

BETWEEN THE ZAPATISTA AND AMERICAN DREAMS: ZAPATISTA COMMUNAL PERSPECTIVES ON MIGRATION TO THE UNITED STATES



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ABSTRACT: Chiapaneco migration to the United States is a recent and increasingly large phenomenon that is transforming local dynamics across the state, even in Zapatista municipalities where emigration had been delayed during times of struggle and perceived dialogue opportunities. Today, migration is wearing down the movement and creating a new set of subjectivities. This paper reconstructs the migration phenomenon in a Zapatista community of the Lacandon Jungle and, in doing so, intends to show the ways in which it leads to a communal conflict involving two different types of subjectivities as different actors argue over the meaning of migration and how to manage it. I will also show how, in the midst of great tension, Zapatista communities go through a stage of defensive retreat when faced by this new process.

KEYWORDS: international migration, migration management, Zapatismo, Chiapas, conflict.

RESUMEN: La migración de chiapanecos a Estados Unidos es un fenómeno reciente pero que ha cobrado gran fuerza y está transformando las dinámicas locales en casi todo el estado, incluso en los municipios zapatistas, donde las salidas al Norte se habían retrasado ante la opción de la lucha y el diálogo. Hoy la migración se ha convertido en un proyecto que no sólo le disputa sus bases al movimiento, sino que también compete con éste como nuevo productor de subjetividades. A partir de la reconstrucción del fenómeno migratorio en una comunidad zapatista de la Selva Lacandona, me propongo mostrar cómo ésta provoca un conflicto comunitario en el que se oponen dos tipos de subjetividades y en el que los diferentes actores se disputan la definición de sentido de la acción migratoria y la forma de gestionarla. Se mostrará también, cómo en medio de grandes tensiones, las comunidades zapatistas pasan de una etapa de repliegue defensivo ante el fenómeno a una de apertura.

PALABRAS CLAVES: migración internacional, gestión de la migración, zapatismo, Chiapas, conflicto

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... the north, in the direction of Texas,
Chasing an unnamable dream,
Unclassifiable, the dream of our youth,
That is, the bravest dream of all
ROBERTO BOLAÑOS (*Poemas 1980-1998*)

Eugenio crossed the Mexico-United States border in February 2002, when he was 16 years old. He was the first one in his village to take the trip up north. He comes from a small community in the Lacandon Jungle I will call María Trinidad. Since he was a small kid, Eugenio's family participated in the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional, or EZLN) and he grew in the midst of the struggle, national meetings, intercontinental gatherings, peace dialogues, citizen consultations, protests, etc. When his father announced the impending trip at the Communal Assembly, the news rattled the town but did not take anyone by surprise. Some of the village youths had been toying with the idea of emigrating for a while, even if none of them were ready to publicly acknowledge it. By then, many youths from non-Zapatista communities in the area were already in the United States and their stories travelled across the canyon, peaking the interest of the rebel communities and creating a collective imaginary regarding life on the other side of the border.

Chiapas has become one of the Mexican states with the most emigrants; according to the National Population Council's (Consejo Nacional de Población, or CONAPO) survey on Mexican migration to the northern border (*Encuesta sobre Migración en la Frontera Norte de México*, or EMIF), Chiapas had the highest proportion of migrants traveling to the United States (14%) in 2008—more than Guanajuato (8.6%) and Oaxaca (7.2%), both of which have a long migration tradition.¹ Although some sources show that the presence of Chiapas natives in the United States can be traced as far back as 1925 (U.S. Department of Labor in Jáuregui and Ávila, 2007: 21), until the late 1980s this flow was small enough to go unnoticed, having little consequence on the state.² It was not until the 1990s that emigration in Chiapas became visible, and it only became a generalized, massive phenomenon during the 2000s (Jáuregui and Ávila, 2007; Villafuerte and García, 2006; Pickard, 2006).

Zapatista municipalities have not escaped the state's migration dynamics. It is unlikely that they would, since the tendency is for the phenomenon to acceler-

¹ See «Migrantes procedentes del sur con destino a Estados Unidos, según características del lugar de origen en México, 2008», a document based on the *Encuesta sobre Migración en la Frontera Norte de México* (EMIF). Available at: http://www.conapo.gob.mx/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=388&Itemid=379.

² Durand and Massey (2003: 89) attribute this delay to two factors: 1) a labor contracting system that operated exclusively within the state (internal migration) and Chiapas' minimal participation in the Programa Bracero (1942-64), and 2) the high rate of poverty and marginalization in the region. According to these authors (2003: 90), migration is not usually associated with extreme poverty.



ate and intensify across regions. And even if the Zapatista municipalities work as autonomous territorial entities, they are not isolated from the rest of society; in fact, they constantly interact with non-Zapatistas and, in many cases, the latter live within Zapatista communities. In the region addressed in this paper, the Zapatistas were the last to emigrate north. For many years, Zapatismo managed to contain the migration of hundreds of youths who hoped their problems could be solved in a relatively short span of time by engaging in dialogues with the government and Mexican society. When Vicente Fox's administration, with the support of the three major parties (Revolutionary Institutional Party or PRI, National Action Party or PAN, and Party of the Democratic Revolution or PRD), passed an indigenous law that betrayed the agreements reached during the San Andrés Dialogue (Hernández, Sarela and Sierra, 2004), it became clear that talking would not bring the desired results and that victory was still far from reach. It was at this point that migration became the new alternative for many Zapatista youths.

Migration to the United States represents a tremendous challenge to the Zapatista movement, not only because it entails the loss of its younger elements (those who once appeared to be the natural inheritors of the movement) but also because it introduces new values, meanings, and horizons that challenge Zapatismo's hegemonic political and life project in the region. Even when they do not realize this, migrants divulge a new way of life and this has specific effects on the rebel communities. The following article summarizes some of the results of my doctoral dissertation; the purpose is to contribute to the understanding of the processes currently taking place inside Zapatista communities as they face, for the first time, the phenomenon of migration. The reconstruction of María Trinidad's migration process will allow me to portray the kinds of conflicts, debates, negotiations, and agreements taking place in these villages, as well as the multiple meanings actors within the community ascribe to migration.³

1. WHO IS LEAVING?

As in the rest of the state, most of the migrants in Zapatista communities are young men between 15 and 35 years of age. For the purpose of this analysis, I distinguish between two kinds of migrants: «born Zapatistas» or «second generation» members, and «generation 1.5» Zapatistas. This distinction is important, since experience within the movement and level of militancy differ in each case. When I speak of a «generation» I do not do so in a biological sense or using age criteria: I am referring to the type of militant existence experienced by each group.

³ All of the information here presented was collected during fieldwork research in Chiapas, California and, especially, Mississippi during 2005 and 2007. The methodological approach combined direct observation and in-depth interviews.



The «born Zapatistas» generation is composed of all those people whose childhood and adolescence followed the January 1, 1994 uprising. They did not experience life in the jungle before the uprising or the creation of the autonomous municipalities. The region has been in the hands of the EZLN since they were children and they never worked for a landowner, never dealt with municipal civil servants or attended government schools. They all went to autonomous Zapatista schools and clinics. This generation was born into Zapatismo, so that their participation in the movement, at least during their early life, was not the product of a personal decision but an adscription inherited from their parents and reinforced by the familial and communal environment. Since they were very young, these youths became involved in many of the movement's activities; for example, they would accompany their parents to organizational meetings and attend the festivities or events prepared by the EZLN. The struggle is present in all the nooks and crevices of their daily lives, even during what used to be exclusively familial activities like the planting of the corn—after the uprising, some communities have started working as collectives in order to «resist better» during this long struggle (see Aquino and Maldonado, 1998).

Although this generation has grown up in a very politicized environment, they did not receive the kind of political education their predecessors did. They belong to a period during which all of the movement's efforts were centered on negotiating with the federal government and getting the San Andrés Accords fulfilled, establishing bonds with the national and international civil societies, and forming the autonomous municipalities. The creation of new rebel cadres was sidelined.

The «1.5 generation» lies between that of the «movement founders and the «second generation». Generally speaking, it comprises youths born between 1970 and 1980 who were between 14 and 24 years old in 1994. They experienced life in the region before the uprising, attended the schools of the Ministry of Public Education (Secretaría de Educación Pública, SEP), became acquainted civil servants, witnessed the problems their parents ran into when they tried to regularize their land titles or commercialize their coffee, and might have even participated in peasant organizations. They grew up with the hope of benefiting from the agrarian land distribution and were the most affected by the reforms made to constitutional Article 27, since they were no longer able to request lands. Generation members include those who joined the movement during its clandestine period as well as those who joined shortly after the uprising. Nearly all of them actively participated in the Youth Zapatista Groups (Grupos Juveniles Zapatistas). For them, the EZLN served as a sort of school where they became politicized or, as they put it, their «eyes were opened». In all these cases, joining the Zapatistas was a personal decision (albeit one taken in an environment that favored such a choice) and motivated by a series of expectations such as improve-



ments in the economic situation, access to land, recognition, political transformation, etc.

Zapatista militancy played a central role in the lives of these youths for several years, becoming a source of meaning and a *raison d'être*. This generation believed in the «Zapatista dream», put their fate in the hands of the movement, and were convinced that militancy in the EZLN was the best way to achieve their goals.

2. COMMUNAL CONFLICT IN THE FACE OF MIGRATION

The first to migrate were born Zapatistas. When Eugenio's father told the Assembly he was sending his son to the United States, his argument was financial: «I need money to rebuild my house, rebuild everything the army destroyed when they came into the village». The news caused commotion among community members. They did not know how to react or what stance to take. Transnational migration was new to the village: it was not part of their repertoire, it did not belong within any sort of economic strategy, nor was it a way of life. Until that moment, the only type of migration they knew involved Cancún or Ciudad del Carmen: it lasted short periods of time (three to four months) and was undertaken after communal approval. At that time, migration to the United States was associated to non-Zapatista youths, since they were the only ones going north. Internal tensions grew, conflict escalated and, in the end, those who decided to migrate had to leave the movement: back then it was not possible to emigrate and continue being a Zapatista. Zapatista militancy was seen as ongoing practice, a daily event and way of life, rather than just a sentiment, an affiliation or an ideology that could be maintained without daily practice. Also, as a first generation Zapatista explained,

We were afraid all the youths might leave because we had seen migration (in other towns) is like a vice, once they try it they can't stop. So we closed up, we got strict, and we said «no one leaves». We thought we could stop it that way, but no, it got worse; like the boys were even more eager to leave, then (Pablo, Chiapas, 2006).

The conflict regarding migration was, to a large extent, a conflict over meaning. Two apparently irreducible factions faced off: some saw migration as a surrender, an abandonment of the struggle, and a danger to the community; then there were those for whom migration did not imply surrender but a legitimate way of obtaining economic resources, a liberation, an adventure, a way of rebuilding their lives, even a trend.

The conflict also expresses the friction between two different philosophies found at the center of some Zapatista towns: the militant and migrant approach-



es. In the first case, collective action for the common good is prioritized and the community and the collective organization possess the highest value. In the second, collective action is displaced by an individual or family-based project and a personal search; even if, from this point of view, the community remains an important referent, it is no longer perceived as the center or main source of meaning. This clash also speaks of the need to renew a militancy model that worked quite well for almost two decades but has not been able to withstand the phenomenon of massive migration. As Zapatista communities in other regions are already doing, this village needs to expand the ways in which an individual can be part of the movement. This way, second and third generation youths who aspire to both migration and Zapatismo can continue to participate.

In spite of the multiple tensions that arose during the first cases of migration to the United States, these highlighted a problem that remained unspoken but was evident across the state, opening up a space for internal communal deliberation. As Alberto Melucci (1999) states, conflict publicizes that which the system will not acknowledge; that is, it evidences a problem that concerns all members, a problem around which new codes, meanings, and power structures are being built. In this case, the conflict opened up a space within which types of departure and their meanings could be negotiated.

Here it must be mentioned that youth migration does not necessarily lead to communal conflict in all communities. In María Trinidad, however, migration coincided with some families leaving the EZLN.⁴ At the time, many were doubtful as to whether these members were leaving the movement because they desired to emigrate or if they were emigrating because they wanted to leave the movement. Hence, migration and defection were seen as equivalent and treated as a single process.

3. MIGRATION AS SURRENDER, ABANDONMENT AND DANGER

As I have pointed out, the migration-related conflict is, to a large extent, a dispute over meaning and, during the first stage of the process, it was negative interpretations that predominated. The Zapatista community members saw their comrades' departures as a surrender to dejection and the exhaustion produced by a low intensity war. They also saw this as a danger to the community and a triple abandonment, since those who emigrate leave not only their families but also their communal posts and obligations, endangering a collective project to which everyone has greatly contributed.

⁴ Until then, María Trinidad had been a tightly knit community where, as they themselves put it, «even the chickens are Zapatista». For more than ten years the town was able to overcome the government's attempts to create internal divisions using the army's presence and a variety of social programs.



María Trinidad is understandably aggrieved by youth emigration because the reproduction of any indigenous community is gravely threatened by the loss of its productive male population—what Mutersbaugh (2002) calls «civic death». This sector of the population is not only in charge of providing food and other sources of family sustenance, they must also provide the communal services and collective labor needed for the proper functioning of the community. In the Zapatista case, the threat is double, since the departure of young men affects communal reproduction as well as the functioning of the autonomous municipalities and their ongoing projects.

As has happened in other Mexican towns, one of the first consequences of migration in María Trinidad was insufficient manpower. Everyone was needed to provide «services» and carry out the collective jobs necessary for the proper functioning of the community and the movement. The work load increases for those who remain behind and this, in turn, leads to more tensions. As a young Zapatista educator explains:

Since my companion left I can no longer do my work properly; I need to take care of that group, I must do all of the work now. What was the use of all those courses we took, all of this community effort if he was going to leave in the end? Other mates also left, and me and the other remaining promoter are going to have to help in the fields because the men don't have enough hands. The children are going to miss out on school, it's not fair; I also have needs, I have a baby and that's why I'm not leaving (Elmer, Chiapas, 2006).

Another effect of migration that is perceived as negative is that remittance money has led some families to set up personal businesses that compete with the collective Zapatista projects and challenge the egalitarian ideal promoted by both the movement and the Catholic Church. Women in particular see migration as a threat to their families, since there have been several cases of abandonment on the part of migrating husbands. This is a public problem from the communal point of view, since the community is responsible for all the members in the group and is in charge of solving the problems of an abandoned family.

It must be pointed that the mistrust brought about by migration is, in large part, the result of what has been observed in other towns in the region, which have «prophesized» what could soon be the future of rebel communities: abandonment of villages, weakening of communal organizations, family disintegration, abandonment of agriculture, alcoholism, drug addiction, crime, and increased personal wealth for a given few, among others.



4. MIGRATION AS AN ECONOMIC NECESSITY

Faced with the negative connotations of abandonment, surrender and danger, migrants have produced a positive image through which they justify their need to leave: migration as an economic necessity. That is, a legitimate way of «earning a living», «advancing», «getting ahead», «improving», «pulling through». In this case, migrants try to show that their actions are born out of a sense of obligation imposed by the difficult economic situation and their familial responsibilities, rather personal desire. This argument was used by the 1.5 generation, since they usually have dependent family members:

We decided to emigrate to bring our families out of poverty, to have something, improve economic conditions, fulfill the dream of having a house; in short, do something more, especially because of our children. Before, coffee would bring us money; we would harvest coffee and one year later we knew we had money to support our families, to buy something, but then the army came into our town and that was the end of that. They ruined all that work and now, if we want money, we do not have a job, there is no work in the region, and that's why many decided to emigrate to other places in the country and we decided to come here [the United States]. Like I said, so we could have something with which to support our families (California, 2005).

The problem is that, in a context where everyone lives under the same economic conditions and aspires to equality, it is not easy to convince those who oppose migration that this is the only alternative to earning a living in the region. This is why the idea of migration as a «necessity» has been contested and depicted instead as ambition. Some think these departures are not the consequence of poverty but a desire for money and an urban lifestyle. This clash over meaning has led to an internal discussion regarding the definition of «necessity» and life aspirations. For example, while everyone agrees on the region's precarious economic situation, some will state that «there's a reason why we revolted». While militant Zapatistas continue to think that struggle and collective organization are the best path to changing their life conditions and «getting ahead», migrants say the struggle has not had the desired effects and that, in the current regional context, the best option is migrating to the United States, where a few days of work will yield more than a month of labor in the area.

While both militant Zapatistas and migrants aspire to a «better life», they understand this concept differently. For the former, a good life involves «working without a boss», «having enough land», «being organized», «being united», «being with the family», and not so much having money or the luxuries associated to urban life. Still, many youths think that a good life should provide access to certain commodities that had, until now, been dispensable or inaccessible but are slowly growing in value and being incorporated into communal life thanks to



migration remittances. Deep down, this debate shows how migration inevitably leads to symbolic disputes regarding life aspirations, necessities, and the kind of objects and activities that are valued.

5. MIGRATION AS RELIEF OR LIBERATION

Another meaning given to migration is that of relief or liberation as understood in three different ways, all of them associated to concrete daily situations. For starters, migration is seen as a way of freeing oneself from certain communal norms, particularly the ban on alcohol consumption. This might appear rather silly, but the Zapatista law that has caused the most unhappiness among some of the members—especially young males—is the one banning the sale and consumption of alcohol. Although everyone agrees that alcohol has played a very negative role in these communities (hence the law), some youths are bothered by this prohibition and see the north as a free space in which to party and have fun.

Secondly, migration is associated to freedom of movement and the opportunity to see places where the potential migrants have never been. We must remember that, until 2001, there were numerous military outposts along the canyons and these prevented free transit while subjecting the population to constant checkups and interrogations. In order to ensure its security, each community controlled members' movements and people had to ask permission in order to travel.

Finally, migration can also free a person from certain obligations and responsibilities associated to the charges and chores assigned by the community or the movement. Zapatista autonomy requires a high degree of member participation. All Zapatista members have some sort of charge or responsibility and are required to actively participate in the movement's events, meetings, and assemblies. Although this is only the case among a small group of the population, some youths find these permanent demands for participation in collective life a chore, which can prompt the desire to emigrate.

The militant generation that began the movement finds it difficult to understand how their children or other youths might view migration as «freedom». For them, being free means, above all, «having enough land to cultivate» and not working for a superior. Sixty-year-old Don José, a María Trinidad Zapatista with over 15 years of active participation in the movement, muses: «Life!... We fought to free ourselves from bosses and our children go north looking for them, even paying to do so» (Chiapas, 2006).



6. MIGRATION AS PERSONAL RECONSTRUCTION

Yet another meaning ascribed my migrants to migration is what I have come to call «personal reconstruction»; that is, the possibility of rebuilding their lives. In spite of the new spaces of political participation Zapatismo has opened up for women (see Hernández, 2008), their role inside communities is still strongly linked to their status as wives and mothers; that is, they are valued in regards to their ability to start a family. Those who fail to do so must live in a sort of pre-adulthood, being cared for by their father or a brother.⁵ This is why single or separated mothers see migration as a way of rebuilding their personal and emotional lives. Although exceptions do occur, most single or separated mothers will remain in the parental home or marry a widower, who will probably have many children to support. For many young women, these are hardly attractive options. They desire to rebuild their lives and form new families, and migration offers the chance of finding a new, suitable partner. Also, once they are sending remittances home, they can validate themselves in a positive way and earn new types of recognition inside their communities.

Some of the María Trinidad youths who decided to abandon the movement also saw migration as a route to personal reconstruction. Most of them experienced their departure as a painful process and went through a period of personal crisis, not only because of the divisive communal conflict within which their actions took place but also because this involved a loss of identity markers –the ways in which they defined themselves served as a positive pointer for many years and were a source of self esteem. For most men in this situation, migration is a perfect opportunity to regain lost self esteem.

7. MIGRATION AS A TREND

As many of the jungle inhabitants migrated to the United States, a solid migration network was constructed. This entailed a new action repertoire and the creation of a positive social imaginary regarding the other side of the border, which eventually turned migration into a fashionable trend; that is «a culture of migration where people migrate because everybody else does» (Castles, 2006: 42). As a young man told me, only half-jokingly, as we chatted in the California valley: «Zapatismo is out of fashion; I'm part of migration, the latest trend».

⁵ Across the region, single men prefer to marry young virgins. Single mothers or women who «failed» in their marriage belong to a «secondary category» and their matrimonial chances are therefore diminished. These practices, however, should not be seen as exclusively or inherently indigenous, since violence toward women is also a generalized practice across patriarchal industrialized and democratic societies and third world environments.



As Simmel (1923) explains, fashion is crisscrossed by imitation and distinction, which allows for the simultaneous satisfaction of communal affiliation as well as a desire for differentiation and isolation. That is, fashion synthesized the need for acceptance, adhesion, and security along with the desire for singularity, difference, and individualism (Simmel, 1923). From this perspective, migration could be an attempt on the part of born Zapatistas, in particular, to resolve the permanent tension between the individual and the community. It is through it that they seek to overcome the conflict between every youth's desire to be a different and outstanding member of the group and the desire to be recognized as part of a collective. The tension between imitation (belonging) and distinction (differentiation) is quite present in communal life. Jungle communities are constantly struggling for equality and clashing over some members' desire for differentiation. Consequently, any fad or change gain ground quite easily. The testimony of a Zapatista from the area clearly illustrates this:

What we see is that «egalitarianism» exists in these communities. We all want to have the same things so, if a man decides he wants to paint his house, everyone goes to him and says, «I also want to paint my house», and there will be some who will want to do so even if they have no money, because we all want to be the same. But I must ponder, think that this paint is an extra, a luxury and not a necessity; it's a fad. The same with going north: one leaves, the other one sees he comes back with some trinkets and also leaves and wants to have the same things. But it's the same: luxury and not necessity (Emiliano, Chiapas, 2005).

Jungle communities indeed aspire to egalitarianism and any change or innovation introduced by an individual seeking to be different (through either clothing, domestic objects, housing style, job, or any other evident sign of differentiation) will immediately be noticed by the rest of the community and become a source of both criticism and imitation. It will also be quickly absorbed by all in the community until it ceases to be a sign of difference. The same has happened with migration and, nowadays, many teenagers dream about going north and following in the footsteps of their older siblings or friends; no one wants to be left behind. They all want to «taste» this experience and become part of the «northerners».

The distinctions generated by migration are defined in relation to the community as well as previous generations. It is not just about new types of objects or personal commodities; above all, it is about lived experience. By seeing new places, meeting new people and taking on jobs no one in the communal context knows (with the exception of other migrants), returning migrants acquire their own style: new behaviors, clothing, speech patterns, ways of dancing. And yet, as with all other fashions, this difference is temporary and lasts as long as its material signs remain. When the new clothes and shoes wear out, the electrical



appliances stop working and the dollars run out, the only sign of difference will be the lived experienced. Asked about the changes suffered by those who travel north, a member of the government council answers:

The change is temporary: they come back with caps, big hats, northern booths and, six months later, this is worn out and they have to buy the same things we do, and we all go back to being dressed the same way, with what is available in the area. They come back all stuck up, fat, they want to kill a chicken every day, but their money runs out some time later and they're back to eating beans and *pozol* every day, just like us. This is how it goes, what comes from the north runs out, stops working, and a bit later we are all back being the same. So, what good was leaving? (Chiapas, 2006).

8. MIGRATION AS ADVENTURE

For many youths migration is a personal and collective adventure. That is, a risky experience made up of unexpected events and encounters that leaves the daily routine behind and entails a high degree of uncertainty (see Simmel, 2002). An event that cannot be completely planned or measured because it involves venturing in to the unknown without knowing what the final result will be but provides an escape from what Majakovskji called «the banality of the daily» (in Mezzadra, 2005: 44). The following testimony from a 60-year-old non-Zapatista migrant outlines this well:

I don't go north out of necessity. I don't want to boast, but in my village I have a cement house, a store, coffee plantations, land, I don't lack anything. My sons have grown up, I gave them all I could. They also ask me why I go, and I tell them, «to see other faces, hear other voices, travel a bit. Find some other jobs.» It's like rich people who have the money to go on vacation; they can go and see other countries because they have money, papers; us, even if we have the money, we get no papers, so the only way to see a bit more of the world is through emigration (Roberto, Chiapas, 2005).

The first forays are highly uncertain. However, young migrants are always optimistic about their journey and luck. As Simmel (2002: 79) points out, the adventurer relies on his own strength and believes in his good luck, even if the uncertain nature of the journey calls for a certain dose of fatalism. Migrants surrender to both trust and fatalism; hence, their adventures oscillate between passivity and activity, what is achieved and what is received (Simmel, 2002: 76). During the journey, the migrant also abandons himself to his luck or destiny, as a large part of the adventure escapes his control. When migration is lived as an adventure, the figure of the migrant is invested with a strong epic dimension vis-à-vis the image of the deserter. He becomes a sort of hero whose journey turns into an odyssey full of adverse and favorable events. This heroic image is built, to a large degree, once the migrant has returned to his hometown and gets to narrate his adventures on the other side of the border.



9. COMMUNAL OPENNESS TO MIGRATION

Eugenio's departure and that of a group of eight youths in 2003 opened up the path to the United States in María Trinidad. Since then, migration has not stopped; every departure produces more potential migrants by strengthening the regional migration network and fueling migration action repertoires, as well as the social imaginaries that foster new departures. Thus, in less than five years, migration has become a life alternative for many youths. Today, everyone is a potential migrant and most of María Trinidad's Zapatista families will have to face the dilemmas brought about by the departure of a son, brother, husband, or any other close relative. As a member explains:

Every family has a rebel child who is just not going to obey so, even if we talk to them tell them to stay, they will go. You talk to them, explain, but if they wish to go then there's nothing you can do. When the young get an idea into their heads there's no going back. But we continue to resist here (Rómulo, Chiapas, 2005).

Given that there was no way of stopping them, families had to take a more flexible stance and accept the imminent departure of their children. The community realized it did not have the strength required to stop this phenomenon and went from having banned migration to attempts at regulating it. It knows that, if it doesn't, other militants will also abandon the movement.

Currently, militant members in Zapatista communities are allowed to migrate to the United States if the community allows them to do so and they fulfill their part of whatever agreement is reached. The assembly provides the space within which departures and the agreements involving them are negotiated. Said agreements tend to regulate the lapse of time the migrant can be away and the amount he or she will have to pay to cover the communal work they will cease to carry out in the village. The sanctioned period of absence goes from one to five years; María Trinidad allows four, but in communities where migration is more recent only one year is allowed. Migration is prone to swift changes; agreements are not immutable and terms are renegotiated if necessary. The purpose is to find the best possible solutions to a situation previously alien to the community. A member of the government council explains that, at the beginning, the communities in border areas agreed there would be no limits to how long an individual could be out of town and that this would be decided by the migrants in question (Chiapas, 2006). So men started leaving for five to six years and there was no one to carry out the communal chores. This led to a reassessment of the communal agreement and the current permit covers two years, after which the migrant must remain for three years in the village providing the necessary services. It must be pointed out that it was migrants themselves who saw the need to regulate departures in order to keep the villages working. These types of



agreements are similar to those that have taken place in Oaxaca communities, where the high migration rates have endangered the system of communal organization.

The amount migrants must give goes from two to four thousand pesos a year and it is used to pay for the communal work the migrant will abandon during his or her absence. This financial arrangement is a common practice across Mexican indigenous communities with high migration rates and is seen as a sort of tax in exchange for the services enjoyed by the migrant's family. It has certainly allowed migrants to keep their «communal citizenship».

The Zapatista rebels' growing openness to migration is not only reflected in the establishment of communal agreements over departures but also in social perceptions. Little by little, migration ceased to be equated to surrender and abandoning the movement and views became more nuanced. Communities have opened up a space for migration and, today, almost all Zapatista families in María Trinidad have at least one family member working in the United States. Migration is no longer seen exclusively as an end to militancy or a source of conflict that will lead to the demise of communal solidarity. Furthermore, it is now accepted as a new strategy through which to earn a living and, for migrants, a way of rebuilding their lives.

10. CONCLUSIONS

By reconstructing the beginning of migration in María Trinidad, a Zapatista community of the Lacandon Jungle, I have tried to show how the migration phenomenon developed in the midst of great communal tension and conflict, leading to multiple subjectivities some of which threaten the hegemonic rule of the Zapatista movement as the best project through which to solve popular demands and achieve more desirable living standards.

María Trinidad's first migrants departed in 2002-2003, a most discouraging moment for the Zapatistas given that all governmental institutions refused to fulfill the San Andrés Accords. At this point, low intensity war had also led to the first Zapatista defections in María Trinidad, and these coincided with emigration. Emigration led to a communal conflict between opposing subjectivities, and actors wrangled over the definition of migration and how to manage it. On the one hand, there were those Zapatista militants who defined migration as a surrender, abandonment, and a danger to the community and the movement. On the other, those who publicly defined it as a legitimate way of obtaining economic resources and saw it as way to attain freedom, an adventure, a trend, and a form of personal reconstruction.

This conflict around the meaning of migratory action expresses two projects currently present in rebel communities: the autonomous Zapatista project based



on a collective organization for the common good, which aspires to a profound social transformation, and the migration project, based on individual or family-based actions that seek to satisfy very concrete personal needs and aspirations. Although these two projects would initially appear to be mutually exclusive (while the first requires communal presence and participation the second leads to prolonged absences), they currently coexist in tension and permanent negotiation. Zapatista communities have slowly opened up to migration after a period during which they completely rejected this phenomenon; they have come to realize that migration does not have to be equated to abandoning the movement or eschewing communal responsibilities. In fact, several experiences in other regions of the country show how migrants' bonds and dedication to their hometowns are maintained through years of absence (Fox and Rivera Salgado, 2004). Today, rebel towns are reinventing forms of militant compromise and coming up with new social relations, new ways of «living together» (Touraine, 1997) that enable a connection between the collective aspirations of the movement and the personal aspirations of young migrants.

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