resurgence of their communal practices of decision-making against the political-party and state apparatus.

The events of January 18th, 2016, in the community of San Lorenzo Huitzizilapan, along with the broader series of events and struggles in the Municipality of Lerma in the state of Mexico, provide a glimpse into the multiple layers, tensions and complexities of communities in Mexico struggling for self-determination, self-organization and autonomy. In the case of San Lorenzo Huitzizilapan, springing from the battle to save their forest and water from a highway project, the community has begun to reengage their traditional forms of community organization within but also against the confines of the state. The unique and creative ways in which Huitzizilapan was both engaging but also resisting recognition laws, the complex ways in which gender plays out through these processes, the ongoing tension and simultaneous cooperation between state and communal authorities, all make evident the complexity of struggles for autonomy as they play out on the ground. These complexities and tensions, present throughout the autonomous milieu in Mexico, are specifically what I want to explore throughout this dissertation.

Autonomous Struggles in Mexico and Beyond:

In the last thirty years resistance struggles across the globe have increasingly framed their politics within the discourse of autonomy. In Mexico, we can point specifically to the Zapatista uprising in Chiapas in 1994, who through their internal development, and failed dialogues with the Mexican Federal government, found autonomous self-organization to be the appropriate trajectory forward in their struggle for freedom. With their capacity to reach a wider audience across the globe, *Zapatismo* has had an ongoing influence in autonomous struggles

internationally. The battle of Seattle in 1999, the global justice movement of which Seattle spearheaded, the water wars in Bolivia, the *piquetero* movement in Argentina, Arab Spring, Occupy Wall Street, Black Lives Matter, the Kurdish freedom struggle and the contemporary antifascist movement are just some of the many movements that have all embodied components of an autonomous politics.

Within Mexican territory, processes and currents of autonomous struggle have similarly gained more traction, both influenced by the courageous Zapatista struggle in Chiapas, but also by the specific histories and material locations of different communities and groups that have engaged practices of self-organization and self-management as a means to survive and thrive. While autonomous struggles in Mexico have most notably arisen as communal struggles for autonomous self-government, these struggles and the processes that make up these struggles have cut across the division between rural and urban, springing to life under a confluence of forces throughout Mexican territory.

In this dissertation I want to engage with these autonomous politics within the context of Mexico—a context of many contexts, the "many Mexicos"—in order to explore a modest glimpse into the plurality of struggles and processes emerging from below employing self-organization often under the banner of autonomy. I stress the many contexts of Mexico throughout this dissertation, to help us maintain attention to the plurality of historical locations from which autonomous forms of organization and struggle are emerging and resurging. An attentiveness to the historical and material diversity of what is Mexico, invites us to better understand the plurality of autonomies and self-organizing processes in the plural, resisting singularity or universality in our thinking of autonomous struggles.

My specific interest and contribution is to engage, explore and map out some of the complex layering of resistance politics in the context of autonomous struggles in Mexico—the internal and external contradictions and tensions, the pluralities and politics of difference in the autonomous milieu, the ever-present contradictions of my own positionality in relation to the layers of complexities of these autonomous struggles. I want to focus on these lines and sites of complexity, mapping out how they manifest in their specific contexts. Complicating the often-simplified analysis of autonomous politics—that an autonomous struggle is a space on the margins or outside the state, that autonomous politics refuse to engage with governmental and capitalist forces, that autonomous struggle can be identified by its rigid separation from institutionalized politics—this dissertation seeks to engage the contradictions of on the ground autonomous organization through their various layers, tensions, contradictions and complexities.

In exploring these tensions, contradictions and complexities, I hope to bring to light a subtle yet important critique of ideological and tactical purity, or the "who is the most radical" type of politics, that is often present in many anarchist, autonomous, anti-capitalist and anti-statist circles, particularly in the Global North. This critique arose through my own process of self-reflection, and the urgent necessity to question my own politics in the face of the complexities and various forces at play that animate autonomous struggles in Mexico. This subtle critique speaks to a more fundamental point of the necessity to recognize location, history and material context from which struggles emerge and engage their politics. It further challenges us to maintain an openness to tactical diversity, attuned to the material contexts and histories of located struggles. I want to better explore this self-reflection and self-critique further along in this introduction.

Methods:

This dissertation is led by a cross-deployment of theoretical work and nearly three years of ethnographic research carried out with(in) the autonomous milieu in Mexico. It further combines elements of historical and legal research as well as discourse analysis of statements, communiques and press releases of both government officials and communities in resistance. It is thus very much an interdisciplinary approach and consciously so.

My ethnographic work was organized around a form of participant-observation, both direct and indirect with the communities and processes of struggle of which I explore in this dissertation. Some processes, including specifically armed self-defense struggles and the workings of community assemblies, are processes internal to members of the communities themselves. Thus, while I accompanied these processes, and was present on numerous occasions to observe their inner workings, to say I was a participant is to ignore the complexities of what participation truly signifies in struggles for self-governance and autonomy in the communal context.

A good portion of my research was characterized by my participation in doing solidarity work, accompanying struggles with support, direct or indirect, without actively participating in the inner workings of such processes. I've slept in direct action encampments, participated in community radio gatherings, attended community assemblies, harvested corn and coffee with rural communities in resistance, attended press conferences, visited political prisoners in prison, shared coffee and bread waiting long hours with families in front of the courthouse, marched in the streets, helped cook for demonstrations and helped blockade roads and government buildings. I was on the organizing committee of a North American anarchist conference that brought various stripes of anarchist, Indigenous and autonomous struggles and researchers together in

Mexico City. I've too been an active participant in the free media scene in Mexico translating and spreading information to the English-speaking world regarding struggles in Mexico.

Positionality: Insider/ Outsider:

To engage in ethnographic research requires an engagement with the politics of positionality. If we take positionality to mean the specific subjective location from which knowledge production takes place, or the frameworks from which knowledge acquisition is pursued, we have to contemplate some important questions: How does one's positionality influence research agenda, research process and research results? How do relationships of power function within and through research design and knowledge development? How do we navigate the relationship between objective and subjective knowledge?

Feminist theorists have done fundamental work to bolster our thinking in relation to positionality and the intricate functioning of power through research methods and epistemologies. Donna Haraway is important in emphasizing the situated-ness of theoretical reflection or knowledge acquisition. Haraway is keen to point out the contradictions inherent in attempting to produce knowledge from a particular location that simultaneously seeks to have a more expansive impact. Haraway expresses this contradiction within the context of feminism. She writes,

> So I think my problem, and our problem, is how to have simultaneously an account of radical historical contingency for all knowledge claims and knowing subjects, a critical practice for recognizing our own "semiotic technologies" for making meanings, and a no nonsense commitment to faithful account of a real world, one that can be partially shared and that is friendly to earthwise projects of finite freedom, adequate material abundance, modest meaning in suffering, and limited happiness (Haraway, 1988: 579).

This is ultimately a question of power and subjectivity: how can we both locate ourselves within a particular position of the web of power (that is locate our vision as one contingent upon our positionality) all the while developing knowledge that serves larger emancipatory goals? Or put differently, how do we develop critical theories that take into account "…how meanings and bodies get made, not in order to deny meanings and bodies, but in order to build meanings and bodies that have a chance for life" (Haraway, 1988: 580)?

Within the midst of this contradiction, Haraway metaphorically utilizes the sensory tool of "vision" as a means to avoid this binary opposition. She explains, "Vision is always a question of the power to see—and perhaps of the violence implicit in our visualizing practices" (Haraway 1988: 585). Haraway's use of vision is different than "an infinite vision" of technological mediation, which she says is an illusion, "…the ideology of direct, devouring, generative and unrestricted vision" (Haraway 1988: 582). The vision Haraway proposes, and the vision that is useful to our discussion of positionality, is a partial vision, a subjectivity that can only then maintain any sense of objectivity. She writes, "Feminist objectivity is about limited location and situated knowledge, not about transcendence and splitting of subject and object. It allows us to become answerable for what we learn how to see" (Haraway 1989: 583). Haraway's vision is situated, a vision that comes from a specific location and is inherently partial, so as to maintain a sense of accountability.

This feminist objectivity as situated knowledge is simultaneously critical of relativism as well as universalization. The opposite of relativism is not in fact universalization. Haraway tells us, "The alternative to relativism is partial, locatable, critical knowledges sustaining the possibility of webs of connections called solidarity in politics and shared conversations in epistemology" (Haraway 1988: 584). Haraway's situated knowledge is an endeavor to look

beyond the relativism and across porous boundaries, from the location of one's vision as the starting point. This vision never closes the subject but is part of the ongoing discussion in the development of collective knowledges. She furthers,

> I want to argue for a doctrine and practice of objectivity that privileges contestation, deconstruction, passionate construction, webbed connections, and hope for transformation of systems of knowledge and ways of seeing (Haraway 1988: 585).

It is a way of learning by walking; always reflecting and taking into account our locations. As an old teacher of mine used to say, we are not all walking in the same shoes.

Throughout this research project, I´ve constantly remained attentive to the complexities of my own positionality as I traverse these various processes of struggle and the way my positionality influences my own vision and analysis. Being a white male from the global north with a somewhat unusual rural libertarian upbringing has produced certain experiences and certain understandings that influence the way I make sense of myself and my relation to others. It also has influenced the questions I ask in my research, the way I approach such questions, and the way in which I engage in political struggles (or not engage at all). Part of my experience is one of privilege—we live in societies structured by colonialism, racism, patriarchy, and the like, so I am afforded certain privileges through the ongoing existence of these structures. At the core of my ethnographic work has been a drive for constant self-reflexivity, a continual awareness of these privileges and a continual opposition to the reproduction of these privileges in my research methods and interactions.

The positions and identities that I embody, while embedded in certain historical locations, are themselves ongoing processes of articulation and becoming. Furthermore, they are situational, taking meaning relationally according to the specific context. Nancy Naples reminds us that in relation to the insider/outsider debate in feminist theory,

> …the insider/ outsider distinction masks the power differentials and experiential differences between the researcher and the researched. The bipolar construction of insider/ outsider also sets up a false separation that neglects the interactive processes through which insiderness and outsiderness are constructed (Naples 1996: 84).

In my research I have tried to maintain awareness of the ongoing fluidity of insider and outsiderness in the particular contexts and interactions I have encountered as a fundamental component of the complexities of my research. This has included with whom I've spoken, where I've engaged my work and to whose interests my research is serving.

Activist Scholarship and Dissertation Relevance:

Throughout my time as a graduate student, and specifically the time I spent working on this project, I have been haunted in search for my own political meaning. What role does a "researcher" have in social struggle? Is there a manner in which I can combine my political commitments and my academic duties? What role can I play, with my voice, in strengthening the voice of those often rendered voiceless? Or as the late political theorist Joel Olson put it, "What is the most damage I can do, given my biography, abilities and commitments, to the racial order and the rule of capital?" (Olsen). I would add to that, the ongoing rule of colonialism, nation-states and empire.

As this project developed, it became ever clearer that doing activist-scholarship, particularly in the context in which I was working, was fraught with contradictions: tensions between personal/political and institutional demands, issues of privilege and inequality, ongoing legacies of colonialism and empire embedded in dominant research designs, etc. Under the influence of Charles Hale's work on activist scholarship, I began to see these contradictions inherent in researching social struggle as an asset rather than as a menace. As Hale suggests, "A

large part of the richness of activist research come precisely from humble, forthright engagement with these ethical-political contradictions of our work" (Hale, 2008: 23). Some of the contradictions and tensions at play in my own quest for political relevance as a researcher, along with my own positionality in its various faces, forms and manifestations, have become an integral part of the following discussion on practices of autonomous politics in Mexico.

For example, I've come to see my own relationship to movements in Mexico as part of the complexity of an autonomous struggle navigating itself and its surroundings. If autonomy on some level means self-determination, including self-identification, what is my role in both studying and participating in these processes? How might my influence be an interference on the free development and self-organization of a community or collective project? How are a community movement and process of struggle and I simultaneously navigating our relationship between one another in our distinct struggles for freedom?

In the ongoing engagement with these contradictions, and through continual conversations with communities and participants in autonomous social struggle in Mexican territory, I found myself constantly reflecting on my own politics, as my own deep-seated political ideologies either made little sense within, or were directly being challenged by, the contexts and processes of autonomous struggles in Mexico. It became evident that in attempting to understand located struggles through the lens of my own historical and political trajectory, I was sustaining the colonial or authoritarian analysis that worked against the very struggles for autonomy in which I was engaged. Little by little, I came to question my own indebtedness to certain problematic methodologies and ideologies.

There were clear examples of this self-reflection. The role of the catholic church throughout Mexico, but particularly in Indigenous and *campesino* communities in struggle,

struck me and downright bothered me when I began this research. How is it that oppressed peoples can turn to one of the very forces that oppress them in search for emancipation? The old anarchist adage haunted me: "*No gods, no masters*". As I worked closely with the community of Eloxochitlán de Flores Magón, Oaxaca for example, I began to understand the church played a different role in the community than it did in the context of my own community during my upbringing. In Eloxochitlán, it wasn't the church I'd so quickly criticized in the United States, but rather a creative mix of Indigenous cosmology and Catholicism that often served as an institution or communal relationship that strengthened communal activity and communal struggle. An outright rejection of the church might make sense in some historical and contemporary contexts, but it took on a much different meaning and role in the community struggles of which I was working. Through this interaction with the influences of the church, I began to question the rigid adage, "*No gods no masters*", paying closer attention to historical and cultural context of which these cultural and political practices were being carried out.

Prior to my work in Mexico, I maintained a rather rigid rejection of any engagement with the state and its political interlocutors as a dead-end form of political action, and furthermore in contradiction to the politics of autonomous struggle. I thought both making demands toward the state and cooperating or dialoging on any level was a manner of reinforcing the state's sovereign power over decision-making. On some level I still hold these ideas close. Yet, working through the complexities of on the ground struggle, particularly in the face of extensive violence and repression as is the case in Mexico, it was made clear that different strategies were often necessary. A case in point is the community police in Guerrero which I explore in chapter 5. In the context of overwhelming violence, cooperation on certain levels with both local municipal governments and other state forces and representatives has been necessary to ward off repression

and simply to survive. The unique ways in which Indigenous communities engage the politics of recognition, which I spoke to in the prelude and will also address in chapter three, further reinforce the complex interactions between the state, autonomous forces, and other forces that animate social struggles.

There were other processes and moments that I still fail to understand, but that have become part of the complexities I've accepted in carrying out this research. For example, in 2016, I spent the last week of October and first week of November in the Indigenous Mazateco community of Eloxochitlán de Flores Magón, Oaxaca. I've spent quite some time there throughout my time in Mexico, but these two weeks were particularly special. The end of October and beginning of November is the *Dia de los Muertos* or Day of the Dead festival, a weeklong celebration of music, dance, food, and most importantly offerings to the dead. Eloxochitlán, along with most of the Mazateca region of Oaxaca, celebrate Day of the Dead with the tradition of *Huehontones*—a collective and communal practice of music and dance. Small groups of musicians and dancers move throughout the community into the early hours of the morning, stopping at every house being invited in by the residents to play a song, dance and receive the offerings from the people—usually bread, coffee and the local fire water, *aguardiente*.

What I found particularly perplexing during this celebration was the manner in which a very serious political conflict in the community seemed to be superseded by the festivities. The tensions between different families in the community, the fact that there remained seven political prisoners in jail from a political conflict at the time, the fact that many community members were forced to flee the community due to political repression, all took a back seat amidst the festivities that in many ways brought the community back together. Yes, certain houses were

avoided and certain persons remained distant, but the day of the dead festival in some sense thwarted the deep divisions and tensions in the community, albeit momentarily. These types of communal politics remain confusing to me but have become important forces in helping me decenter my own political, cultural and cosmological worldview.

Amidst these processes of self-reflection, the meaning of this project became clearer. Reflecting on my own positionality helped draw attention to the shifting layers of complexity and tension not only in my own relation to these autonomous struggles but within and between these autonomous struggles themselves. Different political ideologies, ontologies and histories intersected on various levels and in various moments within the autonomous milieu in Mexico. What autonomy meant to the community system of police, justice and reeducation in the mountains of Guerrero was different from what autonomy meant to the urban youth squatting autonomous spaces in Mexico City. Self-organization was articulated and enacted differently in the community assembly of Eloxochitlán de Flores Magón, Oaxaca from the community assembly in San Lorenzo Huitzizilapan, Mexico state; while they might share similar characteristics, the material and historical locations demand different processes and modes of action. Urban free radios in Mexico City often engaged a different form of political and organizational practice than the community radio stations working in rural Indigenous and *campesino* communities. Finally, my own understanding of autonomy rooted most prominently in the history and practice of anarchism was constructed from a different historical understanding than say Indigenous communities resisting the ongoing processes of colonialism.

Within this context, I began to see this project as my own contribution of "…partial, locatable, and critical knowledge…" to a much larger collective conversation regarding strategies of resistance to the horrors of capital accumulation, state violence and the cooptation

of social struggle. My own positionality, intellectual development and social history have brought unique contradictions to the forefront of this discussion, but similarly I hope unique perspectives in this ongoing collective conversation regarding freedom struggles within and across various contexts, histories and locations.

On a more practical level, I see this dissertation as a contribution to the historical legacy of international solidarity. While the Zapatista struggles have garnered much attention, providing a significant amount of influence outside of Mexico, other autonomous struggles in Mexican territory have seen far less discussion and reflection, particularly in the English language. With that in mind, I see this dissertation as a humble means to break with this absence, to explore autonomous practices and processes and the challenges they face and navigate in the English language from my own perspective, but in constant conversation with those whom I have shared discussion and interaction. It is my hope in doing so, we can further instigate dialogue across geographical, cultural, political, historical and social locations, between struggles of self-organization and autonomy, in pursuit of greater understanding, strength, solidarity and humility.

I see the importance of international solidarity as more pivotal than ever. As the processes of capital accumulation become ever more interconnected across the globe, it is fundamental to recognize the way in which land theft, resource extraction, industrial production, infrastructure development, gentrification, militarization, financial capital and the multiple faces of ongoing dispossession and domination are co-constituting. To that point, I see the importance of recognizing the way in which located struggles send ripple effects beyond their immediate location, interfering with the various linkages of domination and exploitation elsewhere, and inspiring resistance struggles in other locations. I draw from the thinking of third-world

feminism in particular stressing the importance of recognizing diversity and difference as an asset, while seeking relationships of mutual aid grounded in respect, accountability and shared struggle.

Practices of Autonomous Politics:

Autonomous modes of social struggle and self-organization often challenge the conventional approaches of social movement studies pushing us to reconsider how we should think about what political resistance is and what political resistance does. Struggles to strengthen forms of self-organization and self-determination within communities struggling for autonomy contest the terrain and mode of politics characteristic of conventional understandings of studies in collective resistance. As such, autonomous struggles exemplify in practice a diversified approach to political resistance and political possibility that require alternative epistemological and methodological questions. Here, I want to make a series of interventions into the methodological inadequacies of studies in collective resistance in order to stimulate our thinking of alternative modes of political organization, mobilization, and resistance that will guide my dissertation as a whole.

Social movements and revolutionary struggles that don't conform to the organizational practices of hierarchical institutions—that is leadership roles, political representation, clearly defined vertical structures, etc.—are most often understood to not be properly organized for resistance or perhaps to not be organized at all. These forms of organization have been diagnosed as disorganized, anarchic, primitive, pre-political or pre-ideological in conventional analysis of resistance studies. They are seen as failing to embody what is necessary to constitute a true political force. Uruguayan militant Raul Zibechi pinpoints this methodological bias:

> The problem is that we are unwilling to consider that in everyday life the relationships between neighbors, between friends, between comrades, or between family, are as important as those of the union, the party, or even the state itself. In the dominant imagination, organization is understood to mean the institutionalized and also, therefore, hierarchical—visible and clearly identifiable (Zibechi, 2010: 13-14).

Following this line of argument of Zibechi, an autonomous politics of self-organization requires an attention to the everyday forms of organization as in themselves the mode of political resistance. As such, political resistance is the strengthening of the forms of organization embodied in the everyday relations of an autonomous movement or community in resistance. It is a political logic that works from within and toward a politics of the everyday.

Similarly, autonomous struggles constantly respond to, and directly integrate, power itself into the life of the community. In stark contrast to the separation of powers, checks and balances, and the formation of decision-making bodies divorced from society, modes of autonomous self-organization are integrally embedded into the life of the community. French anthropologist, Pierre Clastres, found similar social formations amongst Indigenous communities in his anthropological work in South America. Challenging our understanding of primitive and civilized he writes, "Primitive societies are societies without a State; they are societies whose bodies do not possess separate organs of political power…power is not separated from society" (Clastres, 1989: 163-164). In the context of Mexico, communities struggling for autonomy continually integrate power back into the community. Decisions are made in communal assemblies, work is done collectively in a manner to benefit the whole of the community, and organs of power come from within and are part and parcel of the community itself.

Another challenge offered by the practices of autonomous politics to scholarly literature on resistance, is the rejection of a totalizing and singular social struggle or social world, necessitating an awareness of location, a philosophical openness, and a sensibility to plurality.

Mexican philosopher Raquel Gutiérrez Aguilar suggests that attentiveness to the struggles taking place in Latin America within the last couple decades requires an abandonment of frameworks that assume the singularity of movements meant to recompose the totality of a static social world, and rather the use of frameworks that open up pathways to an understanding of the multiplicity of organizational forms that are embodied in the plurality of autonomous struggles. She suggests that we can move toward this openness by approaching popular struggles as politics that engage contradictions on a multiplicity of societal and personal levels, through a variety of temporalities, and in various political spheres. This of course allows us to see practices of autonomous self-organization or other forms of social organization that contradict the totalizing projects of modernity, as practices of collective resistance.

Bolivian philosopher Luis Tapia approaches this detotalizing logic similarly, claiming the inability of capital and states to fully subsume social relations and challenging us to look for resistance in those un-subsumed organizational spaces. Capitalist and state projects of modernity sought and seek to totalize specific forms of social organization over a given territory—that is, to take what is diversified, unorganized, and unstructured (at least in the minds of statesmen) and organize it according to a specific totalizing logic. Scholars of collective resistance often reproduce this logic, centering their analysis on specific forms of organization and on modes of political resistance that derive from this form of organization.

Tapia emphasizes what he calls the political subsoil of a given society—the unarticulated, marginalized or invisible forms of sociality that escape these totalizing processes. He writes, "…this makes up what I will call the political subsoil…new practices that are organized as critique, alternative, irony, or negation of the political institutions of the social order and that, therefore, remain excluded and unrecognized" (Tapia, 2008: 85, My translation). It is here in the

political subsoil, in the unarticulated and un-captured forms of communal organization that we might better search for an autonomous politics that escapes totality and pursues and embodies plurality.

Irish philosopher John Holloway's work on changing the world without taking power works according to a similar logic. For Holloway, we must think of radical politics as cracks in the capitalist and state system—"misfittings" that open up space for alternative ways of being. He writes,

> …social change is not produced by activists, however important activism may be in the process. Social change is rather the outcome of the barely visible transformation of the daily activities of millions of people. We must look beyond activism, then, to the millions and millions of refusals and other-doings, the millions and millions of cracks that constitute the material base of possible radical change (Holloway, 2010: 12).

For Holloway, radical transformation is in the building of alternative ways of being, or the embodying of alternative social relationships. Rather than demanding change at the institutional level, changing the world without taking power relies on first a refusal, and then the capacity to build alternative ways of doing at the level and temporality of immediate social relationships. These alternative spaces—or cracks—are fissures that work according to a politics of plurality.

Aligned with the larger critique of totalized thinking, and its inadequacies in taking stock of the plurality of autonomous struggle, is the necessity to think outside of a totalized or fixed conception of temporality. Autonomous politics work according to, and actively produce, temporal rhythms that differ from those of states and capital and the historical time of modernity assumed in Marxist and neo-Marxist frameworks. Furthermore, they often resist the event or wave-based approach of resistance studies that often pinpoint the beginning and end of the lifespan of a social movement. Autonomous politics at the level of the everyday, I want to

suggest, work according to their own internal rhythms, and often remain in movement even when the demonstrations on the streets subside, or the union memberships waiver.

Speaking generally, autonomous politics might be most sufficiently thought of as a politics of construction and navigation—the physical and philosophical construction of alternative worlds and alternative understandings of what is possible, and the navigation of the layers of complexity and tensions that are inherent to any social struggle. Rather than a politics of protest or demand, autonomous politics are predominantly a politics of constructing something different, at a level beneath or in between the constituted state apparatus or international bodies of constituted power. At this grassroots level, autonomous movements actively construct alternative social relations, organizations, institutions, and cultural logics. They are the beginnings of new worlds developing from below.

The verticality of this spatial metaphor is important. Much of social movement literature sees politics as an exterior body that serves as the agent of political change. While communities or social movements can organize at the level of the grassroots, the instance in which they are seen to be doing real political work is when they engage with a power that stands above them—that is separate from them. This is theorized then as demands or claims. In this way, social movement agency and capability are grounded on the ability to demand that the political agent above and outside society make changes that will be thrust down from above onto society.

Of course, autonomous social movements don't exist in a realm where confrontation with institutional power is nonexistent. Direct confrontation is often inevitable, as road blockades or armed conflict with state authorities exemplify. Furthermore, engagement with the constituted state apparatus also becomes inevitable, as movement participants end up in jail, or certain advances can be won strategically through legal channels. These tactics though often serve as

forms of defense and exist as just one component of the larger tactical repertoire of autonomous movements.

On the whole, autonomous movements challenge us to rethink our conceptual frameworks directing us toward political resistance that isn't based upon demands or claims, actors and passives, possibilities and impossibilities. Representation and representative institutions are in fact continually rejected. Autonomous movements do most of their work at a different temporal and spatial location—at once embodied and at the level of the everyday.

Defense of Territory:

Territory is at the heart of social conflict in Mexico—both historically and contemporarily—and integral to much of the work being organized by autonomous struggles of self-organization. Conflicts over territory can be traced to the stiff resistance against Spanish colonization in the 16th century onward to the liberal reforms of the 19th century which consolidated private property mostly in the hands of foreign businessman, to the modern day neo-liberalization of Mexico leaving both land and its resources available for extraction and plunder.

In the middle of the 19th century, the liberalization of Mexico greatly expanded private property and private landholdings producing catastrophic effects for the majority rural population of the country. General Porfirio Diaz took power in 1876 and ran the country for a total of three decades: 1876-1880 and 1884-1911. His rule was marked more than anything by extensive industrialization and modernization in the country characterized by the selling off of land and resources to foreign interests. His rule brought to the forefront the struggle over land

and territory in Mexico, instituting processes of accumulation by dispossession, mostly the dispossession of Indigenous and *campesino* communities in the Mexican countryside.

The Mexican revolution which kicked off in 1910 on one hand began as an anti-reelection campaign against Porifirio Diaz, but more deep-seated grievances emerged to the forefront of the revolutionary struggle including the demand for land reform and land redistribution. *Tierra y Libertad*, or land and freedom, was the calling cry of the revolution and the recuperation of land by those who work it was the call of infamous revolutionary figures like Ricardo Flores Magón and Emiliano Zapata. Article 27 was written into the post-revolutionary Mexican constitution which facilitated the land reform addressing, albeit insufficiently, the demand for land of the revolutionary groups.

In 1992, president Carlos Salinas de Gortari reformed article 27 of the constitution which had granted communal land to Indigenous and *campesino* communities in Mexico. The reform to article 27 meant that the ejido land distribution project would no longer be protected, opening up a pathway to the privatization of ejido lands. The official justification for such privatization was the necessity of modernization of the agricultural system in Mexico, but what it meant was a threat to 28,000 ejidos and some 3 million *ejiditarios* benefiting from the communal land redistribution project. The reform laid the foundation for the subsequent implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) which took effect on January 1st, 1994, the day in which the Zapatista rebels of Chiapas, Mexico rose up in arms.

Land struggles in Mexico continue to this day with the ongoing attempts at privatization of communal and ejido lands and the selling off of rights of resource extraction to foreign and national corporations. A recent and undoubtedly clear example of this is the Bowman Expeditions. In 2005, the department of Geography at the University of Kansas received a

500,000-dollar grant funded by the US Army's Foreign Military Studies Office (FMSO) to survey and map Indigenous communal land in San Luis Potosi and Oaxaca, Mexico. The "Mexico-Indigena" project as it was called, sought to map out Indigenous lands beneath the justification that unmarked or unmapped land breeds delinquency and violence. The real reason for such project was based upon the growing organization in Indigenous communities in Mexico as well as the resource rich land which they inhabited. Unmapped, communal lands cannot be bought and sold according to the neoliberal market, but divided and mapped ones can.

The package of eleven structural reforms implemented by the current Peña Nieto administration in Mexico through 2013 and 2014 included an energy reform, another integral component of the struggles over land. The energy reform has followed the neoliberal consensus opening up the previously nationalized oil, gas and electric industries to private investment. Part and parcel of this reform is the selling off of land and resource rights to corporate interests along with the development of infrastructure projects to coincide with the new developments in extractive industries. What this means in Mexico is the ongoing privatization and plunder of communal and collective land by and for private interests.

The struggle against the dispossession of communal lands, and more generally over territory are fundamental to the processes, strategies and practices of movements and communities struggling for autonomy and self-organization. As Uruguayan journalist and militant Raul Zibechi writes, "The control of territory is the primary base from which autonomy is constituted" (Zibechi, 2007: 128, My translation). He writes further, "The land is not considered only as a means of production, breaking with a narrowly economistic conception. Territory is the space in which a new social organization is collectively constructed, where new subjects are introduced, establishing their space, and appropriating that space materially and

symbolically" (Zibechi, 2007: 26, My translation). It is with and through territory that autonomous forms of self-organization are constructed and maintained. As many movements recognize the privatization of communal territory as threats to their processes of self-organization and self-determination, the struggle over territory has only become more intense.

Following Zibechi above, territory is the space through which social relations, forms of organization and forms of existence, are developed and maintained. Brazilian geographer Porta Gonçalves sums this up well:

> As several authors have demonstrated (Haesbaert, Sack, Raffestin, Lopes de Souza, Lefebvre, Coronil, Soja, Porta Goncalves, among others) territory is not something interior or exterior to society. Territory is appropriated space, space made one's own, in short territory is instituted by social subjects and groups that affirm themselves through it. Thus, there is, always, territory and territoriality, that is, social process of territorialization. In the same territory there is, always, multiple territorialities (Porta Gonçalves, 2009: 127, My translation).

Porta Gonçalves' insight brings an important point in relation to autonomous struggles, that territory is produced through the social activity of territorialization. This social process of territorial production is fundamental in considering the ways in which autonomous struggles self-organize and actively produce the relationships and spaces in and through which they exist.

The place-based ontology of Indigenous and *campesino* communities in Mexico is fundamental to the defense of territory as an integral component of resistance struggles. While a strictly economistic view might see territory as a source of raw materials and wealth, community struggles in Mexico often understand territory and human life as interconnected and interwoven components of existence and resistance. Mixe anthropologist Floriberto Díaz Gómez writes,

> The land for us is a mother, that gives birth to us, feeds us, and takes us into its entrails. We pertain to her, and thus are not owners of any land. Between a mother and her children, the relationship is not one of property, but of mutual interdependence. Our mother is sacred, and we are thus sacred. The land as territory is part of our understanding. Each one of the elements of nature fulfill a

> necessary function inside the whole and this concept of integrality is present in all of the other aspects of our life (Díaz Gómez, 2003: 97, My translation).

Through Díaz Gómez's insight, we can better highlight the fundamental tension between the neoliberal politics of territorial privatization and extraction, and the Indigenous and *campesino* knowledge that understands and respects the integrality of the earth, it's lands and beings. This tension has been at the forefront of a great deal of autonomous organizing in Mexico, where Indigenous and *campesino* communities resist the politics of extractive capitalism by defending their territories through their own unique self-organized practices attuned to their knowledge-systems and ways of life.

Chapters:

This dissertation is organized around a constellation of questions, complexities and processes continually escaping, overflowing, and rupturing their confines. It seeks to ask what the forms of political organization and modes of political practice of autonomous movements in Mexico can tell us about what political resistance is and what political resistance does. It does so by maintaining a focus on autonomous politics as the main interlocutor. At the same time, this dissertation escapes this question, and escapes the incentive to truly define what autonomous politics is. It consciously seeks to rupture this totality or stabilization, focusing rather on processes, elements, and modes of autonomous politics of communities in Mexico that are constantly in movement. The dissertation will pursue these goals through the following organization.

The following chapter—chapter two—will serve two purposes, first to ruminate on the complexities of defining autonomy; and secondly, to offer a sort of cartography of the autonomous milieu in Mexico. Drawing from the work of feminist materialism, located

feminisms and decolonial theory, I attempt to extrapolate a loose understanding of autonomy as a series of practices that are located in specific contexts and cohere from a plethora of different factors and forces. I do this to challenge the tendencies of universalization and normative political analysis, characteristic of the social sciences, including work in resistance studies.

Chapters three, four and five move toward a more empirical approach derived from my engaged ethnographic work as a means to explore processes of autonomous struggle in Mexico that help define the subterranean politics of the everyday. Chapter three takes up the struggle of the community assembly of Eloxochitlán de Flores Magón, Oaxaca, to engage the complexities of struggles for self-determination amidst policies of Indigenous recognition imposed from above.

Chapter four turns to another process of self-organization and autonomous struggle in Mexico, community or free radio. Through and engagement with the diverse struggles from which community radio has emerged, and the spatial practices that community radios construct and embody, I analyze the community radio as a fundamental component of self-organization and autonomous struggle. Looking at the way community radio works within and beyond the immediate community space, I use the practices of community radio to challenge the boundaries of inside and outside, contesting an understanding of autonomous struggles as fixed, static or demarcated spaces.

Chapter five takes up community self-defense, engaging the distinct processes of the community police of the state of Guerrero and the *autodefensas* of Michoacan, to explore the complexities of legality and legitimacy amidst armed struggles for self-defense. Through an exploration of the way in which various self-defense groups have engaged their politics, and the way in which both the Federal and State governments have responded, I reflect on the

complexities of autonomous politics, both from the perspective of communities in struggle, as well as governmental policies seeking to regulate and control processes of autonomous organization.

Chapter six takes to task some common understandings of autonomy by trying to think through the borders of autonomous struggles, and the relationship between the inside and outside of what is considered to be autonomous. Against both a regional autonomy that fixes autonomous struggle in a particular space, and against a universalizing critique of autonomy, that sees the necessity of a global unified revolutionary force, I want to suggest an autonomy that retains both an openness and a closed-ness of its outside spaces of demarcation. This is to suggest that the borders of autonomy are never fully fixed, they are porous and always in flux. Thus, autonomy is always in movement, constantly emerging in the process of construction and navigation.

Chapter seven, concludes my series of interventions, by way of weaving together some of the component parts of this dissertation. I specifically take up the question of how processes and movements of self-organization relate to each other both within their immediate spaces but also across diverse locations and geographies. I engage the metaphor *tejer*, or to weave, to think through the interrelations between self-organized processes and movements, but also to better understand my own role as an activist researcher working within and between these struggles.

Chapter 2: Located Autonomies

The revolution was not and could not be a mechanical product of the abstract human will. It was an organic process burst with elemental force from the very needs of the people, from the complex combination of circumstances that determined their existence.

- Alexander Berkman (1922)

Autonomous oriented politics are found everywhere: from Rojava to Chiapas, from Spain to Argentina, from the urban streets to the rural countryside. Similarly, they are practiced every which way from health clinics to occupied social centers, from community radio stations to communal work, from radical bookstores to community assemblies, and almost everywhere in the spaces in between. Presently, "autonomous" has become a dominant signifier for certain modes of politics that many contemporary struggles use to define themselves. The practices of these autonomous politics and the locations from which they engage their struggles differ drastically, suggesting autonomous politics maintains a sense of ambiguity and is capable of traveling across the borderlines of political orientations and political strategies. Claudio Albertani reinforces this point:

> The practices of autonomy cannot be captured in political, juridical, or philosophical definitions. There exists workers autonomy and Indigenous autonomy; autonomy can be a youth squat in an undetermined metropolitan area, a collective of rebellious workers, or a community of *campesinos* in resistance (Albertani, 2011: 49, my translation).

If autonomy is illusive, freely working across practical orientations as well as geographical locations, what might that tell us about its politics? If autonomy almost implicitly resists

codification, how can we think of autonomy's political and social practices at a conceptual level while maintaining some sort of discursive or practical cohesion of what exactly autonomy is?

I want to approach these questions from a particular angle. Rather than seeking to define autonomy discursively and in the abstract, I want to ask in what ways are autonomous politics being practiced. What animates autonomy and thus signifies its meaning is the organizational practices of communities in resistance. It is defined in and through the practices that make up its politics. As such, I want to ask less of what autonomy is in the abstract, and more so of what autonomy does in practice, where its work is done, and how its actors seek to define themselves through their practice.

Drawing specifically from the context of autonomous struggles in Mexico, I want to follow the line of thought above to indeed suggest that autonomous politics must be thought of in the plural, and perhaps cutting against the grain a bit, I want to argue that autonomy's illusiveness might in many respects be its core strength. With a rejection of a universally applicable political program, and a commitment to a politics that is self-determined and self-constructed, autonomy adapts to different contexts, and remains in movement in the face of ever-changing historical conditions. Furthermore, autonomy is based in situations, located in particular historical contexts, and derives its meaning in a self-determined manner from its particular location.

I want to animate these theoretical insights by drawing from some of the variations of autonomous struggle in Mexico. As Giovanna Gasparallo explains of Indigenous movements in Mexico, "We speak of autonomies in the plural because there cannot exist a specific formula for them: they are processes molded by different historical, cultural, social, political and economic conditions" (Gasparello, 2009: 26, My translation). The struggle to stop illegal drug cartel

logging of the forest and remove political parties from the community of Cherán, the movement to free political prisoners and restore the *Magonista* influenced community assembly in Eloxochitlán de Flores Magón, or the resurgence of forms of community justice organized most notably around community police forces in the Sierra mountains of Guerrero, are all grounded in specific historical and practical locations that shape their particular pathways toward autonomy. As such, it seems pertinent to think of a location and situation-based autonomy, an autonomy that is animated by plurality and grows from the soil of different lands.

With this in mind, I want to mobilize the theoretical orientations particularly of feminist and decolonial theory to help us think through plurality and located-ness within the autonomous milieu in Mexico. This chapter will thus serve two specific purposes: to theoretically engage a politics of plurality that escapes the totalizing logic of a singular and homogeneous autonomy, and simultaneously carry out a cartographic exercise to map on a general level the autonomous landscape within Mexico.

Materialism, Location, and a Politics of Plurality:

The nature of autonomous struggle as a mode of social organization that seeks self-determination challenges the classical revolutionary subject of socialist theory and its descendants who have insisted on historical movement and its motivating forces as a totalizing process of subject production. Here I want to briefly engage the classical revolutionary subject, through the work of Hegel-Marx-Lukacs as a means to elucidate the limitations and dangers of a totalized political, social, or economic subject. Following that, I want to employ various insights from feminist and decolonial theoretical and political struggles, to challenge the unified and

totalized subject of this tradition of socialist theory, and to argue of the necessity to think through location, difference, and self-determination-identification in autonomous oriented politics.

For Hegel, philosophy's contribution to history is its uncovering of the development of reason in the course of history. History is reason and reason is history. It is the totality, the eternal, or the ever-present that slowly unveils itself in the clashing of dialectics, in the movement of the various smaller parts. Reason is the background, which remains untouched and uninjured, slowly engaging in its own self-revelation through the movement of history. It is only philosophy that can and has made this discovery and contribution to the understanding of history. Hegel writes, "Through its speculative reflection philosophy has demonstrated that Reason…is both substance and infinite power, in itself the infinite material of all natural and spiritual life as well as the infinite form, the actualization of itself as content" (Hegel, 1997: 11). Reason is the totality that slowly emerges rationally, and philosophy is the method by which this self-revelation of reason can be recognized and understood.

Marx and Engels' historical method is derivative of Hegel's historical reason but formulated not from the ideological speculative philosophy of Hegel, but rather from the specific historical material conditions at play within society. It is particularly the mode of production—the form of social organization meant to produce and reproduce material life—from which their historical method is based. Starting from this material basis, and not the Hegelian "science of pure thought", Marx and Engels sought to emphasize the revolutionary subjectivity, much like reason in Hegel's formulation, which slowly develops into itself from the material conditions of the capitalist mode of production. The historical movement of capitalism essentially produces the consolidation of two distinct and homogenized classes, thus producing the homogenized revolutionary subject of which is the proletariat.

Two important methodological assumptions are implicit in the historical materialism of Marx and Engels that remain highly influential in studies of social struggle. Firstly, historical materialism as a method centers the mode of production as the pivotal materiality, articulating authentic revolutionary struggle from a singular material base. This means that all oppressions, exploitations and crisis, can be traced back to capitalist mode of production. Secondly, in a developmental linearity in the tradition of Hegel's spirit, the capitalist mode of production is theorized to travel the globe, affecting different societies equally, and causing a coherent global reaction, producing for Marx and Engels the inevitable global proletarian revolution based upon the global proletarian subject.

These implicit assumptions in Marx and Engels' historical materialism directly speak to the question of subjects and subjectivity, grounding subject formation in a monolithic totality, the capitalist mode of production. In the debates that ensued after Marx and Engels' writing, many thinkers sought to retain Hegel's influence on Marx and thus retain the centrality of totality to their analysis. One of the most influential thinkers was Hungarian Marxist George Lukacs who insisted on the conceptual framework of the totalizing class struggle as essential to a revolutionary politics. For Lukacs, as for Hegel and Marx, totality was a process of the movement of history. Like Hegel, isolated facts and events were components of a larger movement of the totality. Working along with Marx, that totality was the coming together of theory and practice—the moment when the historical conditions produce the proletarian consciousness in such a way as to ignite them into action. This historical coming together of theory and practice was the praxis necessary for the proletarian revolution, and was necessarily a total movement. He writes,

> For the destruction of a totalizing point of view disrupts the unity of theory and practice. Action, praxis—which Marx demanded before all else in his Theses on

> Feuerbach—is in essence the penetration and transformation of reality. But reality can only be understood and penetrated as a totality, and only a subject which is itself a totality is capable of this penetration (Lukács, 1971: 39).

The tradition of an orthodox historical materialism—found in certain interpretations of the work of Hegel-Marx-Lukacs suggests a totalizing revolutionary subject and totalizing social struggle. These subjects are articulated by specific material conditions and instigated into sufficient revolutionary action only at a particular level of development of such material conditions. Mexican feminist theorist Verónica Renata López Nájera critiques this dogmatic historical materialism. She writes,

> Underlying such an interpretation is a tension between the revolutionary subject, product of theoretical reflection and, the revolutionary subject, present in everyday life, that does not necessarily maintain a coherency with the conceptual model, but rather has always been diverse, multiple, and contradictory (López Nájera, 2014: 102, My translation).

The revolutionary subject of historical materialism is a homogenous and hegemonic subject, a theoretical formulation moving us toward the vertical or hierarchical. In line with López Nájera's insight above, the subjects that engage autonomous struggle are on the contrary infinitely diverse, creating in movement, spaces where they can organize around their particular needs according to their specific context in a self-determined manner.

Mexican theorist Raquel Gutiérrez Aguilar provides one such direction out of the homogenized revolutionary subject. Rather than theorizing social struggle from a subject that is solely *produced* by exterior forces—for example the political subject or the proletarian subject—Aguilar suggests that we think of subjects defined within and through the processes of social struggle. She writes, "Note that I am talking about subjects of struggle and not of social or political subjects. It is the struggles that constitute the subjects, and not viceversa" (Gutiérrez Aguilar, 2015: 21, My translation). She goes on,

> To register who the people are that mobilize and resist, constitutes a very different activity than that of classifying these people into previously established categories. Thus, the struggles are, in each occasion, made up by multiple and heterogeneous subjects of struggle that, from their particularity, impress their distinctive and relevant characteristics, recovering what they know and constituting originality from there (Gutiérrez Aguilar, 2015: 22, My translation).

To push Aguilar's insights a little further, I want to suggest that autonomous struggles embody forms of social organization that are derived from, and directed toward, self-determination.

Another point must be stressed in this regard. Working within the tradition of "open Marxism" Gutiérrez Aguilar levels a critique at the concept of "social movement" in that it attempts to encapsulate open social processes into a closed concept. She argues that by fixing the concept of social movement or interpreting revolutionary struggle and subjectivity in a homogenous way, the political action or political actor is placed secondary to the theoretical framework. Arguing against this, Gutiérrez Aguilar suggests that the practices of resistance, and the actors who engage them, need to be placed in the foreground, as those that define their struggle in the practices they embody. I want to suggest that it is particularly autonomous struggles that work against this closure, organizing towards self-determination from within their various political, social, cultural and historical locations to address the specific needs in which they face.

Within this context, how we can theorize the diversified subject of social struggle breaking us loose of the homogenized revolutionary subject of classical socialist theory? How do we move away from the hierarchizing of oppressions or social struggles that obscure their plurality, diversity and intersectionalities? Lastly, how do we rethink the very nature of social struggle itself, as is part of the larger project of this dissertation, to reorient our investigative lens

toward the obscured and often ignored forms of self-organization characteristic of autonomous social struggle—that is practices of resistance that work at the level of the everyday?

Feminist theory provides insight into thinking about a plurality of located struggles, and a plurality of revolutionary subjects that better align with the politics of autonomous struggle that I am interested in here. However, as I will suggest further along, it is also essential that we push feminist theory a little further, in order to engage political agency not from subjectivities produced solely of oppression, but from subjectivities of struggle and of self-determination as Gutiérrez Aguilar has suggested to us above.

In the 1970's and 1980's, feminists in North America began to theorize and practice a politics that sought to better understand the various poles of oppression and struggle faced by women amongst their diversity. This was lead predominantly by black and lesbian feminists who sought modes of struggle and analysis that would properly address various poles of oppression. The Combahee River Collective, a black, lesbian, feminist organization was instrumental in this, theorizing the "interlocking oppressions" that were faced in the experience of those who were women, lesbian and black. They write,

> The most general statement of our politics at the present time would be that we are actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression, and see as our particular task the development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking (Combahee River Collective, 2000: 234).

Similarly, Frances Beale spoke of the double jeopardy black women faced, being located in the web of two systems of oppression: racism and sexism. The recognition that not all women experience gender-based oppression the same, and that other oppressions intersect complicating one's identity, leads to a richer understanding of materialism that overcomes the circumscribed revolutionary class subject of classical socialist theory.

Inherent in this analysis is the critique of the interpretation of the mode of production as the foundational basis for understanding one's location, and the insight to incorporate other forces that work simultaneously on peoples of different historical, political and social locations. Stevi Jackson explains in relation to materialist feminism,

> I want to argue for a version of materialist feminism that foregrounds the social—social structures, relations, and practices—but that does not reduce all social structures, relations and practices to capitalism. From my perspective patriarchal or gendered structures, relations and practices are every bit as material as capitalist ones, as are those deriving from racism, colonialism, and imperialism (Jackson, 2001: 284).

Thus, for Jackson, subject positions are derivative not solely from a class basis, beneath the functioning of the capitalist class system, but are equally molded from intersecting systems of oppression—colonialism, racism, patriarchy and the like. In this sense, subjects of resistance can't be traced to one root, the totalizing historical class struggle, but must be understood amidst the tangled roots from which various forms of oppression and resistance emerge.

This intersectional analysis of oppression leads us away from the homogenized subjects of class relations toward a more diverse revolutionary subject or a more diverse approach to social struggle. Fundamental to this approach is the importance of location, in thinking about how oppression manifests itself and how forms of resistance come into being or take shape. Furthermore, a politics of location offers us an epistemology directed toward social struggle that foregrounds diversity, difference and solidarity rather than homogeneity, totality or singularity.

Feminist theory's insistence on the importance of location offers us useful insight in thinking about situation-based struggles that I want to suggest are relevant to an autonomous politics. A feminist politics of location provides attentiveness to one's position in its various elements, to formulate an understanding of a diverse revolutionary subject and a diversity of

practices of social struggle. In making the link between situationist and feminist thought, anarcho-feminist Lynne Farrow writes, "Feminism as situationism means that elaborate social analysis and first causes a la Marx would be superfluous because changes will be rooted in situations from which the problems stem; instead change will be idiosyncratic to the people, the time, the place" (Farrow, 2012: 17). Farrow's insight suggests that feminist struggles derive from particular situations and are often formulated from within specific locations.

Recent work by Latin American feminists have pointed toward location and diversity as a necessary politics of decolonial feminisms. Locating knowledge and social struggle in historical, cultural, and political contexts that are not universalized suggests an epistemological mode that cuts against totalizing social theory. It is rather theory that is practiced and embodied from within a movement and not theorized from without. Mexican feminist theorist Sylvia Marcos writes, "It is not theory of ideas and abstract concepts, of symbolic and semiotic language. It is a theory that is spoken, lived, felt, danced, heard and touched" (Marcos, 2010: 20, My translation). This theory that is embodied in practices, derivative of particular locations, moves us toward politics that are self-determined and in tune with the politics I am suggesting are characteristic of autonomous struggles.

The diversified epistemology that stresses a plurality of forms of social struggle helps us recuperate the everyday practices of autonomous organization as in themselves forms of political resistance. Approaching modernity, or the historical development of capitalism, as a singular and totalizing movement has restricted the visibility of resistance subjects, social struggles, or forms of organization that don't align themselves with the singular or totalizing understanding of revolutionary resistance. Marx's proletarian subject, the total movement of history energized through the friction of its inner parts, produces a oneness of resistance and a oneness of results of

such a revolutionary struggle—the proletarian overthrow of capitalism the emergence of a global socialism. Approaching social struggle through its lack of unification, singularity or totality, allows us to see resistance in other spaces, that is spaces that remain obscured in this other epistemological framework. The attentiveness to other modes of social struggle is what is required to better understand the struggles of autonomous politics and the diversity of its political modes.

A revolutionary skeptic might contest that this diversified subject disallows the necessary unification of a global front against capitalism, or it is too shortsighted in addressing immediate politics relevant to that particular location. Marxist geographer David Harvey makes this argument in his critique of the Zapatista movement. He writes,

> But on the negative side the reception of the Zapatista movement has unquestionably been characterized by a certain romance of marginality, of a supposedly authentic otherness outside of the all-encompassing forms of globalization felt to surround and corrupt oppositional forces at every turn within the heartlands of capitalism…The Zapatista movement thus fell within the orbit of a wide variety of similar movement…who gained general attention by laying claim to their own cultural identities (Harvey, 2000: 74).

He goes on, "…constructing a universal political response purely in such terms falls precisely in to the trap of separating off culture from political economy and rejecting the globalism and universality of the latter from the essentialism, specificity, and particularity of the former" (Harvey, 2000: 74). In Harvey's geographical analysis, there is a necessity to "scale-up" movements, organizing around issues beyond the local and immediate location so as to form a global front against capitalism. Harvey thus returns to the totalized logic of social struggle, and the necessity of a homogenized subjectivity to organize a homogenized global struggle.

Following the line of thought of the totalizing class struggle, can we argue that autonomous struggles are isolated, self-contained movements that have no foresight into struggles outside their immediate space? I want to again turn to feminist theory to think through difference and plurality as a strength rather than as a weakness. The work of Audre Lorde, Chandra Mohanty, and bell hooks among many others, have insisted that difference in location and position, are not points that weaken resistance, but are characteristics that strengthen resistance. Chandra Mohanty speaks of solidarity in such a way:

> I define solidarity in terms of mutuality, accountability, and the recognition of common interests as the basis for relationships among diverse communities. Rather than assuming an enforced commonality of oppression, the practice of solidarity foregrounds communities of people who have chosen to work and fight together. Diversity and difference are central values here—to be acknowledged and respected, not erased in the building of alliances (Mohanty, 2003: 7).

Difference in this sense is a strength and not a weakness as might be suggested by Harvey. Or as Audre Lord suggests, "Our differences are polarities between which can spark possibilities for a future we cannot even now imagine…" (Lorde, 2009: 204). The articulation of solidarity is a process of self-determination, and in the sense I am using it here, a process that is part and parcel of autonomous struggle.

Another argument pointing toward the strength of diversity comes from Bolivian anarcho-Indigenist theorist Sylvia Rivera Cusicanqui. Writing against the politics of hybridity, Cusicanqui employs the Aymara word Ch'ixi as, "…something that is and it not at the same time" (Cusicanqui, 2012: 105). She writes, "The notion of Ch'ixi, on the contrary, amounts to the "Motley" society of René Zavaleta and expresses the parallel coexistence of multiple cultural differences that do not distinguish but instead antagonize and complement each other. Each one reproduces itself from the depths of the past and relates to others in a contentious way" (Rivera-

Cusicanqui, 2012: 105). Against the flattening out of diversity into a third hybrid subject—the flattened subject of the proletarian class struggle—chi'ixi maintains its historical subjectivity and its sense of multiple beings. It allows us a way to think through the relation between autonomous struggles and subjects, that doesn't homogenize them into a third subjectivity, but maintains a sense of conflict and contradiction that sparks energy and movement as Lorde suggests.

Located Autonomies in Mexico:

Bringing the theoretical into conversation with the empirical, I want to highlight in a modest way some of the various articulations of autonomous organization in Mexico. In doing this, I want to remain attentive to the insights above, that political subjects and social struggle are characterized not by a unified totality, but by located particularities that work according to their own modes and own rhythms. The presence of a discourse of "autonomy" in these various struggles suggests that autonomy, like feminism, is in itself a plurality of struggles and processes. I furthermore want to suggest that because of this plurality, autonomous modes of social organization have often remained obscured in the theoretical insights that rely on, and direct themselves toward, a totalized understanding.

I also want to make note that the following overview is colored by my own positionality. I have either been involved directly with these particular movements/ processes or have been informed of such movements by other means. By no means does this exhaust the autonomous landscape in Mexico, and to say I am doing such, is to work against my argument that autonomous practices are taking place almost everywhere if we have the right lenses in which to see them. Furthermore, in no sense am I prioritizing these particular processes over others.

Depending on its interpretation, autonomous practices have deep roots in Mexico reaching back to the resistance of Indigenous peoples against Spanish colonization. I agree with Mexican theorist Gustavo Esteva's insight that, "While to label the struggles against colonization as autonomous would be to colonize the past, these resistances evidently had an autonomic character, in the sense that we give them today" (Esteva, 2014: xiii). The self-organization of peoples, the everyday organization of social reproduction, and the struggle for self-determination outside of the interference of the Spanish crown all engaged practices that could be associated with autonomous politics.

"The autonomy debate took a sharp turn with the Zapatistas' uprising on January 1, 1994, in Chiapas, Mexico, when Indigenous communities politically organized in the Zapatista National Liberation Army (Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional, EZLN) stood against neoliberal globalization in defense of humanity" (Dinerstein, 2014: 2-3). In the following years, the Zapatistas began to deliberately engage the language of autonomy, outright rejecting the conventional revolutionary approach of taking power, and rather focusing their energy on the construction of forms of self-organization from below and to the left, where the heart is, as the Zapatistas poetically put it.

The organization of the National Indigenous Congress (CNI) in 1996 was a project initiated by the Zapatistas seeking to create a space of dialogue between the diverse indigenous communities throughout the country. At the time, it was grounded in further pursing the San Andrés Accords—a set of agreements between the federal government and the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) that sought a rewriting of the federal constitution based in changes meant to strengthen Indigenous self-determination. The accords were signed but never met by the Mexican Federal government, which eventually led the Zapatista movement into a

much more autonomous oriented set of strategies. A resolution from the first meeting of the National Indigenous Congress reads: “The National Indigenous Congress is a space constructed for everyone so that we find our people, so our hearts can speak, so our words can grow and our struggles can be channeled, and it is a form that serves one another to magnify our peoples and to achieve our common objectives” (Congreso Nacional Indígena, 2006, My translation).

In June of 2005, the Zapatistas released their Sixth Declaration of the Lacandona Jungle, in which they simultaneously initiated the “other campaign”, as a shadow, anti-political party campaign that ran alongside that year’s “official” presidential election. The campaign was an inclusive initiative, based on a staple of the Zapatista program, listening. It was also an inclusive initiative in the sense that it was organized around an understanding of the plurality of social struggles and the plurality of subjects of struggle.

> We are inviting all indigenous, workers, campesinos, teachers, students, housewives, neighbors, small businesspersons, small shop owners, micro-businesspersons, pensioners, handicapped persons, religious men and women, scientists, artists, intellectuals, young persons, women, old persons, homosexuals and lesbians, boys and girls – to participate, whether individually or collectively, directly with the zapatistas in this national campaign for building another way of doing politics, for a program of national struggle of the left, and for a new Constitution (EZLN, 2005).

The plurality reaches deeper:

> Yes to reciprocal respect for the autonomy and independence of organizations, for their methods of struggle, for their ways of organizing, for their internal decision making processes, for their legitimate representations. And yes to a clear commitment for joint and coordinated defense of national sovereignty, with intransigent opposition to privatization attempts of electricity, oil, water and natural resources (EZLN, 2005).

The Sixth Declaration of the Lacandona Jungle has maintained a national and international presence, serving in many respects as a fundamental influence on autonomous struggles throughout the country of Mexico, and even throughout the world.

While the Zapatista struggle and their subsequent organization of various gatherings, festivals, campaigns, congresses, etc. have had a major impact on the social discourse of autonomy in Mexico and across the globe, the diverse histories of social struggle in Mexico retain a fundamental presence in the makeup of the autonomous milieu. Throughout Mexico, a confluence of factors, elements, forces, and processes have emerged in different contexts, times and locations that bring life to autonomous struggles. Movements develop and take shape from specific cultural, historical, political, social, and economic contexts. Some are inspired and derive influence from other communities. Others begin as responses to material threats and develop into more integral movements for self-determination and autonomy on different plains outside the immediate acts of material resistance.

The southern state of Oaxaca remains a bastion of autonomous oriented struggle. This orientation toward autonomy has an interesting relationship with the state in Oaxaca, where the state constitution was changed in 1995 to allow Indigenous municipalities to organize according to their *usos y costumbres,* or normative forms of self-organization, self-management, and decision-making. Of the 570 municipalities in the state of Oaxaca, 418 are registered under *usos y costumbres*. While this legal recognition is much more complex and insidious, autonomous modes of organization on the ground in the communities remain prevalent in Oaxaca. Community assemblies maintain the utmost authority in most of these communities and as Mario Martinez Luna describes of the *Sierra Norte* of Oaxaca, forms of communalism—collective

work, collective decision-making, and collective duty administration—serve as the organizing principles of the majority of the communities.

In 1990, the cross-community organization, *Organizaciones Indias por los Derechos Humanos en Oaxaca (OIDHO),* or Indigenous Organizations for Human Rights in Oaxaca, was formed to demand the rights of Indigenous peoples in the state of Oaxaca. Drawing influence from the historical figure Ricardo Flores Magón, the organization has sought to embody the principles of autonomy, anti-authoritarianism and anti-capitalism in a mission to develop a new form of doing politics. Subverting a strictly institutional interpretation of human rights, OIDHO has radicalized the concept explaining: "Human rights for OIDHO is not only a juridical concept, but above all a concept of social justice and political struggle" (OIDHO, 2012: 106, My translation).

In 1997, the organization *Consejo Indigena Popular de Oaxaca—Ricardo Flores Magón* was formed in an attempt at a cross-organization council connecting participating Indigenous communities and organizations from throughout the state of Oaxaca. The organization came together with the participation of various Indigenous organizations previously walking their own individual paths. These organizations included: *Organizaciones Indias por los Derechos Humanos en Oaxaca (OIDHO), Unión de Comunidades Indígenas de la Zona Norte del Istmo (UCIZONI), Comité de Defensa Ciudadana (CEDECI), Consejo de Defensa de los Derechos del Pueblo (CODEP), Frente Indígena Oaxacaqueño Binacional (FIOB), and Unión Campesina Democrática (UCD).* CIPO-RFM was formed as an "...alliance with *Magonista* spirit where the autonomy of the organizations was respected" (OIDHO, 2012: 100, My translation). While CIPO-RFM has faced extensive state repression and internal conflicts that have hindered its development, the organization has continued organizing for self-determination and justice for

Indigenous communities of Oaxaca. However, many of the original participating organizations in CIPO-RFM, including OIDHO, have left due to internal disputes.

The CIPO-RFM house in the Santa Lucia del Camino neighborhood of Oaxaca City, serves as a space of encounter of the various community participants in the council, where workshops, gatherings, and organizational meetings take place. Currently the council works across some fifteen communities in various parts of Oaxaca, in mutual solidarity but also mutual inter-community respect for diversity and locations of struggle. They seek free association between the communities that make up the organization, in the exercise of autonomy under the influence of the Mexican anarchist Ricardo Flores Magón.

In 1998, the organization *Comité por la Defensa de los Derechos Indígenas (CODEDI)* emerged out of a post-electoral conflict in the community of Santiago Xanica in the *Sierra Sur* of Oaxaca. Through the years, CODEDI has organized and developed into a cross-community organization that currently encompasses nearly 50 different communities throughout the state of Oaxaca. Like OIDHO, CODEDI has taken the idea of Indigenous rights beyond its mere juridical meaning, to organize in defense of Indigenous territory and for the autonomy of Indigenous communities. CODEDI has often worked alongside and in alliance with the OIDHO organization along with various other organizations in Oaxaca struggling for autonomy and against state repression.

In 2006, the people of Oaxaca rose up in a state-wide protest making visible the underlying autonomous struggles ever-present in the region. On June 14, 2006, following a three-week occupation of the *zócalo* by Oaxaca's historically combative section of the National Union of Educations Workers, state forces (directed by the then governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz) were deployed to rid the city center of the encampment. With various tools of repression at their

disposal—including firearms, clubs, helicopters and tear gas—the state moved in to disperse the occupied city center of the teacher's union. For many, the occupation of the *zócalo* wasn't an unusual occurrence, as the teachers regularly occupied the *zócalo*, "…to demand a living wage, resources for infrastructure repair, and free schoolbooks and social services for poor students" (Denham 2008: 25). However, the violent repression was unprecedented. In the immediate aftermath of the repression, and in an unexpected turn in the minds of state forces, the teachers reoccupied the *zócalo* and were joined in solidarity by people throughout the state of Oaxaca and beyond.

Just a few days following the state repression on the teacher occupied *zócalo*, the idea was put into action of forming a people's assembly. Over 300 different organizations from across the state of Oaxaca met in what eventually evolved into (or continually evolved as) APPO (the Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca). What APPO was exactly, many weren't quite sure. "The APPO was born without a formal structure, but soon developed impressive organizational capacity. Decisions in the APPO are made by consensus within the general assembly, which was privileged as a decision-making body" (Marcos, 2008: 77). "Proposals are generated in smaller assemblies of each sector of the APPO and then brought to the general assembly where they are debated further and ratified" (Marcos, 2008: 77). In the organizational makeup of APPO, the participating organizations and individuals were diverse. "Students, teachers, anarchists, Marxists, churchgoers—everyone was invited" (Marcos, 2008: 77).

APPO's organizational structure was greatly influenced by the decision-making structures of Indigenous communities throughout Oaxaca—the majority of peoples that make up the state of Oaxaca. Delegates from a multitude of rural Indigenous communities were sent to the statewide meetings of APPO, but more localized APPO's emerged in the rural areas

surrounding Oaxaca City. Caravans were organized and sent throughout the state of Oaxaca to help build coordination between rural and urban areas and peoples.

Gustavo Esteva helps us better contemplate what exactly APPO was. For Esteva, APPO wasn't a "mass movement" as understood by the classical left, nor was it a political organization as organized from the top down. APPO was a "movement of movements" built from the bottom up and according to principles of solidarity and self-organization. Some thought of it as "…a space for discussion, reflection, analysis and action" (Denham, 2008: 77). An important component of APPO was that it didn't adhere to a reigning ideology that blanketed over the entire movement of movements. Esteva writes, "There is no proposition or goal that defines APPO; it encompasses a diversity of intentions and trajectories (Esteva, 2010: 981). APPO was more or less a coordinating body, made up of various social sectors and organizations that helped move the rebellion forward while maintaining a deeper sense of self-organization and autonomy.

Nightly barricades were put in place to secure the city from the countless paramilitary, state police, and violent groups sent in to bring the movement to its knees. These barricades weren't solely forces of security but became spaces where further community initiatives of self-organization and autonomy emerged. Esteva writes,

> On the barricades, new forms of anarchism—in both ideological and lifestyle applications—began to appear. The collectives on the barricades defended their autonomy ferociously and sometimes with a level of hostility that was hard to channel. Some groups occupied abandoned public buildings and began not only to live in them but to convert them into centers of cultural and political activity. The children and youth of these groups played a significant part in the movement, especially in confrontations with the police, which many of them were used to (Esteva, 2010: 985-986).

These barricades, served as a space of coordination, but also a space of community and social life that helped foster a greater sense of autonomy and self-determination.

Emerging from, or emerging as APPO, were multiple forms of public and neighborhood security initiatives, which also found in the barricades a space of coordination. *Topiles* were organized in the urban areas—forms of community police modeled after the *topiles* used in Indigenous territories throughout the region. These security teams were meant to protect the occupied areas—including the teachers in the *zócalo*, various radio stations, and even some government buildings that had been occupied. These *topiles* worked in coordination with other neighborhood security teams. Community justice worked something like this:

> When we detained people, or when the neighborhood self-defense committees turned people over to us, we tied their hands behind their backs and took them to the gazebo in the center of the *zócalo*. They had to stay there for a couple of hours, or else overnight if it was late, and the next day they had to sweep the *planton* or pick up garbage. It didn't really matter what they did, just that they did something (Cuautli, 2008: 101-102).

Neighborhood and community security functioned according to understandings of community and restorative justice, outside the frameworks and hands of the law and the state. It was a self-organized community security that emerged voluntarily in spaces where it was needed.

Complementing the various formations of self-organization that emerged amidst this rebellion was the occupation and re-appropriation of radio stations and news outlets. Radio Universidad—the local college radio station—was occupied by students and served as an information center for coordinating the various activities throughout the city.

> Whenever there were threats of attack people would call into Radio Universidad, which was our way of informing ourselves about what was going on all over the city, and as *topiles* we also called in with updates. Radio Universidad was our way of keeping ourselves informed about everything and also informing the population about what was going on (Cuautli, 2008: 101).

Further radio stations and government buildings were taken over and self-run. A march of mostly all women meant to acknowledge their role in the uprising quickly set their sights on the

channel nine news offices. The group of women from the march stormed and took over the channel nine news stations including television and radio where anti-government shows were broadcasted and discussed. Further groups of solidarity helped maintain the occupation of the channel nine offices bringing food and serving as security forces while the television and radio stations were self-run to strengthen coordination amidst the revolutionary uprising.

In October of that year after over 100 days of dynamic self-organization in the city of Oaxaca, the Mexican Federal government sent in federal police backed by army and navy to get a handle on the situation. Through extensive repression—jailings, disappearances, exile—the city in rebellion was crushed serving another historical example of the immense capabilities of ordinary people's self-organization and its threat to those in political and economic power.

The rebellion in was an immense feat of self-organization in the midst of revolutionary struggle. For nearly four months, Oaxaca city and the larger Oaxacan state surged against the governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz in an extraordinary embodiment of self-organization and self-coordination. Gustavo Esteva's account is too insightful not to repeat in total:

> From June to October 2006, there were no police in the city of Oaxaca (population 600,000), not even to direct traffic. The governor and his functionaries met secretly in hotels or private homes; none of them dared to show up at their offices. The Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca (APPO) had posted 24-hour guards in all the public buildings and radio and TV stations that it controlled. When the governor began sending out his goons to launch nocturnal guerilla attacks against these guards, the people responded by putting up barricades. More than a thousand barricades were put up every night at 11pm, around the encampment or at critical intersections. They would be taken down every morning at 6 am to restore normal traffic. Despite the attacks, there was less violence in those months (fewer assaults, deaths and injuries or traffic accidents) than in any similar period in the previous 10 years. Unionized workers belonging to APPO performed basic services like garbage collection (Esteva, 2010: 978).

What had started as an occupation and strike of the teachers' union had quickly become an extraordinary example of the capability of human beings to self-organize in the face of violent repression and political chaos. This wave of revolt put the issue of autonomy center stage in Oaxaca and sent ripple effects throughout the state and country.

The Indigenous Triqui municipal agency of San Juan Copala, Oaxaca was one such community that drew influence from the rebellion, along with the deeper history of resistance in their region. Declaring themselves an autonomous municipal agency in 2007, the people of San Juan Copala began to organize themselves directly under their communal assemblies electing their own authorities outside of political parties. This decision was made as a means to resist the extensive violence under the political party system that had existed in the region for decades. To accompany their pathway toward autonomy, a community radio was initiated, "the voice that breaks the silence", transmitting programs in the Triqui language.

The community of Eloxochitlán de Flores Magón, in the Sierra Mazataca of Oaxaca is another example of a community that has long walked the pathway toward autonomy. The birthplace of the infamous Mexican anarchist Ricardo Flores Magon, the people of Eloxochitlán have engaged an interesting mix of libertarian thought derivative of *magonismo*, along with the traditional Indigenous forms of communal organization that have long been practiced in the Mazateca region of Oaxaca. In the 1990's, accompanied by comrades from Spain and Mexico City, the community began to organize discussions, workdays, and cultural events around the history of resistance in the region and around the history of *magonismo* directing themselves on a pathway toward autonomy. Around the same time in the late 1990's, the community better-organized their community assembly, seeking to work toward the self-determination of the peoples of the municipality and away from the political party structures that had long pursued

influence in the municipality. Although faced with extensive repression, harassment, and imprisonment of various members, the communal assembly has continued seeking autonomous and self-determined organization of the people of the municipality.

Another prominent example of autonomous organization can be found in the Indigenous Purépecha community of Cherán Ke'ri in the state of Michoacán where various histories, forces, and processes have shaped the community struggle for autonomy. In 2011, in response to the illegal logging of their communal forests—logging carried out by local drug-cartels creating both the destruction of their forest along with a continued atmosphere of fear and intimidation—the community, lead first by women, set up *fogatas,* or burning road blockades at the entrances of the town to administer the movement of people in and out of their territory. From this, forms of communal decision-making emerged, including councils of youth, women, and elders that participate actively in the communal assemblies. The *ronda communitaria,* or community round, has taken on the role of communal policing and forest protection, running patrols into the forest to protect them from the illegal logging of drug cartels. Similarly, reforestation projects have been initiated to replant the forests with seedlings and starts that are collectively run by members of the community. A community radio station, community library, and various community-based businesses have emerged to strengthen the community's movement toward autonomy and address the most demanding issues facing the community. These issues include narco-violence, extensive immigration mostly toward the United States, and state neglect in regards to security and well-being.

On the coast of Michoacán, on June 29, 2009, the Indigenous Nahua community of Santa Maria Ostula, recuperated 1000 hectares of their traditional land. The land is rich in iron and precious wood. Furthermore, there are beautiful beaches there along the pacific coast, and

highway 200 is the strategic route to the entire Mexican Pacific coast. This land has been under dispute from various interests including organized crime, the federal, state and municipal governments, mining interests and hotel interests. In the face of extensive threats and further violence, the community saw the necessity to reorganize its community police forces to protect the recuperated land. The struggle thus has not only been for the recuperated land, but also integral to the aspect of land, "…for their mode of communal life and their right to self-determination for the pathway to autonomy…" (Díaz Carnero, 2014: 2, My translation).

In the state of Mexico, on July 9, 2015, Mexican President Enrique Pena Nieto signed a presidential decree that canceled a 1954 order guaranteeing Otomi Indigenous community land rights in San Francisco Xochicuautla. The community of San Francisco Xochicuautla sits uncomfortably between the city of Toluca (the fifth largest in Mexico) and Mexico City (the capital) where a highway project *autopista toluca-nacaulpan* has begun to connect the two urban areas. Perhaps the cities sit uncomfortably around Xochicuautla instead, as the Otomi peoples lived on these lands long before the modern manifestation of Mexico City and Toluca. Nevertheless, the highway project passes directly through the community of San Francisco Xochicuautla and was predicated on this 93.75-acre expropriation Otomi sacred forest.

The Xochicuautla struggle was not new to 2015. Since 2006, when the project was originally proposed, community members have exhausted almost every tactic imaginable, both legal and illegal, in a struggle to defend their forests, and their right to self-determination in their own territory. This right to self-determination and exercise of authority over their territories serves as a basis of their resistance to the project—a basis that is grounded in a call for autonomy.

In Mexico City, on the back of the massive earthquake in 1985 which caused extensive destruction across the urban environment, the organization FPFVII emerged in 1987 as a means to collectively rebuild the physical and communal infrastructure in some of the "red points" of Mexico City—neighborhoods and communities more or less ignored by any sort of social help from the state. Through their some 25 years of existence, the organization has developed in an autonomous manner, educational programs, food supplies, communal assemblies, security teams, housing construction projects, etc. to meet the direct needs of those living within the communities. This has all been done according to the demands of the communities themselves, and through collective decision-making and collective work of the members of the communities. Their urban location influences and motivates their vision, their needs, and their pathway toward autonomy.

In 1999, student demonstrations shook Mexico City, fueling a wave of autonomous initiatives within the context of the student movement. Auditorio Justo Sierra, in the faculty of philosophy and letters, was occupied and became the central meeting and operational space of the general counsel of the strike. As the student strike waned, the space remained occupied and was converted into what is now known as Okupa Che Guevara. The space is run by a variety of collectives calling themselves, "an autonomous space of self-organized work". They hold an endless list of events from prisoner support, workshops, concerts, a zine library, etc. Their work often chimes with other autonomous projects, processes, and struggles throughout the country and world working alongside both rural and urban autonomous-oriented projects.

Chanti Ollin was another occupied space in the heart of Mexico City, that for ten years was converted into a house made up of various collective projects, where arts and skills were shared in a self-organized manner. Known as the house in movement, like Okupa Che, Chanti

Ollin carried out a variety of autonomous initiatives from the community radio, community television program, self-organized festival, etc. along with various workshops and colloquia. Like Okupa Che, they worked alongside and in solidarity with movements throughout the country and world, sharing influence while remaining attentive to their particular location and the particular necessities that derive from their context.

In the early morning hours of November 22nd, 2016, Chanti Ollin was raided with the presence of some 800 riot police. Twenty-six people living in the space were detained, the majority released later that evening. In response, community activists and supporters set up a *plantón*, or encampment in the street in front of the boarded off Chanti Ollin building, demanding the recuperation of their space along with all the materials and supplies inside that were part of their ongoing projects. The encampment lasted a few months, where workshops, free radio broadcasts, and other activities were organized in the encampment on the street. Then on February 7th, 2017, 300 riot police and city cleaning workers arrived again in the early morning to evict the encampment. While the repression on Chanti Ollin, the House in Movement, was a devastating blow to the autonomous and self-organization forces in Mexico City, it resulted in a dispersal of energy into other spaces and projects throughout the urban metropolis. As they often say in Mexico, "Quisieron enterrarnos, pero se les olvido que somos semillas", or They wanted to bury us, but they forgot that we are seeds.

What we can gather from this very limited view of the autonomous landscape in Mexico is what I have suggested above in the beginning of this chapter, a great diversity of autonomous initiatives that derive from a great diversity of influences. Many of these struggles have longer histories of resistance against colonization, neo-colonial land grabs, and mega-development projects. Others have emerged to combat drug-trade violence or emerged more spontaneously

amidst student strikes. The example up the Oaxaca uprising exemplifies in itself a variety of influences including the militant teachers' union, CNTE, the historical struggle of Indigenous people and *campesinos* in the rural areas of Oaxaca. The influence of historical figures such as Ricardo Flores Magón, Emiliano Zapata, or Pancho Villa have a strong presence in many struggles. The factors, forces, histories and influences are varied that bring together movements toward autonomy and their accompanying forms of organization. The plurality of histories and processes is fundamental in thinking about autonomous practices that animate the Mexican landscape and in thinking about the diversity of modes of autonomous struggles.

Conclusion:

Here, in closing this chapter, I want to offer a brief self-critique by tweaking my looking glass, as a means to remain attentive to the practices of autonomous social struggle or organizational practices that fly under the radar of dominant historical, political and social analysis. The brief cartography I have offered above reinforces the community or organization as the unit of analysis in studying resistance. In doing so, again we obscure, or in some respects place in the background, the organizational practices that work below or outside the communal or formal organizational level. Again, we are faced with the difficult question: epistemologically, how do we make visible autonomous social struggle when its practices are more so forms and processes of organization that take place in the mundane, the everyday, and the ordinary? Furthermore, how do we think autonomous politics when they are often an overlapping, disorganized, and eclectic mix of relations, processes and practices that don't consolidate a cohesive whole?

Members of the *congreso nacional indigen,* or National Indigenous Congress, often sign their communiqués with the following statement: "For the integral reconstitution of our *pueblos*." In the English language, *pueblo* has two meanings: "people," or a "small town" that implicitly assumes a physical location. The integral reconstitution suggests that there has been disintegration, a loss of integrality, or certain divisionary processes and consequences. In the context of the CNI, disintegration refers to the effects of colonization and the ongoing divisions produced in Indigenous communities through the various manifestations of neo-colonialism, capitalism, neoliberalism and political party-oriented politics. This has interesting consequences of course for thinking about totality and the struggles for autonomy. Where are the boundaries of a totality drawn? Can *pueblos* be understood as small totalities? What is their relation to the larger totality? These questions I again will take up in chapter 6, but I want to reflect on disintegration to suggest the particularities of autonomous struggle both at the level of community, but also at the level beneath the community, or its parts that are smaller than the community.

In my reading and experience in autonomous struggles and autonomous practices, autonomy is better understood as processes that as we have suggested above, are inherently de-totalized. In the autonomous struggles in Mexico, it is impossible to conceive of communities or specific territories as autonomous in some cohesive sense. Particular practices of autonomy arise that are elements of larger communal life, but also often cut across the boundaries of a particular physical space or organization. Other components of communal life retain elements that would not be considered autonomous. It is thus important that we maintain a sensibility of autonomous struggle at an elemental level, where specific practices of self-organization illuminate pathways toward greater spheres of autonomy.

In the following three chapters, I want to move from the theoretical to the empirical, to elucidate this complexity by taking as my unit of analysis, organizational practices, not organizations themselves. I want to resist the temptation to think of autonomy as cohesively fixed, as it has been characterized overwhelmingly, because to do so, misinterprets the true complexity of autonomous social struggle. I will approach three specific processes—the community assembly, community radio, and community police—in three specific locations, as a means to highlight this complexity and the subterranean character of autonomous struggle on the whole.

Chapter 3: Community Assembly: The Case of Eloxochitlán de Flores Magón, Oaxaca

The structure of functioning [of the community assembly] is not described in any law, it is adapted in agreement with the necessities and requirements of the community at that time and moment.

- Alcántara Núñez

…we've seen that our governors celebrate the decree respecting our uses and customs as a grand achievement regarding our political rights. However, we also see that behind the words of this decree continues the manipulation on part of political parties of the state, and the division is advancing—in many cases violently—of our communities on part of the political parties.

- OIDHO (Indigenous Organizations for Human Rights in Oaxaca)

On December 14th, 2014, the community assembly of Eloxochitlán de Flores Magón, Oaxaca gathered to self-elect their *alcalde municipal,* a municipal authority responsible for questions related to land management, and a position that lasts one year. The community election came just one year after the end of the disastrous rule of the political-party backed municipal president Manuel Zepeda Cortés leaving the community under the yoke of repression, and in a state of division and fear. As some 1500 community members made their way into the central plaza, a *grupo de choque*, or violent group, led by the ex-municipal president Manuel Zepeda confronted the assembly. In the ensuing violence and its aftermath, two died, some eight others were injured, and thirty members of the community assembly had warrants out for their arrest.

The physical confrontation in December of 2014 was the boiling point of a series of historical forces, events and processes that had developed over some two decades in the community of Eloxochitlán de Flores Magón. Elders in the community might describe a longer

historical trajectory of community and regional conflict that reaches further back into history than only two decades. The events and processes that make up the historical movement and the particular events in the community on December 14th remain deep-seated, multi-faceted and admittedly complex. A complete story is impossible, and perhaps undesirable in our resistance to totalization and closure.

Giving in to this impossibility, I want to explore the community assembly and conflicts in the community from a particular angle. That is, I want to highlight the particular case of Eloxochitlán de Flores Magón to reflect on a deeper political tension that exists between the politics of so-called liberal democratic nation-states and movements of communal organization directed toward processes of self-determination and autonomy. I want to engage specifically with the community assembly of Eloxochitlán de Flores Magón because it occupies an essential process in which the community has employed a politics of self-determined and autonomous organization. I want to consider the relationships between the community assembly and the other forces at play that interfere, co-constitute, or repress this institution and process of communal struggle.

I will do this first by looking at the relationship between Indigenous forms of organization in Oaxaca and the state's evolving politics of recognition that seek to manage such forms of organization. I want to put the community assembly at the forefront in thinking about Indigenous forms of community organization in the many municipalities of Oaxaca, along with the way in which the state's politics of recognition have sought to bring the community assembly into its mold. I will then trace the history of this particular community assembly in Eloxochitlán de Flores Magón and explore the role it plays within community life and the larger struggle for autonomy within the community. I will close this chapter by tracing some of the tensions

between the recognition politics of the state and the self-organized movement of the community assembly.

Usos y Costumbres and Recognition Politics in Mexico and Oaxaca:

The community assembly is a traditional form of political-communitarian organization in Indigenous communities in Oaxaca and is often the bedrock of what are more largely called the *usos y costumbres,* or uses and customs, of Indigenous communities. Unlike many of the urban municipalities in Oaxaca, the rural communities maintain a unique form of communitarian organization that differs drastically from the political forms administered and organized by the state. These communitarian forms of organization are grounded in a *sistema de cargos*, or a system of political, religious and civil positions that more or less form a unified structure of communal organization. Alejandro Anaya Muñoz suggests that, "…the electoral uses and customs and system of cargos are two institutional structures related in such a way that they conform a single institutional framework, a traditional model of public authority" (Anaya Muñoz, 2006: 14, My translation).

Soledad Xolalpa Ramirez gives us a fuller description of uses and customs. She writes, "Use is collective organization, developed from and incorporated of economic, political, social and cultural aspects, and that through the passing of time, is adopted as its own to a town, community or social group" (Xolalpa Ramirez, 2002: 12, My translation). She furthers, "Custom is collective conduct, entailing practices derived from the form of organization of a town, community or social group, preserved from their primary structure and conserved from generation to generation until our time" (Xolalpa Ramirez, 2002: 12, My translation). Thus, the uses and customs of communities in Oaxaca, are forms of communal organization, derived from

historical knowledge and practice, that make up the various roles and structures of communal life—including the various political authorities.

For many, uses and customs embody an alternative manner of organizing society, grounded in communal organization and communal identity. Raquel Gutiérrez Aguilar's work on "*lo horizonte comunitario popular",* or horizontal-popular-community politics, helps us strengthen our understanding of uses and customs. She defines this under two specific axes: "The collective re-appropriation of areas of material wealth expropriated or under threat of dispossession…" and "The regeneration-re-actualization of non-liberal political forms that challenge the dominant modes of political decisions, thus disrupting the fundamentals of the ancient order of command" (Gutiérrez Aguilar, 2016: 32, My translation). More directly, the uses and customs are an alternative and traditional form of governance and communal organization, embedded in a system of cargos, with decisions made face to face in a community assembly.

Zapotec anthropologist Jaime Martinez Luna grounds these traditional forms of communal organization in the concept of "*comunalidad*", or communality—the organizational structures of Oaxacan communities under four axes: communal territory, communal work, communal power and communal festivities. These four axes are integrated into a form of communal organization grounded in communal decision-making, communal ownership and shared communal responsibility. These all shed light, in some way, on what we have in mind here when we talk about uses and customs.

Alternative forms of communal/ political organization are widely practiced in Indigenous and *campesino* communities in Oaxaca and are articulated in legal terms under the name of uses and customs, or more recently *sistema normativo interno*, or internal normative system. These

legal terms have become prominent in the context of Mexico and specifically Oaxaca with recent constitutional and legal reforms that have implemented a series of recognition politics to address the cultural diversity of Oaxaca and Mexico as a whole. Oaxaca of course, is a unique state to explore the complexities of uses and customs because of the Indigenous communities and their relation to state policy on various levels.

Firstly, the state of Oaxaca maintains the greatest diversity of Indigenous groups of Mexico. Of the sixty-five ethnic groups in all of Mexico, eighteen of them belong in Oaxaca. Sixteen different Indigenous languages are actively spoken along with a great diversity of dialects. Furthermore, and perhaps most importantly, traditional practices of communal organization are actively engaged including decision-making in the communal assembly, communal work, alternative educational practices and communal festivities. These forms of organization, differ drastically from the logics of state and capitalist organization, making Oaxaca a state with a long history of social strife and resistance embedded in communal forms of organization and resistance.

Amidst this social strife and resistance, and within the context of communal organizational practices in Oaxaca, autonomy is and has been a node of various discourses and circuits. My interest here in the beginning of this chapter is to look at the way in which the federal and state institutions of Mexico and Oaxaca have dealt with, and sought to recognize, Indigenous autonomy under the banner of uses and customs, or in most recent official discourse, internal normative systems. As I move along in the chapter, and in this dissertation as a whole, I want remain attentive to an autonomy of above—constituted, solidified and inscribed from outside of the located autonomous struggles—and an autonomy from below—that is self-determined and changes in movement its particular practices and processes of organization. In

doing this, I want to navigate some of the layers, processes and complexities of this particular community and autonomous struggle.

In the 1980's and 1990's, under a variety of forces and influences, including growing Indigenous resistance in Mexico, as well as changes in policy across much of Latin America, the Mexican government began to make changes to its policies toward Indigenous communities. In 1990, the government of Carlos Salinas de Gortari approved through the federal congress, the convention 169 of the International Labor Organization, the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention. The International Labor Organization is a specialized agency of the United Nations system whose, "…mandate includes developing and establishing international labor standards to improve the living and working conditions of people around the world. These standards take the form of conventions and recommendations that establish minimum international standards on a range of work-related issues…" (United Nations Human Rights). It is important to note that ILO conventions are legally binding when signed by governments, and recommendations are mere "…non-binding guidelines for the development and application of national policy and practice" (United Nations Human Rights).

In 1992, legislatures reformed article four of the Federal Constitution adding a reference to the pluri-cultural character of the Mexican nation. The added paragraph to the article states,

> The Mexican Nation has pluri-cultural composition originally founded in its Indigenous Peoples. The law will protect and promote the development of their languages, cultures, uses, customs, recourses, and specific forms of social organization, and will guarantee members of such communities the effective use of the jurisdiction of the state… (Xolalpa Ramirez, 34-35, My translation).

Interestingly, that same year, article 27 of the Mexican constitution was also reformed—an article that more than any other marked the gains won during the Mexican revolution of 1910 ordering land to be redistributed to *campesino* communities. The reform of article 27 set the

stage for the implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement and was a direct attack on Indigenous and *campesino* communities, their lands and their alimentation. Thus, while seemingly progressive policies were instituted to recognize the cultural, social and political diversity of communities in Mexico, the changes were more cosmetic than substantial, and more often than not lacked institutional processes to actually implement changes at the ground level.

A series of movements from below in the second half of the 1980's and early 1990's served as the catalyst for the constitutional and institutional reforms that ushered in the politics of recognition in Mexico. Extensive organization around the centennial anniversary of the Spanish conquest of the Americas emboldened Indigenous organizations and communities in movements of resistance. The Zapatista uprising in Chiapas on January 1st, 1994, forced the Mexican federal and state governments to engage more seriously in conversation and action around the recognition of Indigenous peoples. This uprising sent shock waves of fear across the state governments of particularly the southern mostly-indigenous states, including of course, Oaxaca. Thinking the Indigenous uprising in Chiapas might take root into an already well-organized Indigenous population, the state government of Oaxaca took steps that year to heed the growing fear and potential for rebellion.

On March 21, 1994, the governor of Oaxaca proposed a new agreement with the Indigenous communities in Oaxaca in order to develop a new relationship between them and the state government. This new accord was presented symbolically, in the *Sierra Norte* of Oaxaca, on the birthday of Benito Juarez, the Indigenous ex-president nationally known for his projects of modernization and Indigenous assimilation.

On May 13, 1995, article 25 of the state constitution was reformed, in which, in the last paragraph, the following text was included, "The law will protect the traditional and democratic

practices of Indigenous communities, those which until now have been utilized for the election of their local governments" (López Bárcenas, Elecciones por Usos y Costumbres en Oaxaca, My translation). Following this constitutional reform, and to fulfill its demands, the Oaxacan Code of Political Institutions and Electoral Procedures was modified with the introduction of a chapter four that dealt directly with Indigenous communities and their uses and customs. This modification allowed those municipalities previously organizing under uses and customs to register candidates without the intervention of political parties.

In March of 1997, legislators reformed articles 25, 29, and 98 with the intention of: "…making more clear, explicit and operable the electoral rights of the Indigenous peoples of Oaxaca" (Gobierno del estado de Oaxaca, 1998, My translation). Then at the end of September, an adjustment to chapter four was approved in the Oaxacan Code of Political Institutions and Electoral Procedures, "…to give better functionality and clarity to the order of the electoral process by *usos y costumbres*" (Gobierno del estado de Oaxaca, 1998, My translation). Through these changes, two distinct electoral pathways were instituted—that of political parties and that of uses and customs.

On the heels of these electoral reforms in Oaxaca, in 1998, the *Ley de Derechos de los Pueblos y Comunidades Indígenas del Estado De Oaxaca,* or the Law of Rights of the Indigenous Peoples and Communities of the State of Oaxaca, was formulated and implemented to clarify certain aspects of the recently reformed article 16 of the State Constitution of Oaxaca. The new law addressed various issues pertaining to Indigenous communities in Oaxaca from questions of autonomy, culture and education, to natural resources, internal normative systems and Indigenous women.

The politics of Indigenous recognition in Oaxaca throughout the 1990's was overshadowed by the Zapatista uprising in 1994 and by the subsequent on and off dialogues between the Mexican federal government and the Zapatista Army of National Liberation. With the government's failure to smash the Zapatista uprising after January 1st 1994, and the massive national and international attention and support received by the Zapatistas, the government conceded to dialogue with the Zapatista Army of National Liberation. Through three phases of dialogue and development, both parts negotiated and signed the San Andrés Accords in February of 1996. As Francisco López Bárcenas makes clear, "The forums ended in giving birth to the National Indigenous Congress which formalized during the assembly carried out in Mexico City October 9-11, 1996" (López Bárcenas, 2016: 67, My translation). As time passed, and the government showed its unwillingness to fulfill the agreement, the EZLN broke off dialogue with the government in September of that same year, until the government fulfilled its commitments.

On July 2, 2000, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), lost the elections to the National Action Party (PAN). This was politically and historically significant, as the PRI had held presidential power for some 71 years since the end of the Mexican revolution. With this change in power, and with the PAN candidate running on the commitment to fulfill the San Andrés Accords, the proposal again was sent to the government. On August 14, 2001, after debate in the Senate that watered-down much of the proposal, the government published the constitutional reform that modified various articles of the constitution regarding the rights of Indigenous peoples.

The changes made in federal and Oaxacan state policies in regards to Indigenous peoples throughout the 1990's and into the 2000's has often affected in complex ways Indigenous communities on the ground in the state of Oaxaca. The question of autonomy sits at the heart

some of these complexities. As Francisco López Bárcenas suggests, “Cancelling the possibility of recognition of the rights of Indigenous peoples, as well as dialogue using the institutional channel, diverse Indigenous organizations called for the construction of autonomy in practice” (López Bárcenas, 2015: 127, My translation). While in many instances, autonomous processes, practices and organizations were already underway, the failure of the San Andrés Accords, and the EZLN’s disengagement from dialogue with the Mexican federal government did indeed energize the discourse and practice of autonomous politics and autonomous struggles throughout Mexico.

In the following section, I want to explore the specific case of the municipality of Eloxochitlán de Flores Magón, in the Sierra Mazateca of Oaxaca, as a means to better delineate the tensions between the recognition of uses and customs administered from above, and this particular example of autonomous organization from below. I want to focus specifically on the communal assembly as a process of organization in its struggle for autonomy. In doing this, we can ask larger questions about autonomies and their movements in relation to other societal and political forces.

Eloxochitlán de Flores Magón, Oaxaca:

Eloxochitlán de Flores Magón is a municipality in the Sierra Mazateca, in the northern part of the state of Oaxaca—located just near the borderlands of Oaxaca, Puebla and Veracruz. While maintaining a population of just somewhere around five thousand inhabitants, the municipality of Eloxochitlán de Flores Magón is dispersed into 24 different neighborhoods and two municipal agencies. The municipal agencies, while part of the municipality, have some independence in terms of political power from the municipal center of Eloxochitlán de Flores

Magón. Eloxochitlán de Flores Magón, also, is the name of the largest town in the municipality, which serves as the municipal seat, holding the municipal government buildings.

It is important to note that the Eloxochitlán de Flores Magón was the birthplace of Mexican anarchist Ricardo Flores Magón in 1874. One community member in his 90's I spoke to on various occasions reflected on this history, telling me in what part of the community Magón had been born, and more about the historical context in which the Magón family lived in the community. At the entrance of the community you are met with a large statue of Ricardo Flores Magón holding his seminal newspaper, *Regeneración*. The central plaza too is adorned with another statue of Ricardo Flores Magón, various schools in the community are named after the infamous anarchist, and even the collective taxis that run from Eloxochitlán to the nearby hub of the Sierra Mazateca, Huautla de Jiménez, are too adorned with the image of Ricardo Flores Magón on both sides of the vehicle. While these points may be superficial, the influence of Ricardo Flores Magón is more than just symbolic, something that will influence the story of the community assembly of Eloxochitlán de Flores Magón.

The municipal center of Eloxochitlán de Flores Magón sits in a valley with a small river running along the valleys edge. The valley is surrounded by steep hills that are crisscrossed by narrow dirt walking trails where the majority of the people in the municipality travel to and from their homes on foot. The trails cut through and are surrounded by *milpas* (the traditional form of planting corn, beans and squash together in the same plot) and other crops, perhaps the most prevalent being coffee. While the municipal center is the most accessible with a paved road, the surrounding neighborhoods in the hills and mountains are mostly accessible by these trails and dirt roads in poor condition, making some peoples' trips to the municipal center a two to three-hour walk.

The municipal center is accessible by one main paved road that runs some fifteen minutes out to highway 182—the highway connecting Huautla de Jiménez and nearly two hours down the mountain, Teotitlán de Flores Magón. The paved road that runs to Eloxochitlán de Flores Magón from highway 182 is periodically blocked by mudslides from the heavy rains that are common in the Sierra Mazateca of Oaxaca. The municipal center is made up of various schools, stores, bakeries, *tortillerias*, internet access points, a pharmacy, and other various small businesses. The central plaza sits on the high point in the valley, where the municipal government buildings are housed, a basketball court and a church. There on the basketball court a community market is set up two days a week where people form the surrounding neighborhoods bring their goods to buy and sell. Also, there on the basketball court community elections are held when the time comes to rotate municipal authorities.

I first came to Eloxochitlán de Flores Magón in the summer of 2016. At that point, various political conflicts had battered the community for ten years, most viciously since 2010, with other conflicts reaching back as far as many people in the community could remember. Twelve members of the community assembly were in jail, with others having active arrest warrants out for them. The repression on the community assembly, which continues to this day, has drastically influenced the activity of the community assembly. With members of the community assembly in prison for the very act of organizing, along with the fear that involvement with the assembly could lead to that same result for others, many people have retreated from direct involvement.

The political conflict has also had other effects on the movement and rhythm of community life. People avoid parts of the community out of fear, while communal activities that would regularly serve as part of the social cohesion of the community such as basketball games

or the weekly markets are avoided and thus attended by less people. Many people have been forced to abandon the community out of fear of detention or harassment, while others who have stayed have been forced to drastically change the order of their daily lives. I was warned on various occasions to not go to parts of the community, or if anyone asked, not to say who I was staying with. Often being the only light-skinned foreigner in the community, I was frequently told to say I was a tourist if anyone asked and to be careful walking alone at night.

The history of the community assembly in Eloxochitlán de Flores Magón is embedded within a long history of historical development and is the product of an intertwining of various forces, processes and modes of organization. As was suggested in the previous chapter, the community assembly in Eloxochitlán has developed from its own political, cultural, social and historical context that makes its struggle unique, and its challenges and obstacles its own. Thus, the formation of the community assembly, and the processes which give life to this particular autonomous struggle, are rooted in a specific location and are responding to specific concrete and immediate struggles.

The community assembly in Eloxochitlán originated from a history of various roots, and has developed in a complex manner, often responding directly to the necessary tasks at hand. In 1988, the coffee producers' organization, *Union de Communidades Campesinas Marginadas* (UCOCAM), was organized as a means to better coordinate coffee growers in Eloxochitlán de Flores Magón. After just a couple years, it was made up of nearly 1000 community members. The organization ran various projects, one of which was the formation of a women's organization within UCOCAM. They ran various workshops including tortilla-making, coffee cultivation and the like.

In 1992, as a result of the growing influence of UCOCAM in the community, the organization garnered enough support in the community to elect a municipal president from within its organization. This development exemplifies the interconnectedness of the political and economic structures in Eloxochitlán and in many of the Indigenous and *campesino* communities in Mexico where forms of organization might emerge in the economic sphere but simultaneously serve to strengthen organization in the political and social spheres.

In 1996, amidst the constitutional reforms that allowed municipal elections according to uses and customs, Eloxochitlán almost immediately registered as such. As stated in the local publication of the Magonista Assembly: "…in 1996, Eloxochitlán was one of the first five municipalities of the 570 of Oaxaca that declared themselves for uses and customs, of course with the active participation of the community assembly as the maximum organ of decision-making" (Nguixó, March 1999, My translation).

From 1997-2003, Eloxochitlán experienced a great influx of organizational initiatives, mostly derivative from the history and legacy of Ricardo Flores Magón, and heavily influenced by activists and organizations from outside the community. In 1997 and 1998, anarchists from Spain, in coordination with other international and Mexican anarchists began to involve themselves in the politics of Eloxochitlán. These "foreign" activists worked in coordination with mostly teachers from the community of Eloxochitlán to develop various organizational initiatives in the community relevant to anarchist and autonomous politics.

Conferences/workshops were organized with the support of foreign anarchists, anarchist and media collectives from Mexico City, and local support led by teachers. In 1998, to better coordinate various initiatives in the community, a "Magonista space" was organized by a group of teachers from the region. Also, in 1998, the community began to run yearly caravans to the

gravesite of Ricardo Flores Magón in Mexico City to commemorate the anniversary of his death and carry on his legacy in the consciousness of the community.

In 1999, the student strike in UNAM (the largest university in Latin America located in Mexico City), organized against tuition increases led to the formation of various organizations and radical spaces in Mexico City including Ké Huelga Radio, Okupa Che, and to some degree the Autonomous Magonista Collective (CAMA). This student strike and the subsequent organization emerging from the strike would have a lasting impact on the organizational initiatives that were beginning to take root in Eloxochitlán de Flores Magón.

In August of 2001, the community radio *Nguixó* took to the airwaves. The radio station was formed and first transmitted with the help of Ké Huelga Radio from Mexico City. After which, and with the support of the community assembly, the radio team was able to acquire their own transmitter. Furthermore, the Autonomous Magonista Collective (CAMA) in Mexico City provided extensive material and moral support in the formation and growth of the community radio.

From 1999 onward into the early 2000's, forums and cultural events continued to be organized in coordination with other organizational initiatives in the community. In 1999 a four-day event, "*Jornadas Magonistas por la Autonomia*", or Magonista Workdays for Autonomy, was organized and held both in the building of UCOCAM as well as in the central plaza. Throughout the four days, discussions were had regarding autonomous struggle, state terrorism and uses and customs in Indigenous communities. Furthermore, documentaries were shown, workshops were organized and a concert was held on the final day.

In September of 2003, a similar event was held, entitled *Magonismo y Autonomia*. This took place across three days from September 14th to September 16th. Similar to the event in

1999, discussions were had regarding *magonismo* and autonomous and Indigenous struggle. In addition, workshops were organized around topics that included literature in Indigenous languages, community radio production and introduction to independent journalism. Food was served, music was played and a productive combination of work and festivity prevailed.

Throughout the middle of the decade, Eloxochitlán de Flores Magón continued with its communal organization, but was overshadowed by the rebellion that took place in 2006 in the capital of Oaxaca. Much of the organizing initiatives, particularly those coming from outside the community, shifted their attention to the rebellion in Oaxaca and the subsequent struggles of which the rebellion influenced—an interesting point that highlights some of the complexities of organizing from inside and outside a community.

In 2010 began a wave of political party influence in the community of Eloxochitlán de Flores Magón. With the support of political party money from the capital of Oaxaca, Manuel Zepeda Cortés, a teacher and member of the community, began to organize parties and events in his house in the community where political support was basically purchased through gifts and other economic incentives. In 2010, Manuel Zepeda Cortés won the election in the community with an unusual 1/3 of the votes of the community. Denying integrated power in the organization of the community government, meaning others who received votes in the community election couldn't actively participate in the communal-governmental structure, a political conflict was instigated in the community—a conflict that energized the community assembly, and in many respects catapulted it into another sphere of organization and activity.

Zepeda Cortés' ascent to power, and his unwillingness to follow the conventional sharing of power in the municipal seat, lead to heightened organization of the community assembly, that sought to maintain a more communal administration of political power and political decision-

making. Within this context, repression followed. In 2012, a member of the community assembly, Pedro Peralta, was detained, tortured and imprisoned on the fabricated charges of possession of a high-caliber weapon restricted solely for military use. Following his detention, the community assembly heightened their organization, demanding the freedom of Pedro Peralta, carrying out various actions in the community.

On November 20th, 2012, as a bus filled with members of the community assembly prepared to make the journey to Mexico City to commemorate the death of Mexican anarchist Ricardo Flores Magón, the bus was attacked by a violent group lead by Manuel Zepeda and the municipal police. Various people were injured, some seriously, in this act that forms part of a long series of aggressions against the community assembly and its efforts of communal organization.

History and Practice of the Community Assembly:

The community assembly is just one of various political-communitarian institutions that have deep roots in Indigenous and *campesino* communities both in Oaxaca, and Mexico more generally. As I suggested above, the community assembly is part and parcel of the *sistema de cargos* and *usos y costumbres* that organize the collective life of the community. However, the community assembly can be seen as the center of these institutions, as it is there where decisions are made, issues are discussed, political authority is administered, and problems are resolved. Jaime Martinez Luna writes, in talking specifically about the Zapotecos in the Sierra Norte of Oaxaca, "In our communities, power is a service, it is the execution of the guidelines of an assembly, of a collectivity" (Martinez Luna, 2003: 135, My translation). The community

assembly is thus the ultimate authority in many communities of Oaxaca, and thus the people themselves are the ultimate authority through this institutional arrangement.

Community assemblies vary from community to community, thus maintaining their diverse and unique structural and practical forms. Furthermore, community assemblies aren't fixed institutions with inflexible rules, but develop and transform according to the interests and demands of its participants. David Recondo writes,

> When attending community assemblies, our attention is called to the manner in which the rules of political communitarian organization are constantly discussed and renegotiated—that is both the formal election procedures and the criteria of eligibility and citizen participation. The *usos y costumbres* are not static, contrary to what one might think as a spectator. The constant reference to tradition or custom as an element of legitimation hides a reality of permanent change (David Recondo, 2001: 101, My translation).

What is the role of the community assembly and what practices does it carry out? The community assembly should be understood as one of various communal forms of organization that remain vibrant in Indigenous communities in Oaxaca. Perhaps it is best to understand these various communitarian forms of organization as a sort of interconnected network that strengthens and maintains the communal identity. As Canedo Vásquez puts in, in summing up these interconnected relations: "The assembly, community positions, communal work, celebrations, and communal territory are transversal and fundamental elements that permit us to understand the "bodily spirit" that is maintained in the community" (Canedo Vásquez, 2008: 423, my translation).

The community assembly of Eloxochitlán de Flores Magón, as all communal and autonomous forms of organization and struggle, maintains a unique set of characteristics derivative of its particular historical location and development. As I expressed above, the community assembly emerged from a combination of forces—productive organizations engaging

their organizational forms into the realm of politics, teachers in the community re-exploring the ideas of Ricardo Flores Magón, along with foreign anarchists and activists from Mexico City engaging in organizational and solidarity initiatives in the community. Furthermore, the re-emergence of the community assembly in Eloxochitlán de Flores Magón was also a resurgence of traditional forms of organization that have existed historically much before the historical panorama I have provided above.

Most importantly, the recent history of repression against the community assembly in Eloxochitlán de Flores Magón has overwhelmingly influenced its current make-up, character and movement. At the moment, seven members of the assembly remain in prison, while many others have either been forced from the community due to ongoing repression or fail to participate in assembly activity due to fear of further repression. Within this context of political repression, the assembly has been fragmented and dispersed.

I spent much time in the community of Eloxochitlán de Flores Magón, sharing stories with members of the community assembly and family members of political prisoners affected by the repression against the assembly. The various families I stayed with are all Indigenous *campesinos*, working the land to make their daily bread. They often transfer back and forth speaking both Spanish and Mazateco depending on the context. We'd often share conversation amidst work, walking to and from different plots of land planted with coffee crops, cracking and removing macadamia nuts from their shells to be sold by the kilo in some far-off urban center (a crop that has been recently introduced in the region), cooking different kinds of meats to be sold in the community, harvesting corn, or examining new coffee plants that would soon be transplanted to their respective plots to be planted. Between the day's daily work activities, we'd

often talk over seemingly constant cups of coffee being offered and served in every household in the community.

Through the conversations, I eventually came to better understand the complexities of the community assembly in Eloxochitlán de Flores Magón. While in Mexico City for example, those doing solidarity work with the prisoners often simplified the struggle and conflict, speaking about the autonomy of the community assembly in absolute terms, the conversations I shared with those in the community often portrayed a much more complex situation—complexities that are testament to the realities of on the ground political and social struggle.

The community assembly of Eloxochitlán de Flores Magón can be better understood as an assembly of organizations and individuals, that might have different interests, but come together to discuss them in a collective manner. The community assembly, while made up by some groups and individuals that have political party affiliations, reject political party interests or political party lines being pursued within the assembly. As Rudolfo told me as we cracked macadamia nuts behind his home, "The assembly is marked by its plurality. Various groups and organizations participate, but there is no relationship with the government¨.[1] When asked about the influence of the ideas of anarchist Ricardo Flores Magón on the practices of the community assembly and community organization, Rudolfo responded half-jokingly: "There is an influence, but it is subtle. We aren't raising the anarchist flag above the community assembly. If we did, the military would likely arrive".[2]

The assembly, in its more active moments, met every week, usually on Sunday. Anyone present at the community assembly could make a proposal to the larger group. From that proposal, the matter was discussed and things were decided by voting through the raising of

[1] From an informal interview carried out in 2017.
[2] From an informal interview carried out in 2017.

hands. The issues raised reflect the issues present in the community at that time. The issues were derived and resolved from within the community. As the community assembly had much overlapping influence with the union of coffee growers, issues regarding the coffee trade often took a principal position in weekly discussions.

The community assembly, in its more active phase, was linked directly to other forms of communal organization in the community. For example, the community assembly served as a means to better organize *faenas,* or community work projects, where community assembly members provided their labor in a voluntary manner to carry out necessary projects in the community. These projects might include cleaning the streets of the community, helping plant or harvest a communal crop, or helping assist in cleanup efforts after strong storms that are common in the Sierra Mazateca of Oaxaca. The space of the community assembly, being linked historically with the UCOCAM organization, also served as a means to better coordinate the production and distribution of coffee produced by those affiliated with the assembly. The community assembly often organized events to celebrate Mother's Day, Children's day, and other holidays to further strengthen the communal spirit and the community assembly as a whole.

The practices of the community assembly, perhaps more so its temporal rhythms, have been molded, at least partially, into the legal framework implemented by the recognition politics of the Oaxacan state in the second half of the 1990's. As Juan, a younger community member who had been involved in various organizational initiatives in the community, explained to me, "Organizational energy in the community was greatly heightened by the passing of legislation recognizing Indigenous uses and customs".[3] The introduction of such legislation, thus

[3] From an informal interview carried out in 2017.

manifested itself in conflicting ways in Eloxochitlán. On the one hand, it motivated organizational forces in the community, giving strength to a resurgence of a more active community assembly. On the other hand, the legislation regulated the rhythms of the assembly, determining election cycles and processes under the guise and regulation of the state government in Oaxaca. This particular tension I will turn to more below.

Another complex component of the recent history of the community assembly in Eloxochitlán de Flores Magón, has been the relationship with the seat of the municipal president. Through my discussion with various members of the community assembly, there was often a reflection of when they had one of "their" people in the position of community authority—meaning someone active in the community assembly and not somebody working beneath the command of political parties. Often times, organizational initiatives in the community, including the *Jornadas Magonistas* and other events celebrating radical history and social struggle, were influenced by that political position. If someone more in line with the community movement or the history of Magón, etc. was the municipal president, there was often more activity around these issues, including at times direct support from the municipality. Other times, as is the case at the current moment, organizational initiatives were few and far between due to repression and suppression of community organization by the particular municipal president at that time.

The struggle for municipal authority in the position of municipal president, from my perspective, has had a negative effect on the practices of the community assembly. With money coming from state and federal governments to help fund the workings of the municipal government, economic incentives often influence the quest for positions of municipal authority. The effect of this financial influence, has left the community more reliant upon the state and federal governments, but more importantly, has created certain financial incentives to strive for

the position of municipal president. At the moment, the community assembly, at least in its public face, has been usurped by a certain group of people striving solely for municipal presidency, while others have had to disengage from activity due to political repression.

Autonomy from Below, Autonomy from Above and the Complexities In Between:

The struggle and repression of the community assembly of Eloxochitlán de Flores Magón exemplifies a deeper and undeniable tension between the supposed *"sistemas normativos internos",* or internal normative systems, administered and recognized by the state, and the self-determination of Indigenous peoples organized and enacted from below. It is through various channels that the state and its functionaries maintain certain levels of influence over Indigenous communities, while hiding this influence under insidious recognition laws that supposedly grant the rights of self-organization and self-determination.

The specific case of Eloxochitlán de Flores Magón represents, among other things, an example of the historically prevalent use and influence of "*caciques",* or local bosses, as a tool of state influence in Indigenous and *campesino* communities. Mexican anthropologist Benjamin Maldonado explains, "Caciques are representatives of the community with the outside as they are the channel through which the political and economic exterior can develop relations with the community; including, to displace the power of the assembly and manipulate the authorities, the caciques are the informal power" (Maldonado Alvarado, 2002: 23, My translation). Caciques have a long history of influence, reaching back to the Spanish colonial administration which structured local politics with local representatives obedient to the colonial administration.

As Maldonado suggests, historically, caciques were a means for the state to have their fingers in the local politics of the community and have the direct line of access and

communication through the cacique figure. Maldonado continues: "The principal problem with these false representatives is not in their non-existent appointment, but that they are not representatives of the Indigenous people before the state but the reverse, they represent the state before the Indigenous people" (Maldonado Alvarado, 2002: 23, My translation). This is fundamental. The figure of the cacique, is a historical figure used by the state to administer certain levels of power within the internal functioning of communities. It is a level of power and influence that works from outside the community inwards. In a very real sense, it is a direct threat to self-determination and autonomy.

While in the case of Eloxochitlán de Flores Magón, external political interests have managed to infiltrate the community through this particular cacique, thus impeding the struggle of the community assembly, the very discourse of the laws that legalize, administer and regulate the uses and customs of Indigenous communities maintains Indigenous communities in a paternalistic relationship with the state. Better said, an impediment to autonomous self-organization is inherent in the language of the State Institution of Elections and Citizen Participation in Oaxaca (IEEPCO) regarding elections by uses and customs.

This paternalistic relationship between the state, and communities organizing according to their internal normative systems, is quite evident in the language of the laws themselves. Take for example the *Ley de Derechos de los Pueblos y Comunidades Indigenas del Estado de Oaxaca* (Law of Rights of the Indigenous Peoples and Communities of Oaxaca) and its interpretation of autonomy:

> Autonomy is not something that can be asked of someone or that can be given. In the definition of autonomy recognized in section IV of this article, it is established with total clarity and precision that autonomy is an expression of free determination of Indigenous peoples and communities, a condition and a right that is inherent to all people, as has been recognized internationally. At the same time, as is signaled in this article, without margin of interpretation, the limit of that

> right, as has been expressed by all Indigenous people of Oaxaca, their free determination is expressed and enacted as an integral part of the State of Oaxaca, inside of the legal framework enforced at the state and federal level and in accordance with the manifest desire of belonging to the state and Mexican nation. Belonging to an Indigenous people, as its members confirm, does not imply the negation of the state of Oaxacan or of Mexico, but deeply confirms it. Far from constituting a risk of fragmentation, therefore, the legal recognition of autonomy of Indigenous peoples is a contribution of enormous importance in the substantive unity, in the plurality, of the Oaxacan and Mexican society. It lays the foundations of harmonic coexistence of people that appreciated the richness of diversity (Ley de Derechos de los Pueblos y Comunidades Indígenas del Estado de Oaxaca, 9, My translation).

Here we see quite clearly, a double discourse surrounding autonomous politics as understood by the state of Oaxaca—a discourse I see as contradictory. According to the Oaxacan state, autonomy is something that can't be asked for or given, it is something that is self-determined. At the same time, it works within a legal framework, and thus is administered and controlled by certain "rules of play". In that sense, it is not self-determined.

In the brief guide to *Sistemas Normativos Indigenas,* or Indigenous normative systems, produced by the IEEPCO, the institute makes clear the mandatory registration of the internal forms of communal organization with the state. They write,

> In order to renew their authorities, the communities must present their communal electoral statues to the institute, or if applicable, inform the institute regarding the duration of the office, the election procedure, the requirements of participation and eligibility, as well as those who conduct the election process in the municipality (IEEPCO, cuadernillo informativo, My translation).

Furthermore, as explained in the election manual, the results of all community elections must be sent to IEEPCO for verification and certification.

The paternalistic relationship between the IEEPCO and the communities organizing according to their internal normative systems, is again bolstered in this particular relationship of

regulation and administration. IEEPCO works as the determining body of legitimacy of the organization of the Indigenous communities, and as the judge of sorts in cases of electoral dispute. In the case of Eloxochitlán de Flores Magón, IEEPCO has worked on various occasions as a force against the organization and strength of the community assembly.

The most recent developments in Eloxochitlán de Flores Magón exemplify this attack on self-determination. In 2016, an assembly was held to elect the municipal president for the following three years—to begin their post at the beginning of 2017. To those whom I spoke who were active in the community assembly under political repression and attack, this "assembly" to elect the municipal president was a political theater, a staged event that lacked the participation and support of the majority of the community. With this, the daughter of ex-municipal president and cacique Manuel Zepeda was elected municipal president—for many in the community this was basically the passing of the torch of municipal power within the family.

Following this staged election, IEEPCO confirmed the legitimacy of the election, thus officially authorizing Elisa Zepeda as the municipal president for 2017-2019. This staged election and authorization works against the self-organization of the community, as the community assembly remains in a state of fragmentation and fear, and many people from the community refused to participate in naming their authorities due to the ongoing repression.

While the tension between the politics of statecraft and Indigenous recognition on one hand, and the self-organized community assembly on the other, is one evident layer of complexity in the struggle for autonomous self-organization in Eloxochitlán de Flores Magón, there exists others that add to the convolution of the community assembly as a process of autonomous struggle. The relationship between organizational influences from outside the community—namely activists from Mexico City and Spain—and the internal processes of self-

organization of the community itself, highlight another layer of complexity in the community organization and the community assembly.

As various people I spoke to in the community agreed, much of the organizational activity in the late 1990's and early 2000's, particularly in relation to the historical legacy of Mexican anarchist Ricardo Flores Magón derived from outside the community. It was particularly young media activists from Mexico City who were involved in the founding of the community radio Nguixó in Eloxochitlán de Flores Magón. As Juan, a past participant in the community radio project told me, because the initial energy behind the project came from outside the community, the maintenance of a more long-term radio project faltered alongside the faltering of this outside energy. The radio project was initiated with good intentions, but perhaps didn't mesh with the immediate interests or necessities of the community—thus ending its operations after just a few years.

The *"jornadas magonistas"* organized in the late 1990's and early 2000's similarly reflect this tension between the interests of activists from outside the community, and the immediate and self-determined interests of the community itself. The diverse mixture of workshops, film screenings and debates exemplify the diverse influences and interests that framed these events. For example, at the "*jornadas magonistas"* in 1999, documentaries were shown covering the Spanish Revolution and libertarian education, a journal was presented addressing feminism and the anti-patriarchal struggle from a libertarian perspective, and punk bands played in the central park. Alongside these activities, debates were had regarding uses and customs and *caciquismo*, a workshop was organized for making masks (an important local practice for the day of the dead celebration), and another workshop was organized regarding Indigenous languages. The mixture of influences is evident in these diverse activities, some

speaking to the interests of more anarchist-oriented activists from outside the community, and others addressing the immediate needs and traditions of the Indigenous Mazateco community itself.

The differing influences and interests deriving from within and from outside the community of Eloxochitlán de Flores Magón speak to another layer of complexity characteristic of this particular autonomous struggle. While it is important not to dichotomize the interests between people from inside and the outside the community—mutual interests and necessities can be seen in both the *"jornadas magonistas"* and the radio Nguixó—there are evident differences derivative from different contexts and locations of struggle. These differences often came to the forefront in conversation with those from the community who had been involved in the various organizational initiatives in the 1990's and early 2000's. The point often raised was organizational initiatives from outside the community often didn't rhyme with the needs and desires of the community, and thus waned often as quick as they arose.

Conclusion:

The struggle of the community assembly in Eloxochitlán de Flores Magón challenges us to reimagine social struggle on various fronts and forces us to reconsider the intricacies and difficulties of struggling for autonomy amidst a field of forces that seeks to repress and/ or coopt autonomous processes. While in some sense, the community assembly re-emerged to combat problems related to the authoritarianism of the cacique Manuel Zepeda, the community assembly on the other hand serves as a tool of political struggle, directed toward the self-determination of the people of Eloxochitlán de Flores Magón. While in many respects, at the moment of writing, the community assembly is in a state of fragmentation, it maintains an underground presence in

various neighborhoods of the community, in the way people talk to each other, organize the functioning of their neighborhood, their processes of everyday life, etc.

In this way, the community assembly embodies a form of political resistance that is both situated in a particular historical, cultural and social context, but that simultaneously works at a level beneath what might normally be considered political. After all, the community assembly is in its essence a form of organization, a means to strengthen, define and pursue the identity of the people of Eloxochitlán in a self-determined manner.

The struggle for autonomy in Eloxochitlán de Flores Magón, is characterized by a certain complexity that begs us to consider what autonomy is and what autonomy does. The recent reforms to the state and federal constitutions in Oaxaca and Mexico that I addressed above, have moved the state's relationship with Indigenous peoples away from the politics of integration and homogenization to a politics of a recognition of plurality. This politics of recognition though, has continued the politics of domination though, just with a different mask on. As Dene scholar Glen Coulthard suggests of the Canadian context,

> …instead of ushering in an era of peaceful coexistence grounded on the ideal of reciprocity or mutual recognition, the politics of recognition in its contemporary liberal form promises to reproduce the very configurations of colonialist, racist, patriarchal state power that Indigenous peoples demands for recognition have historically sought to transcend (Coulthard, 2014: 3).

As Coulthard suggests, the politics of recognition, or in the case of Eloxochitlán, the recognition of communal organization according to uses and customs, serves as an insidious means to maintain state administration over Indigenous struggles for autonomy and self-determination, while weakening resistance in symbolic acts of recognition and empowerment.

After all, it was amidst the organization around the 500-year anniversary of the Spanish invasion of so-called Mexico, the Zapatista uprising in Chiapas in 1994, and the ongoing and

ever-strengthening organization of Indigenous and *campesino* communities in which the state was forced to recognize cultural diversity, and to some extent, Indigenous autonomy. In the case of Oaxaca, Alejandro Anaya Muñoz tells us, "In sum, the politics of recognition has been an effective strategy in the sense of having contributed to the containment of the threat of Indigenous radicalism and therefore the preservation of the governability of the state" (Anaya Muñoz, 2003: 287). It has been argued by various scholars, including Muñoz, that the erosion of legitimacy of the PRI party in Oaxaca also helped instigate the constitutional reforms recognizing cultural diversity. This too, as Muñoz suggests, was successful in containing the erosion of the legitimacy of the PRI party.

In the following chapter, I want to direct our attention to another arm of autonomous struggle engaged widely amongst communities in resistance in the territory of Mexico; that is, community radio. In exploring community radio, I want to remain attentive to the questions relevant to the community assembly, as the complexity of legality, the navigation of the ins and outs of autonomy and the insidious ways of repression and cooptation work similarly in the realm of community radio.

Chapter 4: Community Radio: Spaces and Networks of Self-Organization and Resistance

It is the social relation that the radios produce in the interior of the communities that defines their importance…

- Juan Mario Pérez Martínez

However, the Mexican government forces us to ask for permission, to solicit a concession so that we can express our word and practice our communication…with the argument that it is necessary to regulate the radioelectric spectrum. We ask, to whom should permission be asked and who authorizes it? Will we ask permission to express our words from the same institutions that have provoked so much violence with their politics of war? Will we ask permission from those that have tortured, disappeared and assassinated us? Will we ask permission from those that have condemned our peoples and communities to marginalization and poverty? Will we ask permission from those that have converted nature into a commodity that can be bought and sold? Will we ask permission from those that make a business out of government and are corrupted by their absurd necessity for profit? Will we ask permission from those who enact threatening laws that subject and control the population at will? Will we ask permission from those that have sought to disappear our cultures as original peoples?

- Statement from the 13th Anniversary of Radio Ñomndaa

The Movement of Independent Media has been constructed from emergency, from the permanent emergency of the systematic and recurrent repression in Mexico against the resistance and against those constructing fragments of new worlds. The Movement of Independent Media was born beneath the specific necessity to break the barriers of information during this emergency.

- *Centro de Medios Libres*

Aleida Calleja and Beatriz Solís' important book, *Con Permiso: La Radio Comunitaria en Mexico*, traces the struggle for the legalization of community radio within the judicial framework of the Mexican state. The book centers its analysis in the mid-2000's when community radios were emerging in various parts of Mexico, while their legal status was in a state of flux; not legal and not able to acquire the permits that would grant them legality. Within

this context, the authors' analysis focuses on the struggle for radio permits, arguing community radio to be part and parcel of the right of liberty of expression as an essential component of a liberal democratic state. Inherent to their argument is that communication carried out at the level of the community radio is a right that should be guaranteed in a liberal democracy as it strengthens citizen development and democratic debate. The book's title captures this posture, "*Con Permiso*", meaning with permission, or asking for permission. This title, along with the analysis throughout the book, is about just that, the ongoing struggle of community radios for their legal recognition and right to free communication across the FM airwaves in the territory of Mexico.

Cutting across the argument laid forth in Calleja and Solis' book, in this chapter I want to engage community radio and more generally the vast network of independent and self-run media in Mexico, in relation to and as autonomous struggle. That is, I want to explore the internal and external spaces and networks of self-organization that community radios construct and navigate within and beyond their immediate community or neighborhood space. I want to argue that community radio, its participants and the spaces they construct and maintain, are processes par-excellence of the self-construction of resistance culture and autonomous organization that inherently resists state regulation and permission. Better put, I want to approach community radio not as a means of constructing informed citizens within the mark of the law, but as a process of community and cross-community organization that springs from the necessities of the people derived from their specific historical, political, social and cultural locations. In doing so, I want to remain attentive to the complexities of the construction of radio spaces in relation to internal and external influences that seek to criminalize, repress, coopt or interfere with the self-organization of community communication and community organization.

This chapter will be laid out as follows. First, I want to contextualize the legal landscape of telecommunications in Mexico, looking briefly at recent reforms within the legal system as they relate to telecommunications and specifically to FM radio. Further weaving the threads running through this dissertation, I will explore the telecommunications terrain as one of contestation, where the state, autonomous struggles and other forces clash in dynamic conflicts, or relate in complex and multi-layered ways, between self-organization, regulation and the modes and processes in between the two. Following this, I will explore cartographically some examples of community radios that have emerged accompanying, or occupying, an integral part of larger social struggles. My point in doing this is to maintain an eye on the importance of the locations from which autonomous struggles and processes emerge, to emphasize the plurality of radio processes emerging from their plurality of locations.

In the second half of the chapter, I will approach the community radio through its relation to space. I want to ask, what does community radio have to do with space? How might the space of community radio—a space of encounter—be more important than the message being transmitted in the actual airwaves? How does the participation of the community in the community radio and the construction of the community radio space, serve as a tool for the development of communal organization and community struggle reaching beyond solely the transmission? I want to then complicate our thinking of space in relation to the radio. If community radio serves as an organizational force inside communities, what does it do outside communities? To attend to this question, in the final sections of this chapter, I want to explore the networks of community and free radio and media that constantly work beyond the boundedness of their immediate locations.

Community Radio Amidst A Field of Forces:

The history of community radio in Mexico is a history of struggle located in what Bourdieu called a field of forces, or what Aleida Calleja y Beatriz Solís have called, "…a Bermuda triangle between money, media and politics (Calleja y Solís, 2007: 9-10, My translation). The situation is particularly complex for radios that engage a politically offensive character, where the intermixing of neoliberal economic policies, state repression and co-optation with the ongoing struggle for autonomous media has given rise to particular challenges and particular strategies of community radio. While a history of the relation between market and state forces, in relation to community radio and media is much beyond the scope of this chapter, a brief contextualization of the political and economic climate following the recent federal structural reforms, which included a telecommunications reform, is necessary to situate the contemporary legal location of community radios.

In December of 2012, the government of Enrique Peña Nieto took presidential power in the republic of Mexico. Citing slow growth and corporate monopoly, within the first 20 months of his presidency, Peña Nieto formulated and implemented an aggressive constitutional reform package, directed on all fronts toward the neoliberal consensus of privatization. Amongst the eleven different reforms that made up the reform package, was a telecommunications reform, which sought in its own words, to open up the market to instigate telecommunications competition.

A fundamental component of the telecommunications reform was the formation of the *Instituto Federal de Telecomunicaciones (IFT)* or Federal Institute of Telecommunications. A report from the telecommunications development sector summarizes the mission of the institute:

> The IFT was established by presidential Reform Decree to be the telecommunication and broadcasting regulator as well as to be the authority

> responsible for enforcing competition law in these markets. IFT is granted a significant degree of autonomy and independence; it has legal personality and may own assets (moveable and real property). The IFT is responsible for ensuring the rights recognized under the Constitutional Reform Decree, as well as to regulate the spectrum, the provision of telecommunication and broadcasting networks and services (Leza, 2014).

The IFT was thus created as the body to enforce and regulate the new federal telecommunications reform. The mission of the reform, along with the mission of the IFT itself charged with enforcing the reform, is the increased privatization and regulation of telecommunications in the country—changes that surely have an effect on community radio.

On July 14th, 2014, the Mexican Federal Government published the "Federal Telecommunications and Broadcasting Law" which was part and parcel of the telecommunications reform and the founding of the Federal Institute of Telecommunications. The Federal Telecommunications and Broadcasting Law delineates four different categories under which radios can seek concessions to transmit through the FM airwaves legally beneath the mark of the law.

> According to its aims, the concessions are classified as follows: (i) for profit commercial use; (ii) for public use to achieve the purpose of the state and the three levels of government (including public service concessionaires or permissionaires), (iii) for non-profit private use, and (iv) social use with cultural, scientific, educational, or community purposes (Brennan, et al., 2014).

It is important note the fourth category—radio for social use with community purposes. This category of course fits community radios, and on the surface seems to maintain or uphold a commitment of access to and self-production of community radio. Like other laws of recognition politics, the classification of radio for social use to concessions, again works insidiously to oversee and regulate community radios, and as I will show below, legitimize attacks on radios that refuse to seek out concessions.

On March 18th, 2016, The Federal Institute of Telecommunications (IFT) initiated a campaign they dubbed *"Se busca por robo",* or in search of robbery meant to seek out radios transmitting without concessions. A report by the free radio Ké Huelga tells us, "The witch hunt against the radios that transmit without licensing has taken a heavy toll: 194 inspections, 33 decommissions, 364 inspection requests solely between January and June of this year [2016]" (Ké Huelga, 2016, My translation). The campaign of the IFT serves both as a means to decommission radios that transmit without concession, but also inherently pressures those that transmit without concession to seek concessions through the newly formed IFT. The general intention is to regulate the radio spectrum and thus mark, regulate and discipline radios that previously were transmitting without concession; or more bluntly, without governmental oversight. That is, the intention is to deny community radios of their autonomous, self-organized and self-determined character.

On October 4th, 2017, the Commission of Radio and Television of the House of Representatives approved a reform to the Federal Law of Radio and Television to sanction with up to six years in prison those who operate radio without concessions. Punishment would include the decommissioning and confiscation of radio equipment. During the exchange of opinions leading up to the vote, various political representatives justified the action, explaining that certain community radios are using the airwaves to speak out against the government.

The telecommunications reform, along with the subsequent formation of the Federal Institute of Telecommunications and the various laws and campaigns accompanying these developments have caught community radio within an intersection of various forces. On one hand, the telecommunications reform is situated within a larger packet of neoliberal reforms implemented by the Peña Nieta Administration. These reforms, including the

telecommunications reform, seek the privatization and heightened regulation of the use of the airwaves. On this hand then, the community radio is under attack from the neoliberal capitalist market.

On the other hand, both state and capital interests seek to repress, regulate and survey community radios and their projects of resistance and social organization. The formation of the Federal Institute of Telecommunications, with its task of administering concessions for radios, along with its subsequent implementation of its campaign "*se busca por robo"*, exemplifies an attack on the self-determination and self-organization of community radios. Like the constitutional reforms in Oaxaca and Mexico that sought to recognize Indigenous communities and their right to self-determination and organization, the recent telecommunications reforms work insidiously to regulate the self-organization and self-determination of community radio and community media projects. Rather than liberating this form of organization, the reform serves as an attack on media projects along with the organizational initiatives from which they derive and of which they cultivate.

Within this national and international field of forces, in the following section I want to locate some of the community radios in Mexico that are accompanying communal struggles for autonomy, before moving on to a more in-depth exploration of what exactly community radios do, and what their relevance is to the larger questions I am pursuing regarding autonomy.

Community Radio Born of Struggle:

Community radios have a long and complex history in Mexico, taking a particularly active role amidst the processes of autonomous organization and struggle expanding from the uprising of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation. Since their beginnings, the Zapatistas

have stressed the importance of alternative media and grassroots communication from within struggles as an indispensable component in any movement for autonomy and self-determination.

> We do not forget Radio Zapata, a radio transmission of Zapatismo that was transmitted from the radios taken in different municipalities of Chiapas during the first occupation of the cities. Through the radio the Declaration of the Lacandona Jungle could be heard in full (Centro de Medios Libres, 2013: 21, My translation).

The EZLN's stress on the importance self-produced media was embodied in the radio coverage of Radio Zapata during the Zapatista uprising in January 1994 and has only gained strength since then. The Zapatistas put media and radio in a fundamental position during the San Andrés Accords which were signed by the EZLN and the federal government in 2006 but were never fulfilled by the Federal government. The accords state:

> With regard to the communications media, the delegation of the EZLN considers it necessary that access be guaranteed to reliable, timely and sufficient information on the government's activities, as well as access by Indigenous peoples to existing communications media, and that the right of Indigenous peoples to have their own communication media (radio broadcasting, television, telephone, press, fax, communication radios, computers and satellite access) be guaranteed (San Andrés Accords, 1996).

Alongside a more widespread global backlash against corporate dominated media, the EZLN was insisting on the necessity of not only truthful media for Indigenous peoples, but access to the control and functioning of their own media to serve their own interests. In the San Andrés Accords, the Zapatistas insisted that the contemporary radios of that time, *indigenist* radios that served assimilationist purposes for Indigenous peoples, be turned into and taken over by Indigenous media or media run by the Indigenous peoples themselves. Other radio and media projects were quick to follow the Zapatistas lead.

Ké Huelga Radio and Regeneración Radio both were born during the student strikes in 1999 at the Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) in Mexico City. Regeneración came

about originally in 1999 as Pacheco Radio. Following the arrest of various members of the *Consejo General de Huelga*, or the General Council of the Strike, Pacheco Radio took up space in the CCH Vallejo northern campus of UNAM as a *radio bocina*, or radio that transmitted only through a speaker, "…giving information regarding the negotiations with the rectory, with the university authorities" (Espacio libre, 2012, My translation). Thus, Radio Pacheco became the main voice of the movement for the liberation of the political prisoners. The project of Regeneración Radio itself began under the direction of many ex-political prisoners from the strike.

Ké Huelga Radio sprang to life during the first weeks of the student strike in UNAM in 1999. As Regeneración Radio explains, "Ké Huelga became in a very small amount of time a point of reference to know first-hand what occurred inside and outside the university city, as such converting itself into a link between society and the students in protest" (Regeneración Radio, 2007, My translation). In February of 2000, as the federal police entered UNAM to break the strike, Ké Huelga was the victim of repression leaving it no other choice but to end its transmission. However, after the strike ended later in the year of 2000, Ké Huelga returned to the airwaves and has remained a constant radial force since, amidst various threats and harassment from various governmental and university authorities.

Radio Zapote, another prominent community radio in Mexico City came about during the March of the Color of the Earth of the EZLN and National Indigenous Congress in 2001 at the National University of Anthropology and History.

> ENAH was the house of the Zapatistas during their stay in Mexico City and this provoked an internal debate regarding whether the commercial media would be capable of transmitting that which the people want. From there arose the idea to create a radio that was the space of the struggles of these peoples (Muñoz Ramírez, 2015, My translation).

While various committees came together at the University to better organize and assist the visit of the EZLN and National Indigenous Congress, the organization of the radio outlasted the EZLN and CNI visit, maintaining energy due to the necessity for non-commercial and autonomous media. As such, Radio Zapote has solidified their presence and importance as a student, community and free radio that has continued to the contemporary moment.

In November of 2005, youth in the Juchitán, in the Istmo of Tehuantepec, Oaxaca, began organizing into what would eventually become Radio Totopo. In 2005, the youth rented a house in the *Barrio de los Pescadores*—an initiative to organize cultural events that were outside of the more privileged center of the city. In 2006, just before the passing of the caravan of the EZLN during the *"Otra Campaña",* or other campaign, in Juchitán, the youth managed to acquire a borrowed radio transmitter, with the intent to better organize the activities carried out in the mark of the visit of the Zapatistas. The next year, in 2007, the radio group participated in a workshop on how to build their own transmitters, where they were able to construct their own 30-watt radio transmitter. On February 16th, 2007, the radio officially took to the airwaves.

Radio Totopo has since served as a fundamental space and tool of organization in Juchitán. As Griselda Sánchez explains,

> To make visible the force of the community assembly and its modes of making decisions, our radios can help to revamp the community organization—which is very weak in some cases—to recuperate the ability of collective agency, the disposition to be organized and the capacity to make decisions (Sánchez, 2016: 105, My translation).

In fulfilling this role, Radio Totopo has been fundamental in strengthening the communal identity and organization of Juchitán. Central to this role, is the ongoing struggles in defense of territory in the region specifically against mega wind projects. Thus, Radio Totopo has been

active in organizing the community and thus organizing the resistance against these megaprojects.

During the 2006 teachers uprising in Oaxaca, which evolved into a statewide revolt, radio and media more generally served as grounds of battle, and points of organization, amongst the people's uprising. On June 14th, 2006, in the governmental attempt to displace the teachers occupying the central square, the teachers' union radio (which sits a few blocks away) was targeted. Operators of the radio were violently harassed and the radio equipment destroyed. The radio transmission of the movement was subsequently taken up by Radio Universidad at the Benito Juárez Autonomous University of Oaxaca, which broadcasted until the end of May and served as the voice of the movement.

On August 1, 2006, a demonstration of thousands of women took to the streets in what became known as the March of Pots and Pans. "After demonstrations in the city center, the women decided to march to Channel 9, the state-run radio and TV station. They peacefully occupy the building and begin to broadcast, transforming the state-controlled broadcasting into community-run media" (Denham, 2008: 358). On August 20th,

> In the early morning hours, the occupied Channel 9 is attacked by paramilitary and police forces who destroy the broadcasting equipment and violently displace the media activists. The APPO and the teachers' union respond by taking over all 12 commercial radio stations in Oaxaca by dawn. All but two of the stations are returned to their owners later that day (Denham, 2008: 358).

The rebellion in Oaxaca in 2006 took hold throughout much of the state, where communities and municipalities directed organizational energy toward local struggles. With this, various municipalities and municipal agencies organized neighborhood and community assemblies to self-organize against the rule of political party politicians. The town of Zaachila in the central valleys of Oaxaca, after taking over the municipal building and running off the town

mayor, organized neighborhood assemblies with representatives from each coming together to form a permanent People's Council of Zaachila. From this larger municipal movement emerged the idea of the foundation of a community radio to share updates and pressing issues related to the ongoing rebellion. As Adán explained in relation to the community radio in Zaachila,

> We want our radio to represent a symbol of resistance to the government and promote media that we ourselves create. We also want the radio to be a space where we generate ideas. For example, the idea that we don't have to be capitalists, that we can make radio without paying salaries. And the idea that the radio can be subversive and bring us to new ways of organizing ourselves (Adán, 2008: 324).

The formation of the community radio in Zaachila accompanied the larger processes of municipal and state mobilization taking place in Oaxaca in 2006.

The municipality of San Juan Copala in the Triqui region of Oaxaca, was another municipality that directed energy from the Oaxaca rebellion into local formations of autonomous politics. On January 1st, 2007, San Juan Copala declared itself an autonomous municipality as a means to self-organize in resistance against the ongoing paramilitary violence in the region. Like Zaachila, with the emergence of a more general municipal movement for autonomy and self-organization derived the initiative of a community radio. In 2008, with the support of municipal authorities and various social organizations, youth in the community took to the airwaves with their community radio accompanying the struggle for municipal autonomy in San Juan Copala. Like many community radios, it sought to recuperate and strengthen community cohesion, address issues related to the autonomous movement and share and communicate the Indigenous Triqui language and culture.

Following the April 15th, 2011 uprising of women from the community Cherán, Michoacán, the uprising quickly turned into a general move for communal autonomy.

Recognizing the necessity of information deriving from the struggle itself, youth in the community initiated a *radio bocina*, as it was originally called, consisting solely of a microphone and speaker. With this equipment, the youth passed through the streets, stopping at street corners and informing community members about the latest happenings. In early December 2012, youth from the community of Cherán initiated Fogata Radio—a more formal radio project that transmits on the FM airwaves which accompanies and strengthens the community struggle for self-organization and autonomy.

In the early 2000's, the community of San Pedro Tlanixco, in the state of Mexico, began organizing themselves against an international corporation that sought to divert water upriver from their community for the cultivation of flowers to be exported out of the country. Amidst the struggle and conflict that followed, a Spanish citizen and businessman of the flower corporation died under uncertain circumstances. In response, six community members of Tlanixco—those of which were directly involved in defense of water in the community—were detained and charged with homicide. Three have been sentenced to fifty years, while the others, at time of writing this, are still waiting sentences from a case that began in 2006.

As the movement to free the political prisoners has grown in the community of San Pedro Tlanixco, forming itself into "the movement for the freedom of the defenders of water and life in San Pedro Tlanixco", so too has arisen a radio project to combat the misinformation and divisions in the community—product of the ongoing conflict. As the movement expressed in their own words in April of 2017 leading up to the first anniversary of the radio:

> Radio Tlanixco is a community radio that was born from the necessity to better weave communication with the people, to search for the reorganization of the community. It is a cultural radio that searches to recuperate our customs and traditions, as well as inform the community about important topics, dedicate songs, promote local businesses and strengthen our identity as a Nahua community (Radio Tlanixco, 2017, My translation).

For some ten years, various Indigenous communities that sit in the mountains between Mexico City and Toluca have been in struggle against a highway project seeking to connect the Eastern edge of Mexico City (Naucaulpan) and the neighboring city to the East, Toluca. The highway project, in connecting the two urban centers, is routed to pass directly through the forest of Otomí communities of the mountainous zone including San Francisco Xochicuautla, San Lorenzo Huitzizilapan and Ayotuxco. Amidst the ongoing conflict which has included both the exhaustion of legal measures as well as various renditions of direct action encampments to physically blockade the project, the communities came upon the need for a radio.

On July 3rd of 2016, the community of San Lorenzo Huitzizilapan, in coordination with both local youth as well as collectives from Mexico City, organized a benefit concert to help raise funds for the community radio project. Radio Zapote from Mexico City transmitted the event live, as well as retransmissions by various radios including La Voladora Radio, La Ké Huelga Radio, Regeneración Radio, Radio Fogata, Radio Zapata, Radio Amiltzinko, Radio Ñomndaa, Radio Teocelo, Radio Totopo, Radio Ricardo Flores Magón, and Radio Votan Zapata. From this Ndethe Radio formed, which at the moment serves as a *radio bocina*, or radio that transmits live through speakers in the central plaza of San Lorenzo Huitzizilapan.

On June 19th, 2016, the road blockade in Nochixtlán, Oaxaca set up during the strike of the militant section 22 of the teacher's union CNTE was met with heavy repression. Under serious attack by federal, state and municipal forces, and with the state using live firearms against the blockade, at least ten people were left dead and over a hundred injured. Marking the five-month anniversary of the attacks, the community—including teachers and local youth—initiated the radio project, La Combativa.

As these examples show, community radios in Mexico often arise to address certain needs of the community, often accompanying other processes of autonomous and social organization and struggle. Radios most often outlast larger rebellions, serving as a backbone of communal organization beyond the politics of a social movement organization or uprising. Giovanni Gasparello drives an important point home:

> According to the point of view here, taking space in the mass media is necessary but not sufficient nor transcendent. More so is the process constructing and operating one's own media, that works according to the necessities of each town and of each social and historical context (Gasparello, 2012: 4, My translation).

Like the point I tried to make in my second chapter about autonomous struggles more generally, radios are based in locations, deriving from certain historical, cultural and political contexts, and arising in a manner to address direct needs of the community. Radios also travel, of course through the radio waves. Let's move on to see what it is that community radios do.

Radio Space and Communal Organization:

Within the past few decades, studies in political theory have been overwhelmingly dominated by the linguistic turn. That is, theoretical studies of politics have often turned to language, discourse and linguistics as a means to explore political power in its various manifestations. As Margaret Kohn suggests, the linguistic turn in political theory has dominated political analysis at the expense of an attentiveness to the politics of space. She writes, "Spatial analysis is not an alternative to social and political theory but an overlooked dimension of it" (Kohn, 2003: 11).

Following her lead, I want to bring a spatial analysis into this discussion of community radio. I want to pursue a constellation of related questions: What forms of social and communal organization does the radio incentivize? How does the space of the radio—the cabin and

working space—develop into something much grander and much more integral than solely the words, messages and music that come out of the radio speakers? On the other hand, how does the community radio work outside its localized space in networks of organization, coordination and the sharing of information? Lastly, how does the radio relate to other practices of communal self-organization that reciprocate organizational forces?

Community radio is ambivalent in its relation to space. On one hand, community radio is localized in that it is produced and consumed by a community. It is a community space, and thus often understood to be restricted to a certain localized area. On the other hand, as John Mowitt suggests, "If the essence of radio is broadcasting, then radio is radically delocalized…" (Mowitt, 2011: 162). Radio is transmitted across the airwaves and is thus delocalized from its space of origin. We might further consider what Alan O'Connor states in relation to anthropology and radio: "Radio broadcasts cover much larger areas than most anthropological fieldwork. If ethnography is based on sharing the lives of people in a limited geographical area, radio broadcasts are likely to seem a nuisance; an obstacle to doing fieldwork" (O'Connor, 2006: x). What then can thinking about space do to our understanding of community radio?

Space works in various forms when thinking of community radio. We of course can think of the physical space of the radio cabin. We too can think of the space of the airwaves, the reception space of the transmission, and the organizational spaces where various radio projects organize together. In what follows, I want to direct our attention to these two general spheres, the localized space of the community radio, and the delocalized reach of transmission and organization, to think of community radio and the practices it carries out through space(s). With this, I want to continue with the thread running through this dissertation, exploring the way in which radio serves as a form of self-organization and autonomous struggle.

In July of 2016, we left the city of Oaxaca in route for the Oaxacan coast in the midst of a statewide teachers strike against a series of neoliberal reforms that included various attacks on education. At the time, the militant Oaxacan teacher's union, Section 22, had managed to organize and install 32 road blockades across various parts of the state of Oaxaca. I was with two *compañeros* from Mexico City who were part of a collective organizing a national campaign in defense of mother earth and territory and were seeking to involve communities in struggle in the territories of Oaxaca. We were headed to Juchitán, knowing their long history of struggle against various wind farm projects in the Istmo of Oaxaca—a bastion of struggle for land and territory reaching back to colonial resistance to Spanish invasion.

Having no personal contacts in Juchitán, we had been passed a phone contact from other comrades in the city of Oaxaca of members of a newly formed community radio in Juchitán. We got off the bus at the main intersection in Juchitán, which at the time was blockaded by three buses and various groups of community members. The members of the community radio quickly met us—young people from Juchitán that immediately began to give us insight into the current state of the struggle. There next to the road blockade—a blockade that served much more as a communal space of gathering, sharing and organization than solely a blockade—we shared food and coffee. Shortly after, we walked the five or six blocks to the nearby radio cabin.

The radio was housed in a small, cement-floor, two room building located behind a steel fence and gate. Adjoined to the building, in the back, was an elderly man's *huarache* business—hand-made sandals usually made from leather and old tires that are commonly warn by *campesinos* in Mexico. These two adjoined buildings shared a courtyard with various family homes. I was curious about the relationship between the radio and its neighbors, to which the radio participants told me that the relationship was of mutual respect. They even mentioned that

the old man that ran the *huarache* business was thrilled about, and actively supported, the presence of the radio next to his space.

We stayed that night in the radio space, where we slept on *petates*, straw mats laid out on the cement floor. Two participants in the community radio slept in hammocks that swung across the middle of the space. We shared conversation into the early morning, while also sharing cold beers to fight off the grueling heat characteristic of Juchitán and much of the Istmo of Tehuantepec, Oaxaca. All the while, the radio station transmitted from the small side room. The following day, various young people passed through the radio station space, interested in t-shirts from the screen printing machine the radio space also housed, interested in participating in the radio project, or just to chat about politics or life in the Istmo. In this sense, the radio cabin itself served as a communal space of organization, something that worked alongside the organizational forms instigated by the radio programs.

Descriptions of community radio cabins abound, detailing the communal atmosphere of meeting spaces that often house the actual transmitting equipment. Griselda Sanchez's description of Radio Totopo—another community radio in the Itsmo—describes a similar scenario:

> The physical space of [radio] Totopo consists of two rooms and a patio; in one room with a window is the cabin of transmission and in the other is a large hall with tables, chairs, and bookshelves, it is the place to receive expositions and reading classes for kids. On the walls are pictures of a painting exposition, in the center is the Santa Cruz de los Pescadores and on the patio (with a roof made of palm fronds) you can see two hammocks. The importance of this place is not only that is houses the radio equipment—console, microphones, etc.--, but also because it is the space where hopes are organized and deposited (Sánchez, 2016: 75, My translation).

We could continue with similar descriptions of the physical spaces of community radio projects. The physical space of the community radio often serves as a space of organization, and a space that nourishes other forms of organization and resistance.

French philosopher Henri Lefebvre impressed upon us a fundamental point in thinking about space. He argued that rather than fetishizing space—that is treating it as a dead product ignoring the social relations behind it—we must uncover the social relations behind space. That is, more pointedly, we must recognize that space is socially produced; it is a product of ongoing social production. In relation to community radio in Mexico, we might recognize that the space of community radio is produced from within the social relations of a community—from within and from below. In this manner, community radios are self-organized projects developed from, and meant to help further tie, community relations.

Community radio is embedded within other processes of communal organization that often work off of one another or relate to one another in integral ways. Furthermore, the practices of the community radio work to integrate other processes of autonomous and communal organization, along with processes of struggle that accompany these organizational initiatives.

The short-lived community radio in Eloxochitlán de Flores Magón worked in a similar fashion. The radio announced upcoming communal work projects known as *tequio* or *fauna* or reminded community members of the upcoming communal assembly meetings. It served as a means to broaden and strengthen other forms of communal organization and communal identity in the community. Programs were often transmitted in the Indigenous Mazateco language, as is often the case in community radios located in Indigenous communities, serving as a means to strengthen community and ethnic identity.

Part and parcel of the integral work of the community radio is an overwhelming resistance to professionalization. The majority of community radio workers are not trained professionals, they don't hold degrees in communication or radio broadcasting, and they aren't trained in universities or special schools. Part of the practice of the community radio is to create a means of communication that reinforces communal identity and communal organization, through the self-organization of the radio or media project. It is the practice of the radio, in which political and communal subjectivity is developed and strengthened. Consider Radio Zapote's description of Radio Totopo:

> The radio hosts and those that give workshops in the space are common people, the majority students, workers pursuing their daily bread. They transport themselves on bicycles, converse in Zapoteco. They are not vegans, nor are they bragging about any activism or militancy. Yet they have a clear political posture (Radio Zapote, 2013, My translation).

Here, Radio Zapote is gesturing to the self-organization of the community radio in Juchitán, Radio Totopo. Those that run the community radio are from the community itself. They are not made up of hardened activists, or professionalized media workers, but are community members that are self-organizing the radio according to the interests and needs of the community.

The independent media collective, Subversiones*,* suggests a similar role played by community members in the self-organization of the community Fogata Radio, in the Purépecha community of Cherán in the state of Michoacan:

> Among them, there exists the full consciousness that radio as a tool can be utilized as an instrument of communication that serves to give cohesion, dynamism, and depth to communication that a community engages itself, and therefore, as a means to strengthen the processes of social ties and political participation of the society in the decisions that affect their lives. At the same time, the radio also serves as a space where the community can express their diverse forms of being and thinking, through all the possibilities that this medium of communication offers (Subversiones, 2012, My translation).

Like the communal assembly I addressed in the previous chapter, community radio serves as a process of self-organization, where the practice itself of radio production instigates the formation of political, communal and collective subjectivities. Political consciousness is developed through practice, through the self-organization of the radio.

Radio and Networks of Resistance:

While in the previous section we suggested that radio has a localized character, in that it works from a particular space and attends to the necessities of specific communities, I think we must heed the insight of John Mowitt as well, that because of the radios essence being broadcasting, it has a radically delocalized character. Community radio and independent media in Mexico have pursued extensive cross community and cross-platform connections, always at once working within and outside of their particular communal space. Better put, there is a constant effort amongst community radios and other independent media collectives in Mexico to tie networks of support and solidarity through the media work they are carrying out.

In March of 2017, I participated in a third gathering of *Tejemedios—Medios Libres and Radios Comunitarias*—in the community of Nochixtlán, Oaxaca. Nine months earlier, the community of Nochixtlán had experienced tragedy as federal forces evicted the road blockade that had been set up in resistance to the educational reforms in the country. In the violence some ten people were killed and over a hundred injured.

The event was organized as a means to build solidarity with the community of Nochixtlán, as well as connect with the newly formed Radio Combativa, which had emerged after the violent repression and amidst the ongoing campaign for justice for those killed and injured during the attempted eviction of the road blockade. The event was organized in a

schoolhouse in Nochixtlán, where across various days, workshops, film screenings, presentations and solidarity actions were held. The workshops were open to those present and included topics such as: radiofrequency for popular communicators, investigation for the defense of land, radio production in Indigenous languages, production of community radio, streaming audio and video, photographic documentation, notes and chronicles to accompany social movements, historical memory from a psychosocial perspective, risks to women journalists, internet tools for social struggle, and political formation for popular communicators. There were some 40 different independent media and radio projects participating from various parts of Mexico.

Alongside the workshops, we heard presentations from the committee for truth and justice of Nochixtlán. A collective radio transmission was held from the central plaza of Nochixtlán, transmitting music and reports over different radio and media projects present at the event. Lastly, the event was organized in congruence with the protest demonstration on March 19th to mark the nine-month anniversary of the massacre in Nochixtlán.

In April of 2018, I attended another *Tejemedios* conference in the *sierra sur* of Oaxaca: *Encuentro de Medios Libres y Comunitarios por la Autonomía de los Pueblos*, or the Gathering of Free and Community Media for the Autonomy of the Peoples. The event took place on the *finca alemania*—a colonial coffee plantation previously run by foreigners near the coast of Oaxaca. With the fall of the coffee prices in the 1980's and a unique combination of other circumstances, some ex-workers of the plantation, along with the Indigenous organization CODEDI, were able to recuperate the land. Taking over the land in 2013, the organization has transformed the *finca* into a *centro de capacitacion*, or a training center, where the nearly 50 communities that make up the organization CODEDI collectively maintain a space meant to share practical knowledge to be brought back to the communities involved in the organization.

Alongside the collective work projects and training programs that include carpentry, mechanics, brick-making, a metal workshop, a bakery, medicinal plant workshops, food production and music and theater workshops for the children, the organization had decided to open a community radio station to serve the *finca* and the surrounding communities. The *Tejemedios* gathering was thus both a nearly week-long conference to share skills between independent media projects, but also a gathering to accompany and assist in the opening of the new community radio on the *finca*.

Workshops were held in various spaces on the *finca*, including in the "*galeria*" which served as the schoolhouse for the children, in the cement-floor building on the hill which was to house the new radio project, as well as in the open air next to the basketball court. Similar to the gathering in Nochixtlán, the workshops included: introduction to community radio, connecting and using a mixer, community journalism, participatory video, audio editing, video streaming, radio frequency, Indigenous languages in community radio, connecting and using a mixer, and free software for community radios. Every evening cultural performances were carried out on the basketball court under the stars including live music, dancing, and theatre performed by the children who were participants in the various workshops on the *finca*. After the cultural performances, an open-mic form of video projection was held where anyone could cue up film projects they'd made to be projected on the wall next to the basketball court.

The event, like the various *medios libres* events in which I have participated, was made up by an eclectic mix of community, Indigenous and free media projects, some with legal permits to transmit, some without, both "legal" and "illegal". Present were urban punks with tattoos, Indigenous radio workers from communities in Oaxaca working radios in their Indigenous languages, teacher-members of the militant teacher's union section 22 who have their

own community radio projects, members of CODEDI who were developing their skills for the new community radio on the *finca*, along with a small group of Europeans doing solidarity work with the CODEDI organization. With the eclectic mix of projects and peoples at the event, came an exciting diversity of ideas, skills and opinions that were shared and debated in the space.

An important component to the majority of the workshops that were held during the gathering, along with the philosophy more generally behind the *Tejemedios* events, was the drive to combine practice and theory. The various workshops often included a theoretical or historical element, alongside a practical component where the new skills were enacted directly by participants. In the audio workshop for example, after learning some of the basics of the free software audio program audacity, we split into groups, where each group recorded then edited our own promotional sound bite for the new radio on the *finca*.

The space of *Tejemedios* is not a formal organization, but a space of encounter that brings together the diversity of media projects in pursuit of better coordination and collaboration. In dialogues in and around the event at the *finca*, the question of a formal network of *Tejemedios* continually arose. For some the idea of a formal network was essential. For others, the idea of a formal network would obstruct the liberatory and free collaborative nature of the free association. While nothing was settled, it seems that the space of *Tejemedios*, and the initiative to develop better collaboration between media and radio projects, remains oriented toward just that—a voluntary association that helps develop better coordination and skill-sharing, based upon self-organization.

In both Nochixtlán as well as the *finca alemania* in Oaxaca, the *Tejemedios* events sought to accompany communities in resistance or social organizations that were in the process of developing their own self-organized media infrastructure—in both of these cases, community

radios. Furthermore, both events came on the heels of deadly attacks by the state, instigating initiatives for alternative communication and organization needs within the communities, but also opening up the possibility for the *Tejemedios* network to come together in practical solidarity in the context of the recent acts of state repression.

These two gatherings of independent media and community radio were the third and fourth of their kind organized by *Tejemedios*—literally meaning weaving the media. In July of 2015, a similar event was held in Ayotzinapa, Guerrero and in August of 2014, Amilcingo, Morelos. In Ayotzinapa, on September 26th, 2014, state police kidnapped students from the Raúl Isidro Burgos Rural Teachers' College in Ayotzinapa. The students were in route in three buses to Mexico City to commemorate the massacre of Tlatalolco in 1968 in Mexico City, where police fired upon a crowded square of protesting students killing hundreds.

The efforts of the *Tejemedios* network and the larger milieu of community and independent radio and media in Mexico of building linkages of solidarity and organization across their projects exemplify network spaces of self-organization, skill-sharing and mutual organization. While community radios inherently organize at a local level—including within the radio space as well as within the community itself—community radios too breach this localization in efforts of organizations across various localized radio spaces and community struggles. Subversiones writes,

> We are part of the weavings of communication between collectives, groups, movements and organizations that combat singular thought and deny the chimeras of information corporations. These networks are composed of interconnected nodes that concentrate and disseminate counterhegemonic information, carrying out the tasks of what the Zapatistas call, listeners. That is to say: collecting and disseminating information and facilitating organization, knowledge and mutual support between groups and communities (Subversiones, 2016: 13, My translation).

The networks of communication and organization often follow, as do the individual community radios themselves, the necessities of the community struggles of which they are associated. I can turn to one more example to drive this point home.

On September 8th, 2017, Mexico was struck by the largest earthquake in the last century in Mexican territory. The epicenter was some 100 miles off the Chiapas coast, and measured at an 8.1 on the Richter scale. Some 11 days later, another earthquake struck, this time centered in the central State of Puebla, measuring at 7.1 on the Richter scale. Both earthquakes brought extensive damage to rural communities and urban centers throughout the south center of Mexico. At once, autonomous community radio projects emerged at the forefront in organizing relief and solidarity efforts.

"*Brigadas Autonomas*" or autonomous brigades organized as "autonomous solidarity and organization amidst the earthquakes of September 7th, 19th and 23rd". Various community and free radio spaces, including Radio Totopo, Radio Zapote and the collective radio station set up at Cafe Zapata Vive, opened their spaces as *centros de acopio*, or collection centers, for supplies to be organized and transported to affected areas. On September 20th, various radio and media projects came together to organize a collective transmission from Cafe Zapata Vive, as an effort to better coordinate information and organization regarding collection centers, communities in need, security efforts and many other aspects of the autonomous relief effort. This collective transmission and coordination was taken up across various states affected by the earthquakes including Mexico City, Mexico State, Morelos, Oaxaca and Chiapas.

These various examples of the development of networks of community radio and independent media point to the way in which radios are simultaneously located and transgressing their location. They work both internally and externally, developing community and developing

networks of communities all the while navigating the trappings and repression of capitalism and the state.

Locating Myself in Radio Space:

In a community media workshop in Nochixtlán, Oaxaca in 2017, the workshop organizer engaged us in a discussion of colonialism and hegemony in the context of independent media work. She raised the question to us all, how do we understand or relate to socialists and anarchists? As the conversation circled around, the workshop organizer directed us toward the potential colonial attributes of anarchist and socialist analysts casting their predetermined politics onto Indigenous and *campesino* communities in resistance. We came upon a related question: How can independent media workers not reinforce colonial relations through their predetermined frameworks of resistance analysis, in this context we were talking about Western frameworks of socialism and anarchism?

Amidst the discussion, a participant and member of community Radio Amiltzinko responded with the following input: "These questions aren't so relevant to our project. We make community radio from within our community for our community addressing the needs of our community".[4] The discussion continued. Another participant in radio Amiltzinko responded with her perception of anarchists: "Anarchists are often misrepresented as violent extremists. I haven't had that experience. Anarchists have come to our community, to our radio project, and given very useful and fun workshops, where we have been able to share skills".[5] In this conversation, the layers of complexity are apparent in relation to community radio projects and how they navigate their insides and outsides. From one angle, focus is directed toward the inner

[4] From a Radio Comunitaria/ Medios Libres gathering in 2017.
[5] From a Radio Comunitaria/ Medios Libres gathering in 2017.

workings of the community—the forms of self-organization from below addressing community needs as I alluded to above. The second comment reflects a community radios relationship with what's outside their immediate community space, and how the radio project has experienced such influence.

I want to turn to another example of this coming from Radio Ñomndaa of Guerrero. Like the participants of Radio Amiltzinko above, in an essay by participants at Radio Ñomndaa, they reflect on the tensions and complexities in organizing a radio project from within a community while building networks of organization and solidarity outside the community. They write:

> In spite of the fact that community radios are born from the particular necessities of the community to organize themselves in their struggles in defense of territory, collective rights, and against dispossession, for a world of justice and dignity, these struggles are also shared by many people around the world. It is there where the community radios find political and moral support. That is to say, in social organizations, cultural collectives, independent organizations in defense of human rights, and people in solidarity that are not from the community (Radio Ñomndaa, 2016: 34, My translation).

They go on:

> As such, the people and organizations that approach the Community Radios generate a relation of solidarity in struggle, although it's not always like that. On occasion—contradictions have emerged when the external support aims to make decisions that correspond to the assembly or committee or when a dependency is created in some fundamental aspect to the operation of the radio. Thus, the exercise of autonomy is fundamental, which today is our principal challenge (Radio Ñomndaa, 2016: 34, My translation).

These two passages are fundamental to uncovering another layer of complexity in thinking about autonomous politics in relation to community radio and media projects. We see on the one hand, Radio Ñomndaa's recognition of the "locatedness" of struggle, and the necessities from which an autonomous struggle, in this case a community radio, is born and developed. On the other hand,

we see their recognition of the shared struggle for emancipation with other peoples and communities that reach beyond the immediate location of their community struggle.

The second passage remains the most important. There, participants in Radio Ñomndaa reflect on the tensions that can arise in relation to organizing with those from outside the community in a project that is developed from within and directed toward the immediate community. Their underlying concern is the ways in which those from outside the community can interfere with decision-making that is to be made from within the radio project and community space. Furthermore, while they recognize the usefulness of outside solidarity, they point to the pitfalls of developing relationships of dependency, where the radio or communal project cannot function without that outside relationship or support. It is there, they reference their commitment to building autonomy.

These two examples of the community radio and their navigation of internal and external relationships instigate a consideration of my own relation to community radio and free media. I was first exposed to the community radio movement in Mexico, following the work of the larger yet informal network of *medios libres*, or free media, from afar. Searching for independent and alternative sources of information coming out of Mexico led me to the work of various community or free radios projects including Regeneración Radio, Ke Huelga Radio, Radio Zapote, Tejemedios and Radio Planton to name a few. I listened via internet from Hawai'i, to the live broadcasts of free and community radios in various parts of Mexico. This excluded quite a few radios that work solely on low power FM and are engaged more directly in transmission only within their community space.

As I did further research into autonomous and social struggles in Mexico, the role and the relevance of community radio became ever clearer. The community radio serves as a means of

organization in various spheres, the internal organization of a community in resistance around a self-produced media project, along with the networks of organization produced outside the immediate sphere of the community, through the distant public sphere produced through the broadcasts of the radio signal. I further saw the relations of cooperation developed between communities in resistance and the various outlets of community and free media that often broke the circles of misinformation or ignorance of surrounding community struggles as they took place on the ground.

My ethnographic and political work in Mexico has continually crisscrossed community radio projects sometimes in close quarters and other times from afar across the radio waves. I have continually followed community radios, often listening through the internet or FM from my apartment in Mexico City. Furthermore, I often carry a small hand-held FM radio with me when traveling to various parts of Mexico as a means to pick up transmission from local community radio projects in remote areas.

My position as a researcher from the US, as "an outsider" in that respect, has brought certain complexities and tensions, but also unique and fruitful relationships as my activities have intersected various community radio projects. Recognizing, albeit never fully, the complexities of autonomy and freedom, I've too navigated these relationships of insider/ outsiderness, cooperation, self and mutual understanding.

In the discussion with participants from Radio Amiltzinko above, the complexities of these relationships came to the forefront. What is my role, as someone with anarchist orientations, from the US doing research on autonomous struggles, have to do with projects of self-organized community media? In this space, there seemed to be a process of mutual development and understanding. On one hand, I was recognizing autonomous organization not

as solely a struggle against the state and capitalism, but too against other forces of influence that interfere with the self-direct and self-organization within community processes. Those forces include well-meaning activists from outside who attempt to direct the inner workings of a located social struggle, thus actively interfering with true self-determination. On the other hand, we were developing together a better understanding of the various currents and locations of thought and struggle from which we were emerging and located. Common understandings and desires coalesced at the same time they collided.

Amidst these multi-layered relationships and complexities, I've sought out spaces and processes where cooperation can be useful, and where cooperating and mutual aid have been actively sought. Building networks of solidarity between autonomous and social struggles has been a major initiative, not only of the network of free media projects in Mexico, but of autonomous struggles more generally. Part of this, for me, has been filling the voids of this work, helping share and connect with those struggles taking place in the English-speaking world, particularly in the United States. I've found this role doing translating work within the free and community radio and media projects a useful and sought-after mode of engagement in cooperating with, but without interfering or diluting the processes of self-organization and autonomous struggle. I've furthermore, attempted to frame my dissertation within this current, of sharing and reflecting, across languages and borders, on the complexities of autonomous organization and struggle.

Free, Community, Indigenous and *Indigenista* Radio:

Within the context of radio legislation, the space and struggle of community radios, and the intersecting networks of radio and community media I have spoken to above, I want to spell

out briefly some of the differences in radio projects in Mexico, as a means to complicate the term "community radio" and the somewhat careless way in which I have been using it. Doing this, again will bring focus to the blurred lines that separate autonomous projects and processes from other processes, and the political struggles involved in delineating these differences. The complexities of such differentiation, and the overlapping practices across different types of radio projects provides another layer of complexity inherent to autonomous struggle within the context of community radio and media. While there are shared practical modes that rupture the definitional boundaries between autonomous and non-autonomous radio and media, there are certain aspects that do make the differences clear.

In 1979, the then titled *Instituto Nacional Indigenista,* or National Indigenista Institute (INI), implemented its first Indigenista radio, *La Voz de la Montaña*, in Tlapa, Guerrero. The opening of the radio pertained to a larger set of assimilationist and developmentalist policies implemented by the Mexican government towards Indigenous peoples throughout much of the 20th century. As Inés Cornejo Portugal explains:

> In 1979, the radio, beneath the developmentalist view, was used for educational and *Spanishization* purposes, seeking to equip the Indigenous peoples with sufficient proficiency (agricultural and health) to adapt them and make them participants in the programs of rural development instrumented by the government (Cornejo Portugal, 2010: 55, My translation).

Between 1979 and 2000, the Mexican state installed a total of 21 radios in marginalized Indigenous communities throughout various parts of the country. As the program developed, so too did its mission, moving away from the blatant politics of assimilation, toward a politics of cultural revitalization, conservation and diffusion. The radios focused on transmission in the local Indigenous language along with regional music from the zone in which the radios transmitted. Furthermore, cultural and productive organizations were solicited to participate in

the radio. At its core, the radio programs sought to use radio for cultural, political and economic development in marginalized Indigenous communities. Inherent to the development of these radio projects, was a politics of paternalism, that saw Indigenous peoples as incapable of self-determination and self-directed development thus justifying the necessity of state intervention to help bring Indigenous peoples into the national mold.

In 2003, the administration of President Vicente Fox sought to move away from the assimilationist politics toward Indigenous communities, changing the name of the National Indigenista Institute in the process. This decision reflected a broader change in throughout Latin America in state policy toward Indigenous peoples—a move away from *assimilationism* and *developmentalism* to a politics of the recognition of plurality and cultural diversity. Thus in 2003, the Institute became known as the *Comisión Nacional para el Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas (CDI),* or the National Commission for the Development of Indigenous Peoples. As of 2016, the *Sistema Nacional de Radiodifusores Culturales* Indigenistas—a project run by the CDI—maintains a total of 21 different radios that operate in fifteen states of the Republic and transmit in 36 different Indigenous languages.

David Valtierra, one of the founders of Radio Ñomndaa of Xochistlahuaca, Guerrero, provides insight into the conditions associated with becoming an Indigenista radio. In 2004, Radio Ñomndaa took to the air—a community radio without official permission to transmit on the FM airwaves. Valtierra explains that not long after taking to the airwaves, the community was approached by the CDI offering an official permit under the banner of an Indigenista radio. This permit to transmit legally, came with a series of stipulations. The first condition was to immediately stop transmission for at least six months, while the bureaucratic process to acquire a permit under the CDI was carried out. Armed conflict couldn't be promoted on the radio, nor

could political parties be spoken of, whether in favor or against. Furthermore, the radio couldn't organize itself as a civil association.

The community organized an assembly to discuss the proposal at hand, and through discussion and debate, decided to not incorporate themselves into the CDI mold. As David Valtierra suggests, engaging with the government in the seeking of a permit was falling into a trap of cooptation that would ultimately direct and contain the project as a community radio. Valtierra's logic, and the decision ultimately made by the community, points to a tension between a community radio self-organized from within the community, and a Federal Indigenista radio project, seeking to regulate and supervise the direction and content of Indigenous community radios from outside and above.

In February of 2016, the digital newspaper *Sinembargo* reported the use of Radio Indigenistas for the purpose of sharing government reports and official government statements. As part of the official justification for the Radio Indigenistas to strengthen Indigenous culture in Indigenous communities, including transmitting in the communities' own Indigenous languages, this report exposed the use of the Federal Radio Indigenista program to introduce governmental information/ programs in Indigenous languages through the radio. As the report states, "The budget of the National Commission for the Development of Indigenous Peoples (CDI) designated to the System of Indigenous Cultural Radio Broadcasters (SCRI) worked to spread in 36 Indigenous languages, during all of 2015, presidential messages, secretary of government messages, electoral matters, and diverse actions of the Federal Government…" (Barragán, 2016, My translation).

While Indigenista radios are projects directly administered and controlled by the state as part of national plans of Indigenous cultural and economic development, radios affiliated with

AMARC, or the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters, are a somewhat different species, yet share on some level a direct link to the government. AMARC was founded in 1983 as a nongovernmental organization seeking to serve the global community radio movement. The Mexican chapter of AMARC was founded in 1992 "…with the purpose of grouping community radio projects". They explain, "In 2002, the work intensified and channels of communication were created with governmental institutions involved with the regulation of the use of radioelectric space. In this way, AMARC MX began the search for licenses for community radios, those that don't have specific recognition in the law of the country" (AMARC-MX, Historia, My translation). In the early 2000's, due to the legal obstacles making community radio pursuing and attaining the legal permits to transmit on the FM airwaves nearly impossible, AMARC Mexico took upon this specific task as their primary mode of organizational work.

While community radios associated with AMARC have often been born organically from the necessities of the community, seeking permits through and with AMARC have brought them beneath the logic of state recognition and the "right" to communication. Permission to broadcast as a community radio is seen as part of the rights of the citizen within the legal framework of the Mexican state. Furthermore, the right to communication, according to AMARC, is understood as an integral part of a liberal democratic politics, and the development of an informed citizenry which such a liberal democratic politics requires. North American Anthropologist Jeffrey Juris makes an important distinction between radio projects that pertain to AMARC (Global Association of Community Radios) that function with or actively seek legal permits, and free, Indigenous and autonomous radios that function according to a different logic. He writes,

> For many Mexican free radios, however, the decision to broadcast without a permit is an expressly political act linked to their commitment to a broader politics of autonomy. Whereas the radios associated with AMARC are dedicated to the promotion of "communication rights" via the legalization and proliferation

> of community radios, the free radio movement encourages "communicational autonomy" by taking the airwaves through illegal broadcasts (Juris, 2012: 170).

Here Juris distinguishes radios seeking permits through their legal struggles in association with AMARC and free or pirate radios that refuse the trappings of the state altogether. Furthermore, community radios that do not seek permits from the Mexican government, radios that do, and the Indigenista radios associated with the CDI are characterized by other differences.

Amongst radios that refuse the solicitation of permits to transmit, there are variations as well, that might help us further reflect on the variations of autonomous processes within the context of community radio. Urban radios in Mexico City for example, are often quicker to call themselves free radios than community radios. Jeffrey Juris writes of the difference between urban free radio and Indigenous radio stations, "For the latter, breaking the law is an end in itself, an expression of autonomy that directly challenges the state, whereas for Indigenous radio stations such as Radio Mundo, illegality is a means to a related yet different goal: full recognition of indigenous autonomy and rights *within* a trans- formed pluri-cultural state (Juris, 2012: 172). Juris' distinction simplifies the rather complex diversity of radios that cut across the rural/ urban and Indigenous/mestizo divide. Furthermore, the assertion that all Indigenous radio stations seek recognition within a pluri-cultural state is misleading. Regardless, his distinction carries some weight.

During an introduction to community radio workshop at the *tejemedios* gathering on the coast of Oaxaca in April of 2018, an interesting debate emerged around the identity of a community radio. Present at the workshop were both licensed and un-licensed radio projects—a difference that fed interestingly into the ensuing debate. Sitting in a large circle at small school desks, participants in nearly 40 different communication projects introduced themselves and their communication projects. For various participants, the conversation turned to the question of a

legal permit to transmit on the FM airwaves. Various participants shared the historical development of their radios, and the state repression they'd faced due to their lack of legal permits.

One participant of a free student radio in Mexico City shared how they'd been forced from the FM airwaves due to state repression and had since taken their transmission to the internet. The debate on whether to pursue a legal permit and return to FM was ongoing inside of this particular radio collective. Another radio project from the state of Puebla shared the experience of having their equipment taken by the state during a raid on the radio cabin due to them transmitting without a legal permit. This specific participant, a young media worker who shared with me his commitment to Indigenous cultural revitalization through the radio project, explained that this was actually a positive development, as it forced them to seek out a license, allowing them to have since experienced much more stability and committed participation in the radio.

The variety of experiences related to whether or not to seek legal permission shared in the workshop, seemed directly related to the material and historical context of the specific radio projects and their development. Relatedly, this debate reflected deeper-seated political ideologies held by participants in the various radio projects. Radios that hold a more radical critique of the state, might refuse to seek permission regardless of the material context in which they find themselves. Other radio projects with a more liberal political position, might find a legal permit to be the recognition of their right of communication and a necessary demand as citizens of a democratic nation-state.

In the workshop, I found it interesting the radios that had sought out legal permits seemed to take an almost defensive character, attempting to maintain that their radio projects fit within

what it meant to be a community radio. A middle-aged woman who was part of a group who recently founded a feminist radio in Mexico City with NGO backing and legal permission, seemed to go to extra measures to maintain that their radio project was indeed a community radio. She passionately argued that legal permission should not be the signifier of whether a radio is a community radio or not. A similar sentiment was shared by participants from other radios that had sought out and received legal permission to transmit on FM.

On the other hand, a young male participant of a radio in Huajuapan de Leon, Oaxaca, with a more anarchist perspective on radio broadcasting shared his distrust and downright disgust with the state and its violent acts of repression against communities in resistance. Within this context, he argued that from the radio project of which he was part of, there was no initiative to seek permission from the state, as the state itself was a fundamental component of the larger problems that society faced. As such, his perspective was that the radio should serve as a means for the people to serve the people directly, outside the confines or directives of the state.

The differences between urban and rural, Indigenous, student, etc. radios, along with their ideological positions, are often derivative of the material contexts in which they emerge, which of course influences their forms of organization and the politics in which they engage. Urban radio projects or student radio projects are of course derivative of different material contexts, along with community and social needs. An FM radio in an Indigenous community in the mountains of Guerrero or Oaxaca of course derive from different needs and serve different contexts. Regardless, there are all sorts of cross-pollinations in terms of organization, influence and overall character of different radio projects that work against legally recognized radio permits. Furthermore, it is important to recognize that many radio projects embody a plurality of

ideological positions amongst their members but often share a commitment to serving the interests of the community through the communal self-organization of the radio project itself.

Antoni Castells I Talens provides another layer of complexity in relation to the differences between radio projects in Mexico. Talens emphasizes the way in which Indigenista radios have been conceptually differentiated from community or Indigenous radios. He writes, "Indigenous organizations do not want the concept of community radio to be applied to a radio with a vertical structure that is controlled by the state. The government also doesn't want that its radios receive the "community" label, for fear that the label suggests the management has to be through the community assembly and beneath the ownership by the community" (Talens, 2011: 131, My translation). He furthers, "The community radio is born from below and the Indigenista radios are created from above. The community radios aspire to horizontal and participatory management and the Indigenista radios have vertical organization without the intention to transform them" (Talens, 2011: 135, My translation)

Talens goes on to complicate this conceptual distinction, as he suggests the practices of some Indigenista radios reflect certain characteristics used to define community or Indigenous radios. In a somewhat pessimistic tone, he writes:

> In fact, if the requirements to fit into the notion of community radio become too rigid—whether it be they are controlled by the assembly, collective, with content regarding social programs, with 100% independent income from any public or commercial institution, in harmony with local traditions, radical democracy, in accordance with human rights and horizontality, for example—then in the world there exists almost no community radio (Talens, 2011: 135, My translation).

In spelling out the messy politics that distinguish different radio projects, my point is not to dwell on whether radios are sufficiently radical, free or autonomous. Rather, I'm attempting to provide another glimpse into the multiple layers of complexity that autonomous politics

embody, engage and navigate. The distinctions that mark autonomous from what's not autonomous are often complex in practice, and not so easily defined or delineated. Regardless, from my perspective, there are certain practical modes from which community radios derive and practice their politics that make them a fundamental component to the autonomous milieu in Mexico. That is, radios that emerge from the voluntary association of community members to meet shared goals and necessities. It is often those same radios that emerge from, accompany or help cultivate larger social struggles for self-organization that make their organizational practices an essential part of autonomous politics and autonomous struggles.

Conclusion: Radio and Autonomy:

Community radios serve as a fundamental component of autonomous oriented struggle in Mexico, and an important practice exemplifying the complexity and diversity of autonomous processes as they take shape on the ground. The diversity of, and differences between, community radio projects demonstrate the plurality of historical, cultural, political and social contexts from which not only radios emerge, but from which autonomous struggles more generally emerge and take form. The location from which radios organize greatly influences the politics and content of the radio program, along with the political strategies they take in order to survive. These are self-organized projects that almost always emerge from voluntary association in pursuit of common goals. Those goals of course, are always located in the context from which the project emerges, causing both similarities and differences between radio projects.

A look into the politics and organizational processes of community radio has laid bare yet again the various layers of complexity and tension that animate the spaces in which community radio does its work. These spaces include the physical space of the radio, the community in

which the radio is situated, the spaces of transmission where the community radio message is heard, and also the spaces of self-organized encounter between community radios and independent media projects. They also include the spaces of interference, repression and enclosure where states, markets and other forces obstruct the free development of community radios and community organization. Working within, through and beyond all these spaces, we see the way in which community radio projects are navigating the complexities of autonomy though the internal and external relationships that influence their development as community radio projects. Furthermore, the self-construction and navigation of these radio spaces directs us to the importance of community radio as a force of self-organization within and beyond the community.

Community radio is a radio that is self-run by and for a community. It's a means to strengthen communal organization, resist communication specialization, and disperse the power of communication throughout the community. Furthermore, the spaces and practices of community radio help cohere other processes of self-organization within and beyond the immediate community. They serve as processes helping expand self-organization initiatives and enhancing the organization inherent to autonomous struggles. In this way, community radio works as a particular process among others, sharing, supporting, strengthening and cultivating various lines of autonomous struggle being engaged throughout these spaces.

To continue, in the following chapter I will turn to another process of autonomous struggle, communal organization, and political resistance in the context of Mexico—that of armed self-defense. I want to approach the armed community police and self-defense groups, specifically in the states of Guerrero and Michoacán, as another force in the diverse and plural autonomous milieu in Mexico. In doing this, I want to maintain attention to the context laid out

by the community assembly and the community radio—a context of a multitude of forces, working through the various layers, processes and spaces that characterize autonomous struggles in Mexico.

Chapter 5: Armed Community Self-Defense and Autonomous (Il)Legalities

We do not want recognition from the government...we want respect…

- Cirino Plácido Valerio (Member of the CRAC-PC)

The CRAC-PC is not subject to any level of government nor politician, much less any dishonest groups. The relation with the government is not of subordination but neither is it of confrontation.

- CRAC-PC, Casa de Justicia de San Luis Acatlan, Consejeros Regionales

To live outside the law, you must be honest.

- Bob Dylan

Mexico is at war. An internal war where the people are the enemy. This is a war where international corporations, local, state and federal politicians, along with organized crime groups share overlapping agendas and interests, making deals and exchanging influence. This war has been tragic. Reports note that Mexico was the second deadliest country in the world in 2016, only behind Afghanistan. NPR reported official numbers from the Mexican government showing that more than 2000 people were killed in the month of May 2017 alone—the deadliest month in the history of Mexico since the government began tracking murders in 1997 (Kahn, 2017). This war has impacted wide swaths of the Mexican population, including of course communities struggling to organize themselves and protect the lands they inhabit.

A major force behind the violence in Mexico is the expansive drug cartel activity and influence, working networks of production and transportation throughout much of Mexico and beyond throughout the world. These cartels work not only the borderlands of states, but the

borderlands of legality, carrying out business ventures in both the "legal" and "illegal" worlds, and maintaining connections of influence and cooperation with politicians, military and police. Two states in particular have become ground zero of drug production and transportation in the Southwest of Mexico: Guerrero and Michoacán. According to an NPR report, 93 percent of the heroin analyzed in 2015 came from Mexico, with more than half of that coming from the state of Guerrero (Fredrick, 2018). Michoacán on the other hand, is the number one producer of methamphetamine, and with its extensive agriculture base, has become a haven for cartels coercing quotas from large and small-scale farmers.

The Mexican government, at all three levels—federal, state and municipal—have equally played an active role in the violence that has subsumed Mexico. At the end of 2006, the newly inaugurated Felipe Calderon launched an interior war on drugs sending 6,500 troops into his home state of Michoacán and kicking off the highly militarized and deadly war on drugs (Presidencia de la República, 2006, My translation). What was initiated in a moment of exception, federal troops have become the internal police in Mexico, most always doing more harm than good. Most recently, in December 2017, the Mexican government passed the *Ley de Seguridad Interior,* or Internal Security Law, greenlighting the use of military force in internal affairs at the whim of the President of the Republic. Like the organized crime groups and the other forces at play in this chapter, federal forces and the rest of the state apparatus work the borderlands of legality too, often working corrupt channels with organized crime.

Another prominent force in the internal war raging in Mexico is the extensive influence of extractive industries that blur the lines of legality and illegality. International mining interests often work deals with politicians and armed drug cartels, for access to territory and insurance of security amidst their extractive endeavors. In October of 2015, the 31st International Convention

of Mining was held in Acapulco, Guerrero, as a blatant display of the mining interests in a state battered by resource extraction and violence led by organized crime.

Amidst this panorama of violence—struggle for hegemony, for control of land and resources, for control of drug-trafficking routes—stand the people and communities of Mexico. Particularly in Guerrero and Michoacán, Indigenous and *campesino* communities live and work on the land that sits between the international corporations, the drug trade, and their loot. Fed up with the violence in their communities that has become normalized, in various contexts and in various ways, communities have begun to arm themselves, experimenting with alternative forms of justice and security according to their historical and social contexts, and the necessities that their contexts demand.

These struggles of armed self-defense work the borderlands of legality and illegality, inviting us to consider questions regarding legitimacy and political power, to again consider the complexities of autonomous struggles in relation to the various forces at play in the social and political worlds. Within this context, I want to consider some of the fundamental questions that have been taken up by political philosophy, and I'd like to suggest some nuances to them in the context of this larger dissertation. What is a state without the monopoly on the legitimate use of violence? What is a failed state? What does an autonomous struggle offer us in thinking about these questions? How do autonomous struggles emerge or come into existence amidst a field where legality, legitimacy and the like are openly contested and questioned—or perhaps non-existent? How can we begin to think about legalities and legitimacies that don't adhere to the hangover of the legality and legitimacy of the contemporary social and political order?

Community Police in the Costa Chica and Montaña of Guerrero:

Mexico has a long history of armed resistance, experiencing its most active phase during the Mexican revolution at the beginning of the 20th century. The torch was carried on throughout the 20th century, and after the marked end of the revolution in 1917, with infamous guerrilla figures like Rubén Jaramillo, Lucio Cabañas, Genaro Vázquez, and the countless nameless revolutionaries that turned to armed resistance as their mode of political action. More recently the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) in Chiapas and the Popular Revolutionary Army (EPR) spanning various Mexican states have become markers of the ongoing armed struggle in Mexico. Alongside expressions of armed resistance such as the EZLN and EPR, forms of armed community defense have existed and developed more subtly, daily organizing and constructing community security and community justice from below.

The most notable and perhaps most organized of these forces of armed community defense is the *Coordinadora Regional de Autoridades Comunitarias- Policia Comunitaria* (Regional Coordinator of Community Authorities—Community Police), CRAC-PC. The CRAC-PC came to life in the *Montaña* and *Costa Chica* regions of the state of Guerrero in the early 1990's developing upon the already established organizational forces and networks in the region. A society, group of communities and geographical region, that was already engaged in various organizational initiatives coalesced around a common material condition—the lack of security and infrastructure in Guerrero.

Roots of the CRAC-PC can be traced in certain respects to the guerrilla armed struggles in the state of Guerrero in the 50's, 60's and early 70's. Beyond the shared willingness to take up arms in defense of their communities, the guerrilla struggles and the contemporary community police both share a commitment to territorial defense in the interests of Indigenous and *campesino* communities in the state. The infamous guerilla leader Genaro Vázquez was

originally from the town of San Luis Acatlán, now an important seat in the CRAC-PC community system. A member of the CRAC-PC from San Luis Acatlán proudly mentioned to me that in the community's graveyard, sits the guerrilla fighters tomb.

In the 1980's, the mountainous region of Guerrero was part of a nation-wide increase in coffee production, led partially by government subsidies. The expansion of coffee production in Indigenous and *campesino* communities in the region similarly lead to the growth of social organization, with organizations derivative of productive practices spilling over into other areas of social and political organization. In the 1980's and 1990's various organizations were formed including, *Unión de Ejidos "La Luz de la Montaña"*, *Unión Regional Campesina de la Costa Chica y la Montaña*, and *Consejos Comunitarios de Abasto*.

The emergence of productive organizations coincided with the growing Indigenous organization around the 500th anniversary of the colonization of the Americas. In 1990, the *Consejo Guerrerense 500 Años de Resistencia Indigena (CG500ARI)* was formed by various Indigenous communities in the region to organize around the ongoing resistance to colonization of Indigenous peoples and their territories. It was amidst these various organizational initiatives, that the CRAC-PC developed its roots and influence. Alba Teresa Estrada Castañón explains:

> The process of La Comunitaria illustrates the formation of a collective actor. A long organizational process preceded its creation. Organizations of producers, struggles for ethnic and cultural vindication, the presence of activists of the social left and political party left and, in the 1970's, presence of guerrilla commandos. All of these actors, in interaction with the social pastoral of the progressive clergy provided the social tie, the symbolic repertoire, and the organizational structures for collective action (Estrada Castañón, 2014: 77: My translation).

While these various organizational processes that preceded the CRAC-PC were fundamental in its formation, it was specifically the material situation of violence and insecurity in Guerrero in the early 1990's, that prompted various communities to take action. In the early

1990's the state of Guerrero was living through an extreme wave of violence, marked most notably by the rising influence of drug cartels throughout the state.

> From 1992 to 1995, this most violent wave of violence took place, as the assaults were almost daily, women, girls, youth and ladies were raped in front of their husbands, fathers or whoever accompanied them, without respect to sex nor age. Walking on the roads was nearly impossible, as violence was the order of the day. When the aggrieved people presented their denunciation to the public prosecutor, there was never an investigation (CRAC-PC, 2014, 157: My translation).

In the face of this violence and the state's unwillingness to address the pressing issues, communities in the *Costa Chica* and *Montaña* of Guerrero began to meet in assemblies throughout the early 1990's to address possible ways forward to combat insecurity and violence. Furthermore, they sought to address the state's unwillingness to assist these rural communities in areas of infrastructure and other social assistance—another key element that influenced the formation and organization of the CRAC-PC.

On October 15th, 1995, in the community of Santa Cruz El Rincón, a regional assembly was held with participants from 28 communities including various productive and social organizations of which I mentioned above. There, the assembly took their first step toward communal and regional security, organizing what at the time they called community police. In 1998, in a regional assembly that sought to unite a council of community police forces across the region, the participating communities took on the name *Coordinadora Regional de Autoridades Indígenas de la Montaña y Costa Chica de Guerrero* (CRAI), or Regional Coordinator of Indigenous Authorities in Montaña and Costa Chica. "[In] 2002, the name changed to *Coordinadora Regional de Autoridades Comunitarias (CRAC)* due to the participation of Mestizo communities in the Community System" (Fini, 2016: 101, My translation).

The assembly in 1998 marked the development of a new direction for the community system, moving beyond the task of local security toward a regional organization that included processes of justice and reeducation. With this, the *Sistema de Seguridad, Justicia y Reeducacion Comunitaria*, or System of Community Security, Justice and Reeducation was created. While previously, those detained by community police forces were often let go shortly after, the creation of the regional institution of security, justice and reeducation put self-organized community justice and reeducation at the center of the work of the community system. Teresa Sierra explains:

> The other distinctive characteristic of the community system is the separation between the system of surveillance and security—beneath the responsibility of the regional commanders and the community police—and the administration of justice—in hands of the regional coordinators and the commissioners of the communities (Teresa Sierra, 2013: 169, My translation).

Thus, security and justice, or security and reeducation became two distinct tasks of the CRAC-PC at two different levels of the community system and its organization.

Participation in the CRAC-PC in the communities of the *Costa Chica* and *Montaña* of Guerrero has been matriculated into the system of communal cargos and assemblies, similar to the uses and customs of Indigenous communities in Oaxaca I addressed in chapter three. Thus, like other services fulfilled by community members, service in the community police is an unpaid position, elected by the communities themselves in their community assemblies.

The CRAC-PC has developed over 22 years into a highly organized community system, embodying organizational features that ensure the continual distribution of decision-making power into the bases of the system. I understand organization here not in the more authoritarian interpretation, assuming the exclusivity of organization as a top-down organization, but more as a form where decision making carried out from below with maximum participation of those

whom the decisions effect. From the base in the local communities' assemblies, power, decision-making and organization reach out into a rather complex system of assemblies, councilors and representatives, that in a constant feedback loop, bring decision-making back to community decision-making. I'd like to take some space to lay out some of the internal workings of this organizational structure.

The community assembly, "...is the basic organ and fundamental pillar of the community system" (CRAC-PC, Reglamento Interno, 2017, My translation). "It is the organization where the population analyzes, proposes, organizes and participates in the decisions regarding the challenges that the community faces and validates the actions and decisions taken and the authorities named to coordinate their implementation" (CRAC-PC, Reglamento Interno, 2017, My translation). Like I addressed in chapter three regarding the community assembly in Oaxaca, the community assembly is the base of the CRAC-PC and is where issues are discussed and decisions are made. From the assembly both the *comisario*, town commissioner, and *policia comunitaria,* community police members, are elected directly. The *comisario* serves in the position for one year and is susceptible to revocation by the same community assembly at any time. The principal function of the *comisario* is to implement justice in accordance with the *reglamento interno*, or internal regulations, developed through communal and regional assemblies, who are participants in the CRAC-PC community system.

The community police members are also elected by the communal assemblies and serve their positions for two years. "To fulfill this cargo, the community assembly will name their best citizens, those who don't have antecedents of bad behavior, that are honest, that are originally from the community or that permanently have settled in the community that names them, and that commit to fulfil the regulations and agreements reached in the community and regional

assemblies" (CRAC-PC, Reglamento Interno, 2017, My translation). In this way, the active members of the community police are directly responsible to the interests and demands of the community assembly, along with the agreements and decisions that they make.

Another element of the CRAC-PC, derived from the participant communities in the community system is the *Consejo de Principales*, or council of leaders. This council is made up mostly of elders who have served their various cargos in the community and have shown great commitment to the well-being of the community. Their role is to help direct the workings of the *comisario* giving their opinions to both the *comisarios* as well as the community assemblies as a whole. They too, actively participate in the regional assemblies which I will turn to next.

Outside of the immediate sphere of the community, exists the organization of *Las Asambleas Regionales de Autoridades Comunitarias*, or Regional Assemblies of Community Authorities—decision making bodies that organize regionally across various communities of the CRAC-PC. These regional assemblies are directly linked to either a *casa de jusiticia*, house of justice, or *comite de enlace*, committee of outreach. There are four houses of justice in the communal territory reaching various regions of the *Costa Chica* and *Montaña* of Guerrero. These houses of justice serve as regional centers of organization. The outreach committees serve a similar role as the houses of justice but do their work in areas of the communal territory where new communities are joining the system and where houses of justice don't yet exist. In the regional assemblies, *comisarios*, council of elders, community police, social organizations and local and regional councilors all participate in making decisions regionally according to the decisions made in each participating community.

Beyond the regional assemblies is the *Asamblea General de Autoridades Comunitarias*, or General Assembly of Communal Authorities. This is the maximum organization of making

decisions that reaches across all the participant communities in the CRAC-PC institution and territory. "It is the organization in charge of ensuring and guaranteeing the fulfillment of the historical principles, internal regulations and the integrity of the community system" (CRAC-PC, Reglamento Interno, 2017, My translation). This is the assembly where all actors, organizations and sub-organizations are present and where decisions are made affecting the community system as a whole.

Amidst and between the communal, regional and general assemblies that make-up the multi-layered organization of the CRAC-PC, are a series of positions that better coordinate organization and representation in the various assemblies and decision-making processes. These include local and regional councilors, regional coordinators of the houses of justice or committees of outreach, the executive committee of the community police, and the commission of general coordination.

Through this highly organized structure, the CRAC-PC have developed a community system of security, justice and re-education, where power is dispersed throughout the communities involved. Decision-making is structured in a manner as to insure constant reflexivity and responsibility to the bases of power, which rest in the community assemblies of participating communities. Regional and general organization serve as a means to better coordinate the community system's efforts, as well as better integrate the communities that make up the *Costa Chica* and *Montaña* regions of Guerrero into the shared organizational project.

CRAC-PC: A Community System in Movement:

In October of 2017 I attended the 22nd anniversary of the CRAC-PC in the community of Colombia de Guadalupe in the *montaña* region of the state of Guerrero. I traveled to the event

with a group of students and journalists from Mexico City. The caravan was organized by a friend of mine from the region of Guerrero, who was residing in Mexico City to carry out his studies at the university. He had organized the caravan to the anniversary event, because as he explained to me, he thought it was important that people from the city become better familiar with the community system being organized in the mountains of Guerrero.

Colombia de Guadalupe is located about an hour and a half drive from San Luis Acatlán—a bastion of the CRAC-PC community system that sits down the mountain in the *costa-chica* region of Guerrero. We arrived to San Luis Acatlán by bus from Mexico City, but were forced to stop there as the highway from San Luis Acatlán to Colombia de Guadalupe (and up the rest of the *montaña* region of Guerrero) is narrow, windy and overgrown, making the route nearly impassible by full-size bus. One of the original demands of the organizational forces that led to the CRAC-PC was for improved infrastructure in the *montaña* region of Guerrero, including the paving of Tlapa-Marquelia highway. While the highway has been paved, it still shows signs of an area of Guerrero that has been more or less abandoned by the state in relation to infrastructure investment.

From San Luis Acatlán, we loaded into the back of a pickup truck provided by the CRAC-PC, where we made the hour and a half ascent to the community of Colombia de Guadalupe. As we moved along the highway, we saw multiple trucks filled with coffee plants, being transported to their destinations to be planted. Coffee being one of the principal crops in the region, along with another one of the driving forces behind the organization of the CRAC-PC. Furthermore, we passed various fresh water rivers and streams along with various road signs marked with graffiti protesting mining and hydroelectric interests in the region. The CRAC-PC have been one of the major forces behind the resistance to the hydro-electric dam La

Parota of the Papagayo river and the community next to Colombia de Guadalupe, San Miguel el Progreso, recently won a battle against mining concessions in their community territory. The defense of territory has become a central focus of the CRAC-PC community system, something I will turn to in the next section.

The anniversary took place over two days with a combination of talks, workshops, music, dance and a protest march of all the participating community police forces present. The event mixed both festivities and organizational work, reflecting how often-dichotomized spheres are being engaged differently in the work of the communities and the community system in Guerrero. In attendance were community police forces from a great number of participant communities of the CRAC-PC (usually somewhere between 6-10 people from each community), along with council members, community members, municipal authorities, journalists, community radio workers, etc.

The organizational work at the anniversary consisted principally of five simultaneous *grupos de trabajo,* or working groups, that addressed various themes including: the constitutional reform in the state of Guerrero regarding Indigenous and Afro-Mexican peoples, the Internal Regulations of the CRAC-PC, actions for territorial defense, popular struggle in the context of the 43 disappeared students of Ayotzinapa, and the role and participation of women in the community system. The work day ended with a traditional dance on the community's basketball court, followed by live music and festivities that lasted into the early next morning.

The following day, a march took place through the community with the participation of the community police forces present along with various communal authorities, community members, musicians and others there participating in the event. The anniversary activities ended

with brief summaries of the discussions that were had and agreements reached in each working group along with a set of larger agreements reached during the anniversary as a whole.

The organizational processes that made up the anniversary event, along with the dialogues had in the various working groups make explicit the way in which the CRAC-PC functions as a community system in constant movement. One working group I found particularly relevant to the process of the CRAC-PC was the group discussion on the *reglamento interno*, or internal regulations of the CRAC-PC—a document I referred to extensively above in laying out the basic structure of the community system. This document serves as a guiding source for the structure and activities of the CRAC-PC along with various rules which are to be followed amidst the territory controlled by the CRAC-PC.

During the workshop of the *reglamento interno*, its most recent draft was presented to those present including various council representatives and authorities from the CRAC-PC system. Debate was had, often fierce, regarding recent changes to the *reglamento interno*. As the session winded down, those present agreed to hold another general assembly for which the recent changes would be discussed and agreed upon. The incentive of having the assembly again a month later, was meant to allow representatives and councilors present to return to their regional and communal assemblies to discuss collectively what changes had been made, and what further changes were wanted from the communal base organizations.

The manner in which the *reglamento interno* was presented and developed speaks to a larger politics of the CRAC-PC, a manner of learning as they walk as the Zapatista phrase has put it. The *reglamento interno* is a structure and set of rules in motion, constructed, modified and changed in accordance with the demands of the participating communities. The document, and the organizational modes that give life to the document, respond constantly to the challenges

the community system faces, and the accompanying demands of its participants as they develop and better integrate their community and regional system. The system thus isn't fixed or static, but in constant movement, responding to the situations of the communities involved.

The manner in which community and regional assemblies play an integral part of the organizational structure of the CRAC-PC community system further elucidates the continual self-reflection, flexibility and process of the community system. They write,

> Making decisions through community and regional assemblies, has been the legitimate and appropriate mechanism so that agreements made are valid and respected by the majority. The development of our institution, in spite of having been based in consensus, has not been without misunderstanding, or criticism, whose objective is not always constructive. This has instigated us to question ourselves in a permanent manner regarding how we have worked and how we should continue working; to look at our history and to think about our future (CRAC-PC, 2014: 160, my translation).

The permanent process of self-reflection, of an awareness of historical development with an eye to the future, exemplifies the way in which the CRAC-PC is a community system in movement. If further bolsters the way in which I am approaching autonomous struggles here, as processual movements toward open ends.

Defense of Territory, In all Aspects:

The CRAC-PC work within a geographical zone of what they call the *territorio comunitario*, or the community territory. The community territory is the unity of communities that make up the CRAC-PC system and serves as a loose marker of territory controlled by the community system in pursuit of security, justice and reeducation. In the actions of the CRAC-PC, the community territory has been interpreted in an integral fashion, connecting security and

justice for territory to security and justice for community members as part of their larger project. They write as such:

> By community territory it is understood the unity of communities that form the regional system of security, justice and reeducation, that have decided their incorporation as is established in the present regulation. At all times unity and mutual aid will support between the communities, in a manner that in whatever situation that there is an attack against any element of the community, their air, water, soil, subsoil, flora and fauna, cultural traditions, productive traditions or organizational traditions, will be taken as an aggression against the totality of the system and the community territory (CRAC-PC, Reglamento Interno, 2017, My translation).

The CRAC-PC have interpreted security, justice and reeducation in an integral manner, derived from the interconnectedness of all relationships within the communal territory. This ecological approach to security, justice and reeducation has led to various efforts that reach outside of conventional state understandings of security, justice and reeducation.

First, as was evident in the 22nd anniversary of the CRAC-PC, territorial defense has been centered as an integral component of the community system. As stated during the 22nd anniversary event, “The principal purpose of the community system is the defense of territory, with the understanding that more than common crime, today the large corporations are the enemy dedicated to the plunder and dispossession of our communities, like the mines” (Bellinghausen, 2017, My translation). Territorial defense against extractive industries in the region has become a fundamental task of the activity of the community police and the larger community and regional system.

Beyond the defense of territory, the community system has amplified its project of security, justice and reeducation into other realms of communal and social organization and development.

> In virtue of having proposed to strengthen the creative and organizational capacity of our communities, the community system proposes to construct models of community participation to have in the hand of the people, the exercise of the rights in the following areas: health, education, production (CRAC-PC, Reglamento Interno, 2017, My translation).

With this point, the CRAC-PC are developing their capacities beyond simply armed security forces, into other areas of self-organization. Self-organized health-care and education projects, better productive organization, along with self-organized media efforts have all been integrated into the community system. In this way, we see the manner in which the CRAC-PC has interpreted security, justice and reeducation in the community territory to mean other forms of self-organized efforts that are integrally linked to community and regional well-being.

Contesting Legalities:

Since its formation, the relationship between the CRAC-PC and the Mexican government (and its legalities) has been one of dynamic interplay, characterized at times by conflict and repression, and other times by cooperation and mutual recognition. This complex interplay of forces between the CRAC-PC and the various levels of government, direct us once again to the multiple layers and complexities inherent to an autonomous struggle. At its core, the CRAC-PC emerged as a self-organized force to address insecurity and violence plaguing the region of Guerrero. It was a response to the unwillingness or incapacity of state forces to reel in the horrific violence threatening everyday life. In this self-organized response, the emergence of armed self-defense groups, and self-organized institutions of justice and re-education, threaten the basis of the conventional conception of state power and its monopoly on the legitimate use of violence.

Both analysts of the CRAC-PC and members of the community system often point to the various state, federal and international legal codes that legitimize the ability of communities in Guerrero to self-organize their security and systems of justice. Both Article 2 of the Federal Constitution and Covenant 169 of the International Labor Organization have recognized the right of Indigenous peoples to organize their own systems of security and justice according to, as is the case in Oaxaca, their uses and customs. These two overarching legal statutes, often provide legal ammunition used by the community system against the various attacks from the state.

In April of 2011, the state government of Guerrero signed into law the *Ley Numero 701 de Reconocimiento, Derechos y Cultura de Los Pueblos y Comunidades Indígenas del Estado de Guerrero,* or Law Number 701 of Recognition, Rights and Culture of the Indigenous Peoples and Communities of the State of Guerrero. The law specifically recognized forms of Indigenous organization in the state of Guerrero, and included direct recognition of the legality of the CRAC-PC community system. Article 37 addresses the CRAC-PC specifically:

> The state of Guerrero recognizes the existence of the system of Indigenous justice of the Costa-Montaña and of the Regional Council of Community Authorities for all legal purposes. The corresponding laws will establish the characteristics of relationship of the Council with the Judicial Power of the state and of their participation in the state system of public security, respecting the integrality and modalities of the Council in terms of public security, procuration, impartation and administration of justice. In accordance with Law 281 of Public Security of the State of Guerrero and of the supplementary order and object of the public security that is established in it, this law confirms the recognition of the community police, respecting its character as a body of auxiliary public security of the Regional Council of Community Authorities. Consequently, the organs of public power and the particulars, will respect their actions in the exercise of its functions as acts of authority. The Regional Council of Community Authorities and Community Police will form part of the State System of Public Security. The competent authority may refer to the custody of the Council, to the Indigenous sentenced for crimes of common law to serve their sentence and be socially rehabilitated conforming to the norms established for that purpose by the Council and which

> protects the State Penal Code (Gobierno del Estado de Guerrero, Ley Número 701, 2011, My translation).

The legal recognition of the CRAC-PC under the law implemented by the state of Guerrero was and is a center of debate and conflict, both for the state as well as for the communities and individuals that make up the CRAC-PC. Daniele Fini has noted that, "Before and after its approval, the law was criticized by the leaders of the CRAC-PC because they were never involved in its process of discussion" (Linsalata, 2016: 108, My translation). As is often the case in the development of recognition legislation directed toward Indigenous communities, the legislative process excluded the participation of members of the community institution—thus making evident that the legislation was more an attempt at cooptation, discipline and control, than of the recognition of self-determination.

Beside this context of legal recognition from the state government of Guerrero, the CRAC-PC has faced ongoing political repression including the incarceration and murder of several of its members, and outstanding arrest warrants for many others. Most recently in January 2018, five members of the CRAC-PC were killed and 30 arrested in a military operation on the coast of Guerrero. The CRAC-PC organization has once against denounced this as violent repression and a direct attack on their community system. Prior to these events, at least three members of the CRAC-PC remain incarcerated, and over 70 arrest warrants remain active against its members. The crimes include things like kidnapping and the possession of firearms, charges that seek to criminalize the everyday work of members of the CRAC-PC.

In March of 2017, the Congress of the State of Guerrero began to discuss reforms to Law 701, which has granted legal recognition to the community police system. The motivation for the potential reforms, at least according to those politicians leading the initiative, has been the increase in self-defense initiative across the state, which the government claims, often have close

ties to organized crime groups. The discussions to reform the Law 701, are said to be a means to curtail the growing self-defense initiatives that are not associated with the CRAC-PC, and according to governmental justification, might have links to organized crime.

The CRAC-PC on their own right, have had to navigate this complex and multi-layered relationship with the Mexican state and the ever-present political parties. The CRAC-PC have continually made clear that they do not want recognition from the government, but only want respect for their community system. Part of this demand for respect has been grounded on the understanding that incorporation into, or recognition from, the government of the community system will be a blow to its social fabric, and that of the communities involved. As such, while openly accepting, and at times appealing to this legislation in defense of their community system, they have refused the subordination of the community system under the logic and command of the Mexican state.

Law 701 of the state of Guerrero is a pointed example of these complexities. While openly critical of the way in which the law was developed and administered, law 701 has become a means in which the CRAC-PC have made legal claims regarding their right to self-organize community security, justice and reeducation. It has become a defensive tool in times of repression from the Mexican state, including as a legal demand for the freedom of political prisoners and the termination of current arrest warrants. The recent governmental discussions to reform law 701 in Guerrero, has brought the CRAC-PC in defense of the law, arguing more than ever, any discussion of reform to the law should include participation of members and representatives of the community system.

Unlike the conventional guerrilla forces, the CRAC-PC have made clear they are not at war with the Mexican state but are rather trying to develop their own systems of community and

regional security and organization. In fact, the CRAC-PC have at times proactively sought coordination with the Mexican state on various levels throughout its history and development. For example, in the assemblies, organizations and processes that led to the foundation of the CRAC-PC, the state was often present, whether physically with representatives or more discursively as a reference point in the logistical formation of the CRAC-PC as a community and regional system. Furthermore, the state was solicited on various occasions for funds for uniforms, vehicles for transportation or even at times for weaponry as the community system sought to meet the material demands necessary for security forces within a context of economic poverty.

The 48th Infantry Battalion, the military arm active in *Costa Chica* region of Guerrero has played a fundamental role in the development and existence of the CRAC-PC, often serving as the intermediary between the CRAC-PC and the Mexican political class. Various coordinators and regional council members have actively sought coordination with the 48th Infantry Battalion, most likely as a strategic endeavor to ward off any direct repression coming from the Mexican military active in Guerrero. A fundamental component of this cooperation, has been in the registration of weapons used by the CRAC-PC.

From the outset of its organizational initiatives, the CRAC-PC have followed the necessary processes of registration of their weaponry in coordination with the 48th Infantry Battalion. While the sources of the weaponry have varied—some weapons coming from the communities, some borrowed from other communities, some from the state itself—the CRAC-PC have diligently followed the necessary steps to register their weapons appealing to the demands of the state. As Cruz and Espinobarro explain:

> Taking into account that the majority of the guns carried by the community police were of individuals or the property of the communities, and to prevent more

> disarmament of the community police, we decided to register the guns with the 48th Infantry Battalion (Cruz and Espinobarro, 2016: 142, My translation).

Coordination with the 48th Infantry Battalion has reached beyond the mere registration of weapons to include other spheres of cooperation that cut across the sharp division between state and non-state actors:

> In the case that concerns us, we established a fundamental relationship with three commanders that directed this battalion in different periods of 1997: the coronals of the infantry: Alonso, Leonel and Victor Manuel. The three supported the community police extensively, not only in the training and registration of arms, but also on some occasions with the operation of the groups… (Cruz and Espinobarro, 2016: 142, My translation).

Thus, rather than theorizing the CRAC-PC as an "autonomous" force, understood as fully separated from the state and other exterior forces, we see the way in which the CRAC-PC has navigated the complexities of these relationship strategically in attempt to ward off repression and maintain the internal fabric of the community system. The practices of the CRAC-PC invite us to consider autonomy rather as a complex movement of self-organization, navigation, cooperation and self-defense.

***Autodefensas* in the State of Michoacán:**

In the state Michoacán, bordering Guerrero to the north, a similar context of violence and insecurity has long plagued the population. Like Guerrero, Michoacán has a long history of self-organization against such violence. "Historically, the border between legality and illegality has been blurred in *Tierra Caliente*, where the population has a long tradition of self-organizing their own security" (Arias-Vázquez, 2014: 174, My translation). In recent years, the insecurity in Michoacán has reached unprecedented levels, due to a combination of precarity brought about by

neoliberal economic policies along with the extensive militarization of the state beneath the pretext of the war on drugs.

Salvador Maldonado Aranda sketches out the clear links between the rise of organized crime and violence in the region and the neoliberal economic 'shock therapy' enacted by President Salinas de Gortari after taking power in 1988. Economic adjustment programs have had devastating effects on the rural Mexican population, reducing opportunities for economic security and increasing the likelihood of those to join organized crime groups out of desperation. Furthermore, as Maldonado Aranda suggests, neoliberal policies have also implemented changes in the state's approach to questions of security, corruption and political protection, that have had direct effects on the state of security and violence in Michoacán.

Economic adjustment programs have had devastating effects on the population of Michoacán, particularly due to Michoacán's position as a major producer of both illegal and legal crops. Furthermore, Michoacán's coastal location serves as a strategic zone for drug trafficking routes, adding to the various interests at play over the Michoacán territory. As Maldonado Aranda notes, "Currently, the region continues being a territory, producer and exporter of poppy and marijuana, as well as receptor of cocaine coming from South America, and is identified as the world capital of the production of synthetic drugs" (Maldonado Aranda, 2012: 10, My translation). Infrastructure constructed by the state to develop agricultural production, has been used simultaneously by organized crime, in businesses that work on both sides of so-called legality. Mexican journalist Luis Hernández Navarro explains the dire contradictions in Michoacán society:

> Michoacán is the principal state producer of iron, the principal agriculture exporter, with crops of avocado and berries. But it is also an entity in which

> according to Coneval, 54.4 percent (that is to say 2.44 million people) of the population live in poverty, between them, 650 thousand in conditions of extreme poverty (Navarro, 2014: 243, My translation).

Within this context of state and capital interests, undeniable inequality and poverty, and the ongoing horrific violence that plagues the state, the people of Michoacán in various areas and in various capacities have taken up arms in pursuit of personal and communal security.

In 2009 the Indigenous Nahua community of Santa María Ostula recuperated some 1000 hectares of traditional land that had been usurped by organized crime interests. As the repression and violence mounted in their territory leading to some 43 deaths of community members, in 2013 the community decided to reorganize their *guardia comunitaria*, or communal guard—an armed communal force to maintain security in the community. In 2011, on the heels of the uprising in the Indigenous Purépecha community of Cherán, the community too reorganized their traditional form of communal security known as the *Ronda Comunitaria*, or community round. These two specific communal struggles in the state of Michoacán share characteristics similar to the community system, the CRAC-PC, as the community police members serve directly beneath the command of the community and are appointed by communal assemblies.

Another multi-faceted armed struggle emerged in Michoacán in 2013, characterized by its ideological and historical diversity, but united around a shared material condition of insecurity. Falling under the name *autodefensas*, these self-defense groups rapidly spread throughout much of the state, standing up to the drug cartel *Templarios Cabelleros* and the various municipal and state politicians that work with and protect them. As Guerra Manzo writes, "Injured by the excessive extortions, assassinations, kidnappings, and abuses on the population, as well as the defenselessness in which the federal and state governments left them,

they decided to follow the example of the Indigenous peoples" (Guerra Manzo, 2015: 11, My translation).

On February 24th, 2013, over 800 men and women rose up in arms in various parts of Michoacán—acting upon their frustration with kidnappings, extortions and the general climate of violence in Michoacán. The movement was spearheaded most pointedly in the municipalities of Tepalcatepec and Buena Vista, in the *Tierra Caliente* of Michoacán. Guerra Manzo notes, "In less than a year, [the self-defense groups] would extend to all parts of Tierra Caliente, to the Sierra, the Coast, also including municipalities outside of these regions" (Guerra Manzo, 2015: 12, my translation).

With the growth of the self-defense forces throughout much of *Tierra Caliente* in Michoacán arose the necessity to better coordinate the various forces across the region. Thus, in the middle of 2013, the *Consejo General de Autodefensas y Comunitarias de Michoacán*, or General Council of Community and Self-defense Forces of Michoacán, was formed. The council helped coordinate new groups that emerged by giving them a concrete point of reference, and also served as an intermediary force between the self-defense forces and the government. On the ground, the council didn't necessarily signify better coordination, nor a formulation of ideological commonality.

To speak of cohesion between the *autodefensas*, even taking into account the aforementioned council, is to ignore the vast differences between them. These differences can be drawn from the historical, social, cultural and material differences in the contexts in which the forces emerged. Martha Arias-Vázquez tells us:

> In general, we could say that they are different autonomous groups that coincide in time and space in the decision to arm themselves in self-defense against Los Templarios in Michoacán. Not between them, nor in the interior of each group,

> does there exist ideological or political unity (Arias-Vázquez, 2014: 171, My Translation).

The self-defense groups can be interpreted more as a multiplicity of self-organized forces, emerging from their specific material contexts to combat the issues faced in their particular community or region. While there is a shared commitment to security in their communities, the specific organizational processes and make-up of the groups often differ according to their locations and contexts.

Governmental Response:

The relationship between the government and the *autodefensas* movement has been one of great complexity, characterized by inconsistencies and attempts at cooptation similar to the governmental relationship with the CRAC-PC in Guerrero. As Mexican journalist Luis Hernández Navarro rightly put it, "The relation between self-defense groups and the federal government is complex and has many sides. Between them both, there is an explicit alliance to combat the *caballeros templarios*. They are coordinated to carry out military operations together. The civil guards are not in war against the federal authorities. However, they are not subordinated to the governmental logic" (Navarro, 2014: 371, My translation). I want to briefly explore this complexity.

In June of 2013, Secretary of State Osorio Chong, after speculation that the government was dialoguing with the self-defense forces, assured that the Mexican state has the sole command of security in Mexican territory ("No hay negociación con autodefensas", 2013, My translation). In August of 2013, Osorio Chong again spoke out against the existence of armed self-defense groups. The Jornada reports him saying, "There cannot exist armed groups moving freely in the streets, at the margin of the law" (Martínez Elorriaga, 2013, My translation).

In early January, the self-defense groups rejected a call from Osorio Chong demanding they disarm. After a meeting in the capital of Michoacán, Osorio Chong had called on the armed self-defense groups to return to their communities and their normal everyday lives—once again expressing their illegality in carrying high caliber weaponry on the margins of the law.

In the second meeting to address issues of security with governors from the West of the country, led by Osorio Chong, the Attorney General of the Republic, Jesús Murillo Karam expressed that,

> It cannot be allowed, in any instance, that we break the rule of law with a fundamental principle in all countries of the world in all of them: the monopoly of the state in regards to public force, for a simple reason, because we would come to personal revenge or to public revenge which would make it impossible to live under the rule of law. What we are trying build with and do is the permanence of the rule of law ("No se permitirán autodefensas", 2013, My translation).

Following this failed approach, the Mexican Federal Government, and the Michoacán state government, changed their tactics. On January 27th, 2014, in Tepaltepec, Michoacán, the head of the Commission for Security and Integral Development in Michoacán, Alfredo Castillo, the governor of the state, Fausto Vallejo, and leaders of self-defense groups signed an agreement to institutionalize the self-defense groups under state command. With the agreement, the self-defense groups would be legally recognized as *Cuerpos de Defensa Rurales,* or bodies of rural defense. Anthropologist John Gledhill suggests the coercive nature in which the *autodefensas* forces were brought to the table:

> By combining threats of prosecution and incentives to collaborate in the form of state legislation, Castillo dragooned the leaders of the Tierra Caliente *autodefensas* into accepting incorporation into the *Fuerza Rural*, and he was soon to show what would happen to those who continue to resist this federal government dispensation (Gledhill, 2015: 191).

It is important to note that only some of the self-defense forces were present and willing to take part in this agreement with the government, while others have maintained their distance from institutionalization under the command of the federal of state government.

The agreement reached between the *autodefensas* and the federal and state government held various stipulations. The agreements required that the leaders of the *autodefensas* present a list of all their members, which would be validated by the Secretary of National Defense. The forces were seen to be temporary. The *autodefensas* were obligated to register all of their weapons with the Secretary of National Defense, while the government agreed to provide necessary equipment for communication, operation and movement.

On May 10th, 2014, the head of the head of the Commission for Security and Integral Development of Michoacán, Alfredo Castillo, lead the symbolic swearing in of members of the *autodefensas* into *Fuerzas Rurales*. The first 450 members of the *Fuerza Rural Estatal*, or Rural State Force, were given their blue government uniforms, an R15 with 30 bullets and a 9-millimeter pistol with 15 bullets. Furthermore, fifteen vehicles were transferred to the forces in order to assist in patrolling the region.

The approach of the Federal and State government, along with the strategy of the various self-defense groups points to a certain complexity in regard to their relationship. Enrique Guerra Manzo writes,

> For their part, the state while hitting at the most radical and conscientious cadres of the autonomy of the movement, is betting on an alliance with the local factions most prone to negotiation, that permits them to reinforce their sovereignty and governmentality in the municipalities where the *autodefensas* exist (Guerra Manzo, 2015: 30, My translation).

In some sense, the government was successful in doing this. Through the incorporation of the *autodefensas* into the bodies of rural defense, at least certain parts of the *autodefensas*, the state

was able to coopt a majority of the movement, leaving deep divisions and contradictions amongst the movement as a whole.

However, due to the multiplicity of forms and forces that make up the *autodefensas*, institutionalization has been incomplete and is likely impossible. After the agreements reached between the government and various so-called leaders of the movement, *autodefensas* continue to emerge and engage their practices in various parts of both Michoacán and Guerrero, autonomous from state-power and the institutionalized rural defense forces. The *autodefensas* phenomenon is unlikely to come to end, or be controlled or regulated by the government, as long as the material conditions of insecurity and violence continue in the various regions where the *autodefensas* are doing their work.

Contesting Sovereignties, Constructing Autonomy: Who Holds the Legitimate Use of Force?:

South African anthropologists Jean and John Comaroff have invited us to consider the complex dialectic between law and dis/order present in the postcolony. The dialectic works something like this: the movement toward "more or less" representative democratic regimes in postcolonies, founded on systems of law and order, have paradoxically coincided with the expansion of lawlessness and disorder. The response to this lawlessness and disorder has further fed into the dialectic, as more lawlessness and disorder have been accompanied by heightened demand for more law and order. While they focus specifically on the postcolony, they suggest that this dialectic may be part and parcel of the neoliberal condition across the globe.

This dialectic works in various ways. Comaroff and Comaroff point to what they call the fetishism of the law as a response to lawlessness. This includes a fetishism of constitutionality,

the *judicialization* of politics where legal proceedings are brought to resolve almost any conflict contemporary and historical, and the culture of legality that "…seems to be infusing the capillaries of everyday life…" (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2006: 25). The legal system in its various forms is mobilized as the necessary response to lawlessness even to the point where groups and actions that work outside the law take up masqueraded forms of legality and activate the discourses of legality.

Amidst this dialectic of law and dis/order, the lines that separate law and lawlessness, or lawful and unlawful, are blurred and ruptured in a confusing struggle over and between law, order and disorder. Furthermore, the sovereign monopoly of authority held by a particular legal system is dispersed into a "…horizontally woven tapestry of partial sovereignties…" (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2006: 35) or contesting but incomplete sovereignties. The state is always in the making yet is always being unmade. As Comaroff and Comaroff describe:

> These instances remind us, if a reminder is needed, how politics and crime, legitimate and illegitimate agency, endlessly redefine each other. The line between them is a frontier in the struggle to assert sovereignty or to disrupt it, to expand or contract the limits of the il/licit, to sanction or outlaw violence (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2006: 11).

The dialectic is ever-present, law and its outside are endlessly in need of each other, even while the differences between them become hard to distinguish. The dialectical struggle becomes the struggle between law and lawlessness, and the ongoing search for meaning and legitimacy amidst a field of intersecting forces and processes.

The communities of Guerrero and Michoacán that have taken up arms in pursuit of security in their communities, along with the various armed group formations that contest the division between illegal and legal bring interesting insight in conversation with the dialectic between law and dis/order. In the case of Mexico, in response to the context of lawlessness and

disorder— that is, violence and extortion enacted through alliances between government, organized crime and international corporations—law and order are often mobilized by both the state and the self-defense groups as the markings of stability and legitimacy in their practices. In a paradoxical manner, autonomous self-defense formations and analysts that seek to legitimize them, often turn to the law in search of this legitimacy. This mobilization of legal codes, as a means to delineate differences between armed self-defense groups, legitimizing some and delegitimizing others, again shows the complexity of autonomous processes and forces in their search for meaning.

In studies of the various armed groups in Mexico, there is a constant drive to delineate the differences between the community police of the CRAC-PC, the *autodefensas* of Michoacán, and the various other armed groups including paramilitaries and white guards that have direct connections with the state and are active in the territory of Mexico. Often this delineation turns to questions of legitimacy and legality. Analysts often speak of the "right" to self-defense and security, or the "right" to community justice based upon legal codes administered at the state, national and international levels. In legitimizing self-defense movements through the use of legal codes and statues, a reaffirmation of the state's sovereignty, even amidst a crisis of legitimacy proven directly in the formation of these self-defense groups, reaffirms in some sense the sovereignty and legitimacy of the state.

David Chacón Hernández's understanding of autonomy and the legitimacy of the community police, provides an example of the way in which the state's legal order is often seen as the marker of legitimacy in contexts of legal disorder. As such, the existence of the state is reaffirmed as is its sovereignty over a given territory. He writes defining autonomy, "[The] capacity of action that a person or group of people exercises with the objective of self-regulation,

self-direction, or voluntary exercise in the mark of recognition of the law. These actions are exercised politically, economically, socially and culturally" (Chacón Hernández, 2014: 92, My Translation). Here, Chacón Hernández assumes an autonomous struggle, and the legitimacy of such an autonomous struggle, to be necessarily exercised within the legal framework of the state. For Chacón Hernández, law is the marker of legitimacy, and autonomous self-defense groups, in order to be legitimate, should work within the framework of the law. He drives his point home, writing of community police,

> Thus, the police can be as legal or illegal as they want to be seen. Therefore, what is important is that, if there is no way to dissolve them, then it is necessary to institutionalize them and to assimilate them as part of a politics of community prevention with widespread local citizen participation (Chacón Hernández, 2014: 112, My translation).

It is in the institutionalization, under the mark of the law that Chacón Hernández argues the community police groups should exist and carry out their work. It is there, in the mark of the law, that autonomous struggles find their legitimacy.

Jesús Ramírez Cuevas makes a very similar argument in the same collection of essays. For Ramírez Cuevas, if the state is not fulfilling its duty, as dictated in the law and the constitution, it is the right of the community police and self-defense groups to fulfill this duty. He writes, "If the authorities act illegally, violate rights and displace the people, the citizens are empowered to exercise their sovereignty and fulfill the constitution" (Ramírez Cuevas, 2014: 60, My translation). He continues,

> The right to autonomy of Indigenous peoples permits them to take over security and justice. The community police and community guards are inside the rule of law and respond to the collective and democratic decision and control of their communities. In change, the groups of armed self-defense are expressions of being fed up that could be framed as acts of legitimate citizen defense, but aren't responsible to anyone and act beneath their own logic (Ramírez Cuevas, 2014: 61, My translation).

He follows, "The white and rural guards and paramilitaries are outside of the law and of the constitution" (Ramírez Cuevas, 2014: 61, My translation). We see here again a reaffirmation of the state's sovereign power, and its legal order as the most important determination of what is right and wrong, what is just and what is legitimate.

Within the context of shifting legalities, legitimacy and power, there is an incessant drive to demarcate the distinctions between the various armed groups, not only amongst analysts, but amongst the groups and communities themselves. From its beginnings, the CRAC-PC has often been concerned with distinguishing themselves from other armed groups, whether institutionalized as part of the state apparatus or not. This concern was expressed in the beginnings of the CRAC-PC with its continual demand for official identification cards and uniforms that would physically distinguish themselves from the state's security apparatus or the armed groups affiliated with organized crime in the region. Cruz and Espinobarro explain:

> The issuing of official identification cards for the police was also since its origins, another demand brought by the movement against insecurity. It was an important necessity as the recently appointed community police could be confused with a criminal group and face problems with the population, or even worse, with other police groups or the military (Cruz and Espinobarro, 2016: 130, My translation).

The effort to physically and "officially" distinguish themselves from other armed forces, instigates interesting questions about legitimacy, legality and officiality. What marks the difference between these various armed forces, in a context where the state's monopoly on violence has been delegitimized? What is legitimacy and a legality in a social field of conflicting, competing, contradicting forces that overlap, touch, clash and coordinate? What are the relationships between these various forces?

During a visit to the community of Santa María Ostula on the coast of Michoacán in June of 2017, the complex relationships between state and community police forces as they take place on the ground were made evident to me. During a day of talks, workshops and various cultural activities to celebrate the 8th anniversary of the recuperation of nearly 1000 hectares by the community of Santa María Ostula, various armed forces were present to assist and partake in the event. Beneath the pouring rain and amidst the muggy heat characteristic of the Michoacán coast, a group of six community guard members marched with guns carrying the Mexican flag. The community guard members wore black polo shirts that read *"guardia communal"* or communal guard with an image of the infamous revolutionary figure Emiliano Zapata. The community guard members all wore blue jeans, with some wearing boots, others sneakers, and one *compañero* wearing *huaraches*, or sandals. Generally speaking, the armed members of the community guard weren't distinguishable from the others present at the event, besides their polo shirts and the weapons that they carried.

Shortly afterwards, and as part of the ongoing day of activities, a group of ten men dressed in municipal police uniforms carried out a similar march. This group carried high-caliber weaponry, in comparison to the lower caliber rifles of the community guard group. They wore boots, pants and shirts that clearly demarcated them as municipal police. Just like the community police forces, they marched in lines, performing a sense of order and discipline.

The seemingly opposed armed forces both present that day—one communal and the other municipal—exemplifies the complex dynamics at play in the relationships between autonomous struggles and the state. In Ostula, at this particular moment, the municipal police forces were integrated to some extent into the struggle for communal autonomy and communal security. While brandishing state uniforms and a Michoacán state police vehicle, the municipal police

were accompanying the processes of communal defense surging from below in Santa María Ostula and the larger municipality of Aquila. The distinctions again between state and autonomous forces in this case were not easily drawn and are interestingly complex.

In Michoacán, amidst a legal and political order that is anything but orderly, the drive to institutionalize the *autodefensas* forces has been interpreted through various, even opposing, narratives. The governmental justification for the institutionalization of the *autodefensas* forces in the first place was to restore the rule of law and monopoly on the use of force that a sovereign state is customarily seen to maintain. Once the *autodefensas* forces were institutionalized another fear arose, more so from the population. As John Gledhill explains, “Little seems to stand in the way of the new *Fuerza Rural* reproducing the abusive exercise of local power that has long been typical of states such as Michoacán” (Gledhill, 2015: 194). He further suggests, “It was not clear, however, what, if any, controls were being applied to the elements enlisted as members of the *Fuerza Rural*, which included the H-3 group, already accused of being a new mafia in formation by a variety of independent voices” (Gledhill, 2015: 193). It’s quickly become clear that the institutionalized *autodefensas* forces, now under the command of the government and with legal jurisdiction to carry out their armed patrols, are perhaps held less accountable than before their institutionalization. To put it differently, paradoxically, their institutionalization empowers the *autodefensas* with a capacity to act outside the law, or outside of responsibility beholden to anyone. In a state like Michoacán, where the very government tasked with enforcing the law, is a force of illegality and injustice, the institutionalization of the *autodefensas* means in some sense a free pass into this world of illegality, backed by illegitimate political power.

Gledhill offers another layer of complexity, this time in relation to the armed community guard forces in the Indigenous community Santa María Ostula. In an effort to distinguish their self-defense movement against the corrupt forces of the state, and the other *autodefensas* that may have links with organized crime, on various occasions authorities from Ostula have reiterated their commitment to due process and law, as a means to legitimize their movement in relation to other armed forces. Gledhill writes in relation to one of community guard leaders in Ostula:

> What due process can mean in a place like Michoacán, where the official judiciary are part of an apparatus of power heavily influenced by propertied, political and criminal interests, remains open to further discussion. Yet it seems important to recognize that the leader of Ostula's self-defence force was making a strong statement of commitment to the principle of the rule of law (Gledhill, 2015: 185).

The leader of the self-defense movement in Ostula, referring to due process and the rule of law as a means to legitimize the community guard versus other armed forces, exemplifies again the manner in which law is used as the marker of legitimacy. Furthermore, it once again reaffirms in some sense the sovereign power of the state in its legal codes and legal authority.

What we have in Michoacán and Guerrero is a landscape filled with various levels of paradox. A state and its forces that work outside of their own legality. Community police and community guards that are constructing their own systems of justice and security, while at times legitimizing themselves by framing their work within the legal system. Self-defined self-defense groups that often work on both sides of legality, yet many of which have been institutionalized as part of the legal and governmental order. Community police and community guards seeking to define themselves against "legal" armed groups due to the illegality and illegitimacy of legal forces.

What does this mishmash of legality and illegality, order and disorder, legitimacy and illegitimacy, look like through the guise of autonomy? Again, we have multiple layers of complexity that characterize an autonomous struggle—the various and contradicting influences and discursive frames that organize an autonomous movements' understanding of itself. Furthermore, we see the way in which these autonomous forces disrupt the sovereignty of the state, instigating further questions of the relationship between autonomy and sovereignty.

Conclusion:

Many have argued that the Mexican state is amidst a crisis of legitimacy, and some have gone so far as to mark Mexico a failed state. The mutual influence between organized crime and municipal, state and federal governments, and the various other levels of illegality or injustice throughout the country, are certainly testament to that argument. Compounding the argument further has been the emergence of groups of armed self-defense, whether in the form of community police in the mountains of Guerrero, the community guard on the coast of Michoacán, or the *autodefensas* throughout *tierra caliente* of Michoacán. These forces have threatened Max Weber's classic characterization of the state and its monopoly of the use of violence and has furthermore contested the very sovereignty the state inherently is understood to maintain.

The practices being carried out by communities that have taken up arms to defend themselves instigate a deeper reconsideration of the rigidity and formality of the demarcations between law and lawlessness, along with the control of legality and its institutional enforcement that the state supposedly maintains. The divisions that rigidly separate legal and illegal, state and

organized crime, corporation and crime, etc. are in a constant state of fluidity, interchange and downright confusion. In this case, what the groups of community police and self-defense force us to do, is reconsider the stability of states and their legality, and show proof of contested spaces, processes and forces of sovereignty constantly at play.

Within this context, armed self-defense groups are forces that are contesting the state's attempts to dictate legality and illegality. They themselves are constructing their own "legalities", or their own responses and systems of norms that make sense for their historical, social, cultural and material contexts. They too are navigating the complexities of legitimacy, in areas of Mexico where the state itself has no legitimacy.

In this complex interplay of forces, I want to return to a more theoretical approach in the next chapter, to help us think about autonomies and the relation to their outside. As the chapter above regarding community police and *autodefensas* suggests, the strict separations between autonomy and its outside are much more complex.

Chapter 6: The Ins and Outs of Autonomy

Autonomy, we propose, cannot be conceived as a restrictive self-sufficiency, save for the multiple conditions and influences, which would do nothing more than reproduce the liberal ideal of the rational subject, asserted in its economic, intellectual, and moral independence. On the contrary, autonomy is a political trait of cooperation, is unthinkable without delving into global interaction, connected with many actors and powers of all stripes.

- Raúl Zibechi

From this perspective, it is not about creating self-contained units but about participating in complex, shifting relational processes.

- Nick Montgomery and carla bergman

We've suggested that autonomies are located, that processes are forged from a mix of exterior forces, internal energy, and diverse historical developments. We've suggested that autonomies are in movement, and they are characterized by certain practices that animate their processes. We've hinted that autonomies work spatially, responding both to their internal and external forces. We've continually suggested that the divisions that demarcate autonomous from their outside are constantly changing, continually contested and in a state of constant flux. Lastly, we've argued that autonomous spaces, energies, processes, forces are plural, multiple and not reducible to a single axis.

In this chapter, I want to engage these points directly, exploring in more depth what might be called the "borderlands of autonomies". Notes from studies of regional autonomy, philosophical tracts of liberal rationalist individualism, or ruminations of moral philosophy often lead us to think that autonomy, whether individual, social, moral, or cultural can be clearly distinguished from its outside. That is, autonomy assumes a space of demarcation between the

something that is autonomous and the something of which it is autonomous from—in collective terms, a distinction between the forms of self-governance or self-organization and their exterior or their opposite.

While struggles for autonomy do attempt to construct alternative forms of social organization, the boundaries and separateness of how we understand autonomy from its outside must be challenged on two specific fronts. Firstly, border studies, queer and feminist theory have rightly taught us that boundaries cannot be clearly demarcated and drawn, but are in a constant state of construction, deconstruction and contestation. In the case of material struggles for autonomy, relations are more complex than simple exclamations of "autonomous." This complexity includes the multiple arenas in which an autonomous struggle takes place: discursive, spatial, ideological, cultural etc., and the myriad ways in which influences flow through the boundaries of autonomies challenging us to rethink the autonomous boundaries between autonomies themselves.

The second problematic, directly relevant to the first, is the idea of the border with the roots of its physical manifestation in the development of the nation-state form. Physical borders today are products of a 17th century political-geographic project producing nation-states that sought to legitimize political power and military force over certain territories. As anarchist theorist Rudolf Rocker reminds us, the construction of nations was driven by the desire for domination, and directly opposes human tendencies of fluidity, diversity, collaboration, and movement. Thus, the mobilization of autonomy as static separation reproduces state formations that autonomous struggles inherently rupture in their practice.

Thus, here, I want to explore autonomy, and its borders, taking into account these two aforementioned problems. If we want autonomy, but we don't want state-like borders, how can

we re-conceptualize autonomy in more fluid, unbounded, or process-oriented terms? In order to consider this question, I want to consider the concept of porosity, imagining how we can think of the borders of autonomy as maintaining a sense of fluidity rather than rigidity. This porosity works both positively and negatively—negative characteristics and influences that we don't want penetrating autonomies, and positive solidarities being built through the porous borders between the multiplicity of autonomous processes, forces and practices.

To bring this approach to the ground level, I want to maintain within the context of the last three chapters, mobilizing examples of where the "borderlands" of autonomy can be seen to work as such—porous and in constant movement and contestation. In conversing the theoretical with the material practices, I want to suggest that autonomous isn't a fixed bordered state, but a constant process of movement, navigation, cooperation, solidarity, and construction.

Autonomous Struggles and Their Outside:

Hegel tells us that self-consciousness only comes into being through recognition by another; that is, through the acknowledgement of another self-consciousness onto one's own independent self-consciousness. The other is at once another self-consciousness but also part of one's own self-consciousness, the projection of oneself onto another back onto oneself. This means, for Hegel, self-consciousness only comes into being through a process of mutual recognition. One's understanding of oneself is mediated and fashioned through this relationship of recognition.

Hegel writes in referring to self-consciousness: "It's moments, then, must on the one hand be held strictly apart, and on the other hand must in this differentiation at the same time also be taken and known as not distinct, or in their opposite significance" (Hegel, 1976: 111).

Self-consciousness for Hegel is the simultaneous incorporation of the other self-consciousness into one's own self-consciousness, as they cannot necessarily be held apart. These two self-consciousnesses rely on each other for self-definition and thus must be understood as interdependent in their coming into being of self-consciousness.

Hegel's work on recognition is useful in thinking about autonomous struggles, as with Hegel we can extrapolate the inherently inter-subjective character of the idea of autonomy. When an individual, movement, community, or region is described as autonomous, they are inherently defined in a relationship of recognition, understood only through that which they are autonomous from. Without its outside, what exactly is autonomy? Independent or self-governed compared to what? Often time's contemporary movements define themselves as autonomous from the colonial state, the capitalist mode of production and social relations, or the various hegemonic institutions that are seen to organize social life. To define oneself as autonomous is to ignore the implicit recognition that part of being autonomous is reliant upon the existence of the thing in which we are autonomous from. The concept itself assumes some sort of mutual exchange and an immediate complication of autonomous boundaries as such.

While Hegel is useful in thinking of the influence of the non-autonomous on the autonomous—perhaps insinuating the impossibility of autonomy—we are still lead astray, in thinking there lies the possibility, or even the political desire, to produce strict borderlines around autonomy. Hegel's politics of recognition are at once helpful, and misleading. Hegel's dialectic is predicated on a dichotomous world, a dualistic binary, which has since been heavily critiqued. Hegel thinks of the world through this dichotomy—having one and the other, and the production of self through the recognition of the other.

However, Hegel's thinking also pushes back against itself, helping us think about the porosity of autonomies. If self-consciousness is necessarily predicated by an exchange of recognition, we can grasp the interchange of influence and thus a breakdown of fixed or bordered identities. The fluidity of the boundaries of identity, or for us the boundaries of autonomies, can be extracted from Hegel's thinking as well. Thus, Hegel remains helpful in thinking about the insidious nature of recognition but remains inadequate when we interpret his thinking into a compartmentalization of the world into dichotomous relationships of recognition.

Marxist theorist Georg Lukács' use of reification brings us further into this complication within the context of capitalist and state politics, further expanding the complexities of autonomy to both a realm of materiality as well as ideology. Lukács' concept of reification is derived from Marx's understanding of commodity fetishism and alienation. Commodity fetishism is the treating of objects produced through social relations (social labor) to be simply objects as such; that is, commodities that come into contact on the market. Commodity fetishism is predicated on alienation—alienation of the individual from his sociality, alienation of the individual from his productive activity, and alienation of the individual from the products of his production. This alienation, as encapsulated in commodity fetishism, makes relations that were inherently social—the social production of labor—into relationships between objects; that is, between commodities.

Lukács' idea of reification, closely linked to Marx's commodity fetishism, means the satisfaction of inherent human needs are not being fulfilled by particular productive activity, social relationships, creativity, etc. but through and within the terms of commodity exchange. This means for Lukács that commodity fetishism has infiltrated the ideological realm so deep,

that commodity and market logic has become the ontological or objective basis from which social individuals function; thus, reproducing capitalist relations.

In his thinking, reification penetrates all manifestations of social relations. So, while he focuses most explicitly on commodity consciousness in relation to his concept of reification, his essay entitled "Legality and Illegality" expresses the workings of reification on the political consciousness as well. For Lukács, the emphasis on the parameters of legality and illegality in revolutionary movements, even when emphasizing the use of illegal tactics, is the means by which revolutionaries reify the legal framework, even as they seek to transcend it. He writes, "…for by surrounding illegal means and methods of struggle with a certain aura, by conferring upon them a special, revolutionary authenticity, one endows the state with a certain legal validity, with a more than just empirical existence" (Lukács 1971: 263). The framing of one's tactics through the other of which they are struggling to overcome exemplifies how the other shapes one's own self-consciousness and shapes the means by which they go about this particular struggle.

Lukács takes this one step further in a very Hegelian fashion. It isn't just the politics of legality and illegality, which reify the legal framework already in place, but the very formation of one's political movement as "opposition" is itself a reaffirmation of the particular thing, which is being opposed. This is Hegel's stance exactly; to oppose something is to position something at the center of your opposition. It is to define your movement forward through the path already in place of the something you oppose. Lukács writes,

> For to adopt the stance of opposition means that the existing order is accepted in all essentials as an immutable foundation and all the efforts of the 'opposition' are restricted to making as many gains as possible for the workers within the existing system (Lukács, 1971: 260).

Lukács is arguing that the state should not be seen as the object of struggle—or as the space in which revolutionary struggle must play out. A revolutionary politics must inevitably refuse the immediate framework both in their tactics as well as in their proposed goal. As Lukács makes clear, "…the revolution itself can only be accomplished by people; by people who have become intellectually and emotionally emancipated from the existing system" (Lukács 1971: 257).

With Hegel and Lukács, we are invited to think of the complexity of autonomous struggles in their inherently relational character—the autonomous, what it's autonomous from, and how it is autonomous. We can begin to expose the complexities of autonomy, particularly at their markings of differentiation—the spaces that delineate autonomous from its outside. We see conceptually, how the logics of states and capital work into the supposed "autonomous" spaces and communities.

To think of the borders of autonomy is to simultaneously think of the borders of the state—not specifically the militarized national borders—but the margins of where state logic and force fails to fully take hold. Veena Das and Deborah Poole offer considerable insight regarding our thinking of state-making and the margins of state rule. They write,

> Located always on the margins of what is accepted as the territory of unquestioned state control (and legitimacy), the margins…are simultaneously sites where nature can be imagined as wild and uncontrolled and where the state is constantly re-founding its modes of order and lawmaking. These sites are not merely territorial: they are also, and perhaps more importantly, sites of practices of which law and other state practices are colonized by other forms of regulation that emanate from the pressing needs of populations to secure political and economic survival (Das and Poole, eds., 2004: 8).

Das and Poole's margins, are the spaces of ongoing state-making—they are spaces of encounter and conflict where the state's logic seeks to subsume local or resistance logics. To put it in our terms, the margins of the state, can also be understand as the spaces where autonomous logics

and processes struggle against the logics and processes of the state and capital. They write further,

> Several other authors argue…that a different picture of justice or common good animates activities that take place on the margins of the state. This is not simply a matter of folk notions of law and justice versus state-sanctioned ideas of justice. Rather, what is at stake in these sites is formed through the experiences of local worlds—although we must be clear that local worlds and the state do not stand as binary opposites. Even though they are locked in unequal relations, they are enmeshed in one another (Das and Poole, eds., 2004: 22).

This is fundamental. The margins of the state are marked by spaces of enmeshed relations—in our case the enmeshed relations between the state and the autonomous. These are not clear demarcations, but spaces of struggle and contestation that are constantly in movement.

One last point is worth making before we move on: the borders of autonomy and borders of states are not only spaces at the margins, but equally are spaces of contestation taking place within spaces themselves. Again, Das and Poole are helpful:

> Margins are not simply peripheral spaces. Sometimes, as in the case of the borders of a nation's states, they determine what lies inside and what lies outside. Other times, as in the case of checkpoints, they run through the political body of the state. Borders and checkpoints, as we saw, are spaces in which sovereignty, as the right over life and death, is experienced in the mode of potentiality—thus creating affects of panic and a sense of danger even if nothing happens (Das and Poole, eds., 2004: 19).

Here Das and Poole use the example of security checkpoints to reinforce the function of state "margins" within state space, not only at its furthest edges. To imagine this, we can begin to contest the solidity or cohesion of a state and its rule—something states are keen to portray, construct and perform—but something that doesn't truly exist.

Equally, if we imagine state's margins being found throughout the internal spaces of the state, we can also imagine the same within "autonomous spaces", where processes and struggles

toward autonomy are taking place similarly at the margins—the margins that run through and make up autonomous spaces. Thus, we can begin to better theorize the complexity of a struggle toward autonomy. A movement toward the horizon, the horizon that can never be reached but keeps us in movement, as Eduardo Galleano described utopia. A process of movement, contestation and navigation. I want to reinforce this point in the section that follows.

The Emergence of Autonomies:

Luis Althusser's late writings on the philosophy of the encounter provide us a helpful intervention into Hegel's politics of recognition that better capture the spirit of autonomous social struggles. Althusser's formulation of the philosophy of the encounter rids Hegel of any a priori substance, or any determined teleology, putting in its place encounters that are contingent and always open to dissolution—a framework that is much more attuned with a radical autonomous politics. This emphasis on the becoming of existence through the chance encounter, opens up endless possibilities of other becomings, but furthermore, opens up the space where other becomings can be developed, where reified social formations are evacuated in a constant process of autonomous construction. In this way, we might begin to think of this emergence on a different spatial grid, one that might lie horizontal where different becomings emerge in the porous horizontality.

Althusser starts with the imagery of falling rain (from Lucretius), but a falling rain "…of Epicuris' atoms that fall parallel to each other in the void" (Althusser, 2006: 215). These atoms though are nothing in their isolated falling in the void but only come into existence as atoms themselves, and in the production of greater entities, in the encounter with one another. Here, drawing from Epicurus, Althusser introduces the swerve of the atoms, the slight shift in linear

direction that allows one atom to hit another and thus embodying the encounter. This encounter, for Althusser, is the emergence of a world. Althusser writes that the swerve, "…induce[s] an encounter with the atom next to it, and, from encounter to encounter, a pile-up and a birth of the world—that is to say, of the agglomeration of atoms induced, in a chain reaction by the initial swerve and encounter" (Althusser, 2006: 169). It is this swerve, and the encounter between atoms that don't exist until the encounter, that we see the emergence of particular worlds or differing social formations.

Althusser is steadfast in emphasizing the swerve as a chance encounter, in contrast to the materialism of the past, which fell on deterministic and teleological logic—a return to idealism for Althusser. Althusser wants to recuperate a materialism of the aleatory, which rids Marx's materialism of all determinism (and also interestingly self-criticizes Althusser's earlier emphasis on Marx's structuralism). He writes,

> This materialism is opposed, as a wholly different mode of thought, to the various materialisms on record, including that widely ascribed to Marx, Engels, and Lenin, which, like every other materialism in the rationalist tradition, is a materialism of necessity and teleology, that is to say, a transformed, disguised form of idealism (Althusser, 2006: 167).

The materialism of the encounter is different; it begins with the chance encounter caused by the swerve. It resembles Hegel's coming into consciousness through the recognition from another (in this case through the encounter with another atom), but it removes from it its idealistic logic—it starts and only happens in the material encounter caused by the swerve.

If the swerve, with the subsequent meeting and pileup of atoms, produces the world, what becomes of philosophy? Philosophy for Althusser had hitherto sought its meaning in a search for the origin of things through statements of reason (although he later traces his underground current of the encounter in philosophy as well). Particularly in the materialist tradition,

philosophy took reason to project a specified teleological development—a determined sequential unfolding of events. Althusser wants to eliminate this with the swerve, basing everything on contingency, the contingency of the meeting of atoms in the swerve. He writes,

> Thus it will have been noticed that this philosophy is, in sum, a philosophy of the void: not only the philosophy which says that the void pre-exists the atoms that fall in it, but a philosophy which creates the philosophical void in order to endow itself with existence: a philosophy which, rather than setting out from the famous philosophical problems, begins by evacuating all philosophical problems, hence by refusing to assign itself any object whatever in order to set out from nothing, and from the infinitesimal aleatory variation of nothing constituted by the swerve of the fall (Althusser, 2006: 174-175).

The void is the subject of philosophy then, a commencement of thinking grounded upon nothing but the aleatory nature of the swerve. From the swerve begets objects, consciousness, relationships, worlds—prior to was nothing, the void.

It is in this void that Althusser traces the thinking of various philosophers, in an underground current of the philosophy of encounter he finds often present, but undertheorized. However, it isn't philosophical activity we are interested in here, but the emergence of particular social formations—the emergence of the material world. More importantly, we are interested in the emergence of social formations devoid of the ontological hangover of harmful institutions like capitalism, the state, colonialism, and patriarchy—that is, we are interested in alternative social formations emerging from a void devoid of reification. Althusser's turn to Machiavelli within the context of the swerve helps us better think of emergence of different social formations, the existence of alternative social formations in space, and the porosity from which they exist.

Althusser rightly points out that Machiavelli's Prince, like his materialism of the encounter, takes the philosophical object to be the void—the absence of object. Machiavelli's

question was how could "the prince" produce a national state; produce a unified Italy, from the political and philosophical void—from the space where power and unity were nonexistent. More directly, how can a unified national Italy be produced from parallel movement of atoms, the lack of encounter and unification among the people of the particular region? He writes,

> In sum, an atomized country, every atom of which was descending in free fall without encountering its neighbor. It was necessary to create the conditions for a swerve, and thus an encounter, if Italian unity was to take hold (Althusser, 2006: 171).

As to how this takes place, Machiavelli speaks of the role of the Prince. But as Althusser makes clear, Machiavelli says very little about the Prince himself and his place. He doesn't want to start with a particular character or substance, because this would presuppose a chance encounter. Althusser argues that Machiavelli's Prince is similarly the philosophical void—the place of encounter and emergence that is yet to happen.

Althusser stages another encounter in Machiavelli's thinking that remains essential for the emergence of a unified Italy; that is, the encounter between virtu and fortune. Starting in the void, the encounter between these two qualities must take place, an encounter that is aleatory, and thus is up to chance. For if this encounter takes place thus will emerge the subject of the Prince and with the chance of other encounters, the emergence of a unified Italian nation. This is why Althusser points out that his materialism of the encounter is a materialism of process, "…a process that has no subject, yet imposes on the subjects which it dominates the order of its development, with no assignable end" (Althusser, 2006: 190). It is essentially a materialism of emergence.

Niklas Luhmann's sociological theory helps further substantiate the emergence in Althusser—the emergence from the void. Luhmann might be more useful though in helping us understand the reproduction of a system that has already emerged, although this reproduction is

at once the ongoing emergence of a particular social system. Like the atoms falling parallel in the void of Althusser, Luhmann is interested in the emergence of social systems which stand on no ground, which are devoid of an ontological basis—systems without subjects. Alain Pottage tells us,

> Luhmann's systems theory…should be distinguished…from any theory of society that relies upon notions of substance, structure or subjectivity. Instead, it prompts the elaboration of accounts of social elements and operations (and social theories) that construct themselves upon a foundation that is entirely not there. In place of ontological substances and structures, emergence deals instead with structures, processes and theories that produce themselves out of their own contingency (Pottage, 1998, 3).

Luhmann's sociological theory is ultimately interested in the way social systems define their boundaries; that is how they navigate the relationship between their system and its environment. This at once moves us away from a unification of various wholes within a larger whole (the world) to a sociological investigation whose theoretical starting point is difference. He writes, "…the theme of sociological investigation is not the system of society, but instead the unity of the difference of the system of society and its environment" (Luhmann, 1989: 7). The space or process that mediates a system and its environment then is of the utmost importance, a space where we can further contemplate porosity and emergence.

Luhmann tells us that systems themselves mediate the distinction between themselves and their environment, thus defining what they are themselves and what it is that is their environment. He writes, "…systems define their own boundaries. They differentiate themselves and thereby constitute the environment as whatever lies outside the boundary" (Luhmann, 1989: 6). This constitution of the systems environment is simultaneously the constitution of itself, and this demarcation of the distinction between system and environment equally instigates the emergence of what is the system and what is the environment.

The distinction between system and environment is not ontologically fixed but is under constant mediation—this mediation being the process of emergence of a system and its environment. Luhmann makes clear that a system's environment is always more complex than the system itself, something that inherently threatens the less complex system. For a system to maintain itself as such in the face of the complexity of its environment—a complexity that threatens its existence—a system is in the constant process of reducing complexity in its environment, at which the same time, it increases its complexity, thus strengthening itself as a system. Alain Pottage notes,

> The initial system/ environment distinction having been made, a system is forced to embark on the ongoing process of distinguishing itself from its correlative environment. If it is not to be smothered by complexity, it must continually distinguish itself from its environment so as to admit only those events that are compatible with its own reproduction (Pottage, 1998: 3).

This mediation between system and environment exemplifies the emergence of systems and their environments, but if a system is to reproduce itself in the face of this closed openness, we must turn to Luhmann's idea of auto-poiesis, which gets directly at an autonomous system and its reproduction through a porous relationship with its environment.

Luhmann takes up the concept of auto-poiesis—a term first introduced by theoretical biologists—to designate the process of self-referential reproduction of social systems. He adopts this as a supplement to the theory of evolution where organisms (systems) continually adapt to their environment (that is their environment shapes the way in which they develop). Luhmann writes,

> The dynamics of complex autopoietic systems itself forms a recursively closed complex of operations, i.e., one that is geared toward self-reproduction and the continuation of its own autopoiesis. At the same time, the system becomes increasingly open, i.e., sensible to changing environmental conditions (Luhmann, 1989: 13).

The question then: how do systems reproduce themselves in this closed but open relationship with their environment?

Luhmann introduces the concept of resonance to better approach the porous boundary between a system and its environment. A system is reproduced through the process of auto-poiesis, but it must respond simultaneously to various complexities from its environment. He writes,

> We will also assume that modern society is a system with such a high degree of complexity that it is impossible to describe it like a factory, i.e., in terms of the transformation of inputs and outputs. Instead, the interconnection of a system and environment is produced through the closing-off of the systems self-reproduction from the environment by means of internally circular structures. Only in exceptional cases, can it start reverberating, can it be set in motion. This is the case we designate as resonance (Luhmann, 1989: 15).

Resonance for Luhmann refers to the way in which a system and its environment interact—the consequence of a system being stimulated by its environment and inevitably vice versa. More directly, resonance is the way in which a system incorporates the complexity of its environment into itself, while maintaining the closed character of its auto-poiesetic processes. This process is reliant upon a system's ability to observe itself and observe the observations of its system and its environment.

Here we've come full circle back to the idea of auto-poiesis and porosity in relation to autonomous politics. How is that autonomous communities and movements interact with what they define as not themselves (with their environment). How does their environment at times reverberate with so much complexity that the system itself is forced to oversee some sort of porosity from their environment to system influence? This is where Luhmann's systems theory is helpful to thinking about porosity and emergence, and also more useful than previous systems

theories. Rather than theorizing systems that are either closed or open, Luhmann wants to develop a systems theory that is both. The introduction by the translator sums this up nicely:

> Not until the concepts of autonomy (closure) and interpenetration (openness) are unified in one theory can any systems theory as such, and any theory of social system in particular, be complete. By doing this, the concept of autopoiesis provides the synthetic unity necessary for the production of a systems theory of the social domain (Luhmann, 1989: xi).

Luhmann's system theory speaks to the ongoing emergence of social systems that produce themselves both through an enclosed auto-poiesis and periods of resonance where the system has to deal with its environment's complexity. Thinking autonomously, autonomous movements and autonomous communities are constantly observing (and navigating) and must constantly observe (and navigate) their relationship to what they understand as outside them. Thus, they are in a constant stage of emergence through self-production and a simultaneous navigation of themselves, their environment, and the boundaries that lie in between.

Navigating Autonomy: The Porosity of Autonomous Borders:

The theoretical inventions above, invite us to consider the porosity of borders, and the emergence of other ways of doing things that are being practiced by communities in resistance throughout Mexico and the world. Derived from their Story of Questions, the Zapatistas rightly claim that we learn by walking, slowly but constantly emerging through the process of movement. As Jorge Santiago Santiago explains of Indigenous autonomous struggles in Mexico: "Autonomy is not an objective, but a form of struggle, a form of organization, with the objective of the transformation of the social relations and the construction of alternative models to the neoliberal system" (Santiago Santiago, 2010: 159). Thinking of autonomy, not as an objective, but as a form of struggle, allows us to maintain the sense of process and construction necessary

for a more liberatory understanding of autonomy, outside of bordered statist thinking.

If autonomy is a constant process of navigation and construction, we can similarly point to the ways in which autonomies reorganize the boundaries between themselves to build solidarities, share struggles, and exemplify a sense of porosity in the constant process of mutual construction. We can imagine the borders of autonomy more fluidly in returning to the social struggles of autonomous processes I have covered in the chapters above.

The struggle of the community assembly of Eloxochitlán de Flores Magón, and the processes that makes up its politics, constantly contest the borderlines of legality, moving beyond the recognition politics of state, national and international law. The community assembly in Eloxochitlán de Flores Magón has constantly worked within a historical-legal framework, at once engaging the discourse of the state to legally justify their existence, while also superseding that legality in their practice.

The community radio too works spatially in complex ways and contests the borders of inside and outside, internal and external, legal and illegal. The nature of the radio wave itself, shatters our understanding of an inside and outside, unless we try to justify this understanding through the physical distance at which particular transmitters can transmit their signal. Even these borderlands though would be impossible to delineate and solidify. Furthermore, with the extensive network of *medios libres* or free media in Mexico, the community radios that seemingly work inwardly, transmitting and broadcasting with a focus on their community, also work outwardly in movements of solidarity and heightened organization across space and time. Free media conferences, gather various community and alternative media and radios to share workshops, experiences and skills, building alliances and working relationships outside of the immediate location of their community struggle.

Community police and self-defense groups equally challenge the borderlands of autonomy. The near lawlessness in parts of Mexico has led to an interesting array of legalities or legitimacies that spill over the legal monopoly of the state—a legality that itself is a site of contestation and disarray. The manner in which community police and self-defense groups have not directly challenged the state but have worked at times in coordination and other times against state forces, has further shown the complexity of armed struggles. Equally, the complexity of the relation with the state, shows the spaces of contestation and navigation that are in action in the borderlands of autonomous struggles.

I want to turn to another example, something I've yet to touch on, but that serves as an example, more material, exemplifying the borderlands of autonomy and the state. The road blockade or barricade, as a tactic of resistance, is a fundamental component to a great variety of struggles I have alluded to above. Without doubt, the road blockade is one of the most important tactics used by radical social struggles in Mexico, and very often is engaged by communities in struggle for autonomy.

On April 15th, 2011, the uprising in Cherán, Michoacán was initiated by women setting up road blockades in the community to contest the movement of organized crime forces in transporting illegally logged wood from their communal forests. The road blockade or barricades, quickly emerged as a staple to the communal organization that has developed in the community of Cherán since. Subversiones reported in 2012, that at their height, there existed 190 *fogata* road blockades (Pérez, 2012). What was fundamental to these *Fogatas*, was the space of the barricade became a space of reunion and discussion, ultimately a staple in the emerging communal organization. Paulino Alvarado Pizaña explains:

> In the meetings of each block of Cherán, in everyday life that had been translated for the streets, in all of the fogatas that the neighbors and families tended to hour

> after hour in the community, living together, cooking common, educating the children, celebrating birthdays and sharing worries; was arising, like a growing river, the proposal to transcend the state form of politics; of remaking the community form of collective life, recuperating the political capacity to define the common horizon and the everyday resolution of common needs (Alvarado Pizaña, 2016: 147, My translation).

The Indigenous Nahua community of Santa María Ostula on the coast of Michoacán is another ongoing example of communal organization and resistance that has continually engaged the road blockade as a tactic on the coastal highway 200. The road blockade for the community serves both as a means to put pressure on the state, but also to literally filter the movement of goods and people that pass on the principal coast highway. This tactic of course, serves as a means of security for the community, checking what forces are moving in and out of the territory, and what resources are being extracted from the mountains, of which they are in defense.

Similarly, in 2016 amidst massive teacher's uprisings against the education reforms, at its height there were 32 road blockades set up throughout Oaxaca. It was in Nochixtlán, Oaxaca, on June 19th, 2016, that the police attempted to remove the road blockade killing nine people and injuring over a hundred more. The road blockades in Oaxaca, and at the same time in Chiapas and other parts of the country, were most often not full on blockades. They were very persistent in blockading specific movement—usually international and corporate interests—while maintaining through traffic of other interests.

The road blockade or barricade serves as a material example, of one way in which autonomous struggles actively and materially engage their borders, demonstrating the porosity of borders, and complicating the understanding of a solidified borderline between the autonomous and what it is autonomous from. As Basak Ertür writes in relation to the barricades constructed

during the 2013 uprising in Gezi Park in Istanbul, Turkey: “As the fighting subsided and their utility became less immediate, the barricades began to come alive in different ways. It appeared that they were in constant flux—undone, remade, fortified, beautified and renamed so as to commemorate losses new and old (Ertür, 2016: 101). She writes further,

> The barricades seemed to live and breathe as they pointed to an endless possibility of doing and undoing. They testified to a magnificent and spontaneously self-organized collective labor, yet in addition to being permeable, it was obvious that they ultimately wouldn’t stand a chance against the armory of the state. In that sense, they were both transient and inextinguishable (Ertür, 2016: 103).

Ertür’s conception of the barricades during Turkey’s Gezi Park uprising resonates with the porosity of autonomous borders as exemplified in the practice of the road blockade in struggles in Mexico. The borderlands of autonomy are not fixed impermeable divisions, but spaces of construction and destruction, contestation, making and remaking. The contestation of the borders of autonomies are integral components of the practical work being carried out by autonomous movements and processes of struggle. The making and remaking, contestation and navigation of these borders is thus fundamental to the politics of autonomy.

Conclusion:

Work being done by Indigenous scholars and movements in North America, as well as political struggles for autonomy on the ground, offer us a way into an autonomous politics that refuses the boundaries of the colonial, capitalist, or nation-state mappings, and exemplifies an autonomy of process and construction as expressed in the thinking of Althusser and Luhmann. Mohawk Indigenous scholar Audre Simpson provides us a politics of refusal that hints at one such way out of an autonomous politics that reifies the mappings of state and capitalist power. She writes,

> I am interested in the way in which alternative, Indigenous citizenships may move politics away from this panic, from these seductive inducements to perform the state, and the way they do a different kind of work through a narrative and memory-based process of constructing and affording rights to each other (Simpson, 2014: 159).

Simpson points out that Indigenous resistance to the colonial state is the ongoing navigation of the myriad ways the politics of recognition, brute force, and essentialization continually attempt to undermine movements for self-determination—the movement for a self-articulation of who the Mohawk are as people and how they relate to others. Simpson rightly remarks that her book is a cartography of refusal: a mapping of the ways in which Mohawk people refuse to be administered by the colonial apparatus and construct their own relationships among one another.

A politics of refusal, as Simpson suggests, is an ongoing navigation of self-determination—particularly important in thinking about porosity on all its different levels. The refusal to be administered by the various terms of the state is the process of ongoing navigation and self-reflection in pursuit of self-determination and autonomous self-governance. It is thus a politics of porosity; an observation and navigation of where boundaries are drawn, what influences are useful, and what influences are necessary to be refused. It is a politics of autonomy that doesn't essentialize the categories of inside and outside, or autonomous and the other, but a politics of self-articulation of the ongoing emergence of autonomous politics of self-management.

This similar sentiment has been pursued by Indigenous and feminist scholars that seek to rethink the geographies of nation-states that rest upon fixed and often impenetrable borders. Feminist theory Chandra Mohanty writes,

> Borders suggest both containment and safety, and women often pay a price for daring to claim the integrity, security, and safety of our bodies and our living spaces. I choose feminism without borders, then, to stress that our most

> expansive and inclusive visions of feminism need to be attentive to borders while learning to transcend them (Mohanty, 2003: 1-2).

This is a fundamental point and drives home what we see in autonomous struggles. In some cases, borders are being engaged, for example the case of the barricade or road blockade, but the borders are simultaneously being transcended in the movement of people and the practices of cross-struggle solidarities.

To conclude, I want to suggest that we learn from autonomous movements and communities in resistance, to rescue an understanding of autonomy that isn't bounded by state-like borders, but is in movement, under continual construction and characterized by porous boundaries that are always being navigated. Furthermore, within our movements for autonomy, we must not succumb to the trappings of the state, colonialism, or patriarchy. We must recognize the insidious ways in which harmful influences penetrate our movements for autonomy and how we understand and enact these struggles. We are challenged to navigate our inside and outside, both conceptually and practically, refusing to accept the mappings administered by states and capital. For autonomous struggles, we must remap our worlds, autonomously, derived from the experiences of autonomous struggles themselves.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

United States writer and anarchist theorist Paul Goodman famously wrote, "A free society cannot be the substitution of a "new order" for the old order; it is the extension of spheres of free action until they make up the most of social life" (Goodman, 2010: 25). Breaking with the classical model of revolution as a monumental moment where old institutions and powerful fall and freedom flourishes, autonomous struggles in Mexico resonate with Goodman's insight, characterized by their everyday processes of organization, through spaces and relationships that resist and navigate the commodification, control and discipline of everyday life. Part of this "extension of spheres of free action" as Goodman puts it, is an ongoing dynamic relationship with all sorts of forces and processes that interfere, conflict, repress, support or cooperate with, the processes and forces of autonomous organization and struggle.

In this dissertation I've approached autonomous politics in a processual manner—exploring multiple currents of autonomous action and organization being engaged through various locations in Mexico—the community assembly, the community or free radio and community-based self-defense and justice. I've resisted taking autonomous politics as something cohesive, totalized or fixed. I've further contested the approach to autonomy as something wholly separated and integrally developed—a space or alternative whole that functions outside of the confines of the state, capitalism, law, etc. I did this purposely, as quite frankly, autonomous politics under that interpretation do not exist.

The thrust of this dissertation and perhaps its most useful contribution has been to engage rather than ignore the contradictions and tensions inherent to autonomous processes of organization and struggle. Often times autonomy is treated in absolute terms—whether by

researchers, activists or independent media workers—ignoring the multi-layered dynamics of complexity in which these movements are embedded and engaged. Prior to my work on this project, I too was working under the assumption that autonomous struggles absolutely reject engagement with state, capitalist and other unwanted exterior forces. As I engaged with autonomous processes and movements throughout my fieldwork, it became clear that autonomous struggles aren't about this abstract and absolute rejection but are about the complex and dynamic relationships that they engage, navigate and through which they exist. It seemed important then, to map out some of the multiple layers of resistance politics, rather than flattening them out into fixed and totalizing concepts or political strategies.

A fundamental component of the multi-layered-ness of autonomous struggles, is the plurality and diversity of locations from which autonomous struggles do their work. As I've sought to emphasize, these movements and processes are always embedded in certain historical and material contexts, from which they are organizing, responding, resisting or collaborating. Autonomies are thus located, plural and most importantly in constant movement. Autonomies are enacted and articulated differently across space and time, within and beyond the diverse contexts of Mexico. Fundamental to understanding what autonomous politics does, is understanding the context from which autonomous processes of organization emerge, exist and resist.

Thinking through the importance of location of autonomous struggles, a certain tension emerged that runs through much of this dissertation. If autonomous processes of struggle are plural, and are engaging their work from a plurality of material, historical, cultural and political contexts, what do they do in terms of building alliances and solidarities beyond their immediate contexts? How do located and diverse struggles work together or not? It is there, in the porous

borderlands of autonomies, that I find autonomous struggles to be navigating, negotiating, organizing and resisting. There, in the constant processes of internal and external organization, internal and external resistance, autonomous struggles are hard at work.

Multiplying and Extending Processes of Autonomous Self-organization:

The various processes and forces of autonomous self-organization I have reflected upon in this dissertation, exemplify in another way, the manner in which modes of self-organization reinforce one another, leading to the multiplication and extension of free action as Paul Goodman puts it. I feel it important to return to the three modes of autonomous self-organization I have covered in this dissertation, to better map out, albeit briefly, the way in which self-organized processes support, amplify and cross-organize with other processes of self-organization. With this, we can shine light on the complex, yet exciting ways that various processes of self-organization work themselves together into more integral processes and practices of autonomous self-organization, within and across located community struggles.

As I suggested in chapter three, the community assembly is a node of community decision-making which connects many other spheres of community organization and processes of political resistance. The community assembly, at least within many Indigenous and *campesino* communities, remains the principal decision-making force in the community, the maximum organ of power, on which community life is organized. The assembly isn't a static organizational blueprint placed before the demands required by the contexts of the group, but rather through the assembly, the demands and the necessities of the group spring forth in a horizontal and egalitarian manner. From the assembly, other processes of autonomous organization are kindled, developed and put into practice. Assemblies serve in this way, as a

practical force that helps produce, direct, and bring to life other forces and forms of communal self-organization.

The community radio and other free media projects in Mexico serve as organizational forces that reach much beyond the immediate location from which their work is being mobilized. I suggested in chapter four that a fundamental component of the organizational work carried out by the community radio, is not the material being transmitted through the radio waves, but rather the community organization facilitated in and through the community radio space. Like the community assembly, through the organizational space of the community radio, other organizational processes are developed, facilitated and brought to life. Furthermore, often times, community radios and community assemblies cross-pollinate in their organizational capacities. The community radio might announce upcoming community assemblies, a radio project itself might be proposed and derived from decisions made in the community assembly, or the specific collective or group managing the radio project will often organize itself through the assembly form. In this way, the community assembly and the community radio are two processes of self-organization that often overlap in constructing and facilitating the further development and coordination of self-organized processes.

Reaching beyond the community in the context of the community radio, I showed in chapter four how community radio and free media projects work outside their immediate community space to organize networks of free media infrastructure. I explored the informal network of *tejemedios*, which is grounded on the principles of free association and mutual aid. *Tejemedios* gatherings bring together various radio and media projects to share knowledge and skills, but to ultimately develop better coordination and organization across media platforms, and across the located spaces from which media and radio projects do their work. Through the

organizational forces initiated and facilitated by community radio, both within and beyond the immediate community space, we can see again the way in which community radio and free media serve as processes which better coordinate and bring to life other processes of autonomous self-organization.

In chapter five I turned to the forces of armed community police and self-defense that have emerged in both Guerrero and Michoacán, as well as various other parts of the Mexican republic. Looking specifically at the community system in the Costa Chica and Montaña of Guerrero—the CRAC-PC—we see in its historical development how a self-organized project meant to address problems of insecurity in the region has expanded into various other spheres and processes of community and regional self-organization. For example, turning from mere self-defense, the community system has developed into a much more integral system of security, justice and reeducation, that work through various spheres of community and regional self-organized processes. Furthermore, with a focus on the defense of territory, the CRAC-PC has taken up not only the defense of human lives, but the defense of flora and fauna, water, along with the traditional cultural and organizational practices of the communities that make up the system.

Like the community radio and community assembly, the initiative for security in a region battered by violence, has facilitated other processes of self-organization into a more integral community system of which is the CRAC-PC. In this community system, the cross-pollination between various forces and processes of self-organization come together in interesting and exciting ways, expanding the spheres of free action, and further developing their coordination. Daniele Fini writes in regards to the CRAC-PC,

> In a regional assembly carried out in 2005, it was agreed upon to expand the construction of an integral autonomous system of communities. From there they

> constructed committees to carry out works of intervention in areas like health, communication and production. As a result of these forces, three community radios emerged, health committees were formed and organizers were reformed in some communities, initiating some productive projects (Fini, 2016: 113, My translation).

The practical modes of the CRAC-PC serve as one example of many, where certain processes of self-organization help multiply and influence others. In this case, we see the development and expansion of self-organizing processes coordinated by the CRAC-PC where community police forces, derivative of decisions made in community and regional assemblies, are expanding their work into other areas of self-organization. The various processes of self-organization develop together and alongside one another, into more expansive and better integrated developments of self-organization and autonomy.

Weaving and Theorizing With(in) and Between Movements:

Writing and working with and between, in the interstices of, autonomous struggles in Mexico has brought both joys and challenges. How do we write about social processes that are in constant movement, in a continual state of development and self-making? How do I as an activist-researcher work with and through these struggles while maintaining a commitment and responsibility to their self-determined processes of self-organization? How do we raise questions, opening up conversations and mutual discussion, rather than seeking final answers or closed concepts? What role, in the end, does an activist-researcher play in social struggles?

In Mexico and much of Latin America, the word *tejer* is often mobilized to describe the work being done within and between self-organized spaces, projects, processes, communities in resistance, etc. *Tejer* means to weave or to knit. *Tejer* spaces, projects, processes, communities, is to weave together processes, forces and projects, to extend and strengthen the spheres of free

action and self-organization. Approaching autonomous struggles as *processes* of self-organization as I have in this dissertation allows us to appreciate the work of weaving together self-organization within and beyond the immediate spaces of community struggles. It allows us to see how processes are weaved into other processes, how self-organization is strengthened and amplified in the ongoing development of autonomous struggle.

With this dissertation I have sought to contribute to this process of weaving, bringing together insight and practice, analysis and reflection, across geographical, linguistic and discursive spaces, helping those of us engaged in autonomous struggles to see our common enemies, recognize our differences, and navigate the complexities that such contexts demand. Through this process of weaving, I have sought to trace and map out the complexities of autonomous social struggle, to participate in an ongoing conversation about political strategy, struggles for freedom, against capitalism, state violence and other domineering and exploitative forces. About how we self-organize to meet our necessities, in a horizontal manner—in a way that resists the integration of everyday activity into capitalist and state relations. About how we relate to one another across differences, and across material and historical contexts. About how we find each other. About how we work together. About how we deal with hierarchies and relationships of power amidst these attempts at mutual collaboration.

While the writing of a dissertation is a humble act, in comparison with the courageous on the ground struggles against colonialism, capitalism, state violence, etc. I hope to have opened up new areas of thought and brought stimulating insight into the ongoing conversations around the politics of autonomous struggles, and more broadly struggles for freedom and self-determination. Contributing to this conversation, from my own positionality, as I traversed various spaces and

processes, hopefully has stimulated different lines of thought and practice that produce unique reflection and bring on diverse critique and insight.

In the end, I hope this dissertation helps suggest, argue, propose and invite others to this ongoing conversation and practice. I hope this dissertation contributes in a humble manner to strengthening and assisting the self-organizational practices and processes of autonomous struggles, of those who influenced, participated, collaborated and in the end might read this project.

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