Chapter 8

Outside the Indigenous Lens:
Zapatistas and Autonomous Videomaking

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We are Indigenous people of different languages and cultures, descendants of the ancient Mayan people. The Indigenous people of Chiapas and all the Indigenous peoples of Mexico have been suffering great injustices—plundering, humiliation, discrimination, and marginalization—for several centuries; many other peoples around the world also live in the same situation, in the Americas and beyond. This is a consequence of the violent Spanish conquest and, after that, the North American invasions. This left us living in complete misery and on the way to being exterminated. These are the reasons that forced us to rise up in arms on January 1, 1994, and say, “Enough!”

—Comandante David, Oventic, Chiapas, 2003, from the CMP/Promedios video of the announcement of the formation of the Caracoles and Good Government Assemblies

On January 1, 1994, the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN, Zapatista National Liberation Army), a Mayan Indigenous organization based in Chiapas, Mexico, declared war on the Mexican government in an armed uprising that took over six towns in Chiapas. The international press blasted news of the uprising over broadcast media and the Internet, and for weeks analyses of the underlying causes of the Zapatista revolution jumped off the pages of the international press: the Mexican Constitution had failed to recognize Indigenous peoples, their rights, and their
cultures. The Mexican government therefore was treating Mexico’s Indigenous peoples as second-class citizens, socially and through legal fiat, effectively denying Indigenous peoples the rights guaranteed to all Mexicans under the Mexican Constitution. With a strong sense of the importance of media events, the Zapatistas chose January 1, 1994—the date that the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) went into effect—for the uprising. Since the Zapatistas are primarily an agricultural people, they argued that NAFTA would have a significant impact on Indigenous peoples throughout Mexico. Yet the Zapatista concerns were never heard, let alone solicited, by either the Mexican or U.S. negotiating teams.

In addition to guns, the media were always an important part of the Zapatista “arsenal”; in fact, in the days immediately following the uprising, the Zapatistas (via sympathetic supporters) used the Internet to broadcast their cause to the world. They employed as their spokesperson a charismatic mestizo, Subcommander Marcos. Through his savvy use of the Spanish language, Marcos was able to capture the attention of the international news media, which then declared Marcos to be the “leader” of the Zapatistas when in fact they had no leader per se. This strategic appropriation of the mainstream news media and the Internet allowed the Zapatistas to call to international civil society to join them in “building a new world.” With appeals made via the Internet, they focused international attention on the uprising and, in so doing, used the resulting international pressure to force the Mexican government into negotiations, and a subsequent truce, by January 12, 1994. It is, then, by their own design that the Zapatistas have become something of a “spectacle,” spawning everything from PhD dissertations to conferences to rock music.

This chapter focuses on both the product and process of Indigenous media and offers a “best practice” model of cooperative, transnational, Indigenous media making, based on my personal experience with the Chiapas Media Project (CMP)/Promedios, a binational nongovernmental organization (NGO) that provides video and computer equipment and training to Indigenous communities in the states of Chiapas and Guerrero. From my perspective as the founder, former director, and now international coordinator of the Chiapas Media Project/Promedios, it is clear that the CMP/Promedios model is not the only means of facilitating and promoting Indigenous media; rather, my hope is that our story, including our mistakes, over the past ten years, might encourage others
to join in this struggle. Here I emphasize the local, domestic, and global contexts in which media operate as agents of social change.

The difference between the videos the communities produce about themselves and what “outsiders” produce about them is notable. There has been a tendency for “outsiders” to focus on the militarization and violence in Chiapas, while the communities portray themselves as survivors involved in the next level of the struggle and resistance to neocolonialism/globalization. In the category of self-produced videos, there is also a notable distinction between the Zapatistas’ videos produced to tell the world about their issues and those produced for internal community use and local circulation. CMP/Promedios productions—documentaries focusing on collective projects such as coffee, textiles, education, and organic agriculture—circulate internationally chiefly via universities and film festivals. In contrast, the vast majority of videos produced for internal consumption focus on meetings, celebrations, and religious and cultural gatherings. These internal videos are almost exclusively in the Tzeltal, Tzotzil, and Tojolabal Mayan languages, addressing an audience assumed to be Mayan. Thus, while the Zapatistas strategically use the media for international recognition, videos produced for local circulation demonstrate the integration of media into the Zapatista-Mayan cultural fabric.

The Zapatista-produced videos have a powerful effect on outside viewers. Audiences in the “developed world” are seeing ordinary Indigenous people (with no stereotypical ski masks or guns, as they are seen in the outsider-produced images), organized collectively to work in their organic municipal garden and talking about how they want to be self-sufficient and neither use chemical fertilizer nor take government handouts—something that contradicts the image, produced by corporate media, of the Zapatistas as armed guerrillas only interested in state power. For other Indigenous communities in Mexico and beyond, the videos offer an example of successful Indigenous resistance to globalization and present a sustainable agricultural model for collective survival. This paradigm shift benefits CMP/Promedios in many ways: by increasing video sales, providing word-of-mouth promotion for future presentations, recruiting student interns, and creating sensitivity to Indigenous struggle and self-representation. As I will demonstrate, there are ways that “outsiders” can help to facilitate the process of Indigenous media production and distribution that not only document and educate but that will also help to integrate new media into other forms of cultural production.
What we ask from those who are not Zapatistas, who do not agree with us or do not understand the just cause of our struggle, is that you respect our organization, that you respect our communities and Autonomous Municipalities and their authorities. And respect the Good Government Assemblies in all the regions, which have been formally constituted today, witnessed by many thousands of indigenous and nonindigenous brothers and sisters from our country Mexico and from many countries around the world.

—Comandante David, Oventic, Chiapas, 2003, from cmp/Promedios video

Not every Indigenous community in Chiapas is Zapatista. The communities with which cmp/Promedios works are communities that clearly identify themselves as Zapatista, also known as “Zapatista civilian communities,” thereby distinguishing them from the armed wing of the Zapatistas, the EZLN. These communities organize themselves via local, regional, and municipal authorities, elected through community consensus. They also have a rotating governance board, the Good Government Assembly (Junta de Buen Gobierno), which deals with all matters of decision making for their given autonomous municipality. The members of the Good Government Assemblies rotate out every fifteen days and are members of the communities that are part of each particular autonomous municipality. In some regions, the Good Government Assemblies have been so successful at mediating local conflicts (cattle theft, land disputes, etc.) that local Mexican government judiciary now refers to them to mediate between Zapatista and non-Zapatista individuals.

Other communities support the Zapatista cause but do not identify themselves as Zapatista. And there are non-Zapatista communities, ranging from ones that self-identify with political parties (especially the Partido de Acción Nacional [PAN], Partido de la Revolución Democrática [PRD], or Partido Revolucionario Institucional [PRI]) to communities that support paramilitaries. Many of these paramilitary organizations receive support from local ranchers and, in many cases, state and federal governments.

This larger sociopolitical context is key to understanding the environment in which the cmp/Promedios operates. In December 1997, a month before the first cmp/Promedios workshops were to take place, government-trained paramilitary forces killed forty-five Indigenous people, mostly women and children, in what is now referred to as the “Acteal Massacre.” This bloody event received much international mass media
attention that mostly reiterated the Mexican government’s version of the story: that the massacre was a result of long-standing intercommunity conflict—not government-sponsored violence against Zapatista supporters. The story and perspective of the communities were not present in the coverage. Concurrent with this, the Mexican government began to expel foreigners, including human rights workers, from Chiapas under the pretext that they were violating the constitution by involving themselves in internal politics. Against this backdrop, CMP / Promedios made its first, formal, binational media exchange.7

PERSONAL INVOLVEMENT

With the purpose of creating an intercultural dialogue from the community level up to the national level, that may allow a new and positive relationship between the various indigenous groups and between these groups and the rest of society, it is essential to endow these communities with their own means of communication, which are also key mechanisms for the development of their cultures. Therefore, it will be proposed to the respective national authorities, to elaborate a new communications law that may allow the indigenous towns to acquire, operate, and administrate their own means of communication.

—from Article 3 of the San Andrés Accords, 1996

It was in this environment and under an apparently impenetrable cloak of censorship that the Zapatistas recognized the power of the media.6 In the spring of 1995, I made my first trip to Chiapas while producing a documentary for a U.S.-based ngo taking a humanitarian aid caravan to a Zapatista region. During the production, our caravan arrived in a community that was swarming with press (both national and international): photographers and tv news cameras all “capturing the story” of the Zapatista representatives and community members who were present. It is important to note that this media presence was not a by-product of the Zapatista struggle; rather, the Zapatistas themselves had initiated and directed this international media presence, recognizing their dependence on outside (both mass and independent) media for visibility, for a degree of protection, and for leverage. The Zapatistas understood the power of their story; what was lacking was the means of transmitting that story themselves.

While the “external” journalists were “getting their story,” several people in the community came up to me to ask about my Hi8 camera (where I bought it, how much it cost, etc.), clearly demonstrating an
interest in and awareness of this technology and an obvious desire to communicate their message to the outside world. It was clear that the Zapatistas would benefit from access to video technology. Before leaving Chiapas, I began a discussion with Zapatista authorities, who expressed a strong interest in bringing video technology to their communities, and with representatives of local NGOs who had a working relationship with the Zapatista communities; their preexisting relationships with the Zapatista communities helped facilitate our communication and gave us credibility in the communities. I returned to the United States with the kernel of an idea for a project and with the Zapatistas’ encouragement to move ahead. In this stage of the project, I really only envisioned a workshop or a series of workshops in one region—I never imagined what the project would become.

GETTING ORGANIZED

I have always wanted to provide the people in the Zapatista region with video equipment so that they can communicate, with sounds and pictures recorded by them, what is happening and what is NOT happening in their communities. I am immensely pleased to know that it’s finally going to happen.
—Guillermo Monteforte (personal communication, October 1997)

In the fall of 1995, I returned to Mexico and began meeting people who would be crucial to the success of the project. Through a series of transnational connections, I met Guillermo Monteforte, a Canadian Italian videomaker and trainer who turned out to be indispensable. Monteforte was involved with a government-funded initiative administered by the Instituto Nacional Indigenista (INI, National Indigenous Institute), a government institution that provided training and video technology to Indigenous communities throughout Mexico in the late 1980s and early 1990s. He was also the founding director of Oaxaca’s Centro de Video Indigena (CVI, Indigenous Video Center), created as part of the INI program. Not only did Monteforte have experience working in Indigenous communities in Mexico, but he was also a skilled video professional with sensitivity in teaching these skills. Based on his many years of working successfully with Indigenous videomakers and their communities, Monteforte was able to provide contacts for potential video instructors. At the time, we were still thinking that this would only be a two-week workshop. Since he was the expert, I deferred to Monteforte to organize the

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training program, while I focused on logistics and financing the donated equipment as requested by the communities.

After some extensive conversations with Monteforte, we decided that we needed to present a formal proposal of a media training strategy to the Zapatistas. Several people had suggested that we go and speak with David, a Zapatista authority who lived in Oventic (in the Highlands region). David was extremely supportive of our proposal for the workshop and offered to facilitate the negotiating process with various Zapatista communities.

KEY ACTORS

It is deeply encouraging to see young people come together to build bridges of friendship, cooperation and communication. I applaud your vision and I hope this project will inspire future cross-cultural exchanges with youth groups around the world.

—Carol Moseley-Braun, former U.S. Senator (personal communication, January 7, 1998)

This project could not have “gotten off the ground” without the support of many activists, NGOs, and media makers in the United States and Mexico. As in any process of social change, it is the individual, the community, and the vision that create the ability for sustainability. We welcomed the opportunity to work within already-existing connections while keeping our vision of media activism. Besides Guillermo Monteforte, other people were essential to getting CMP/Promedios off the ground. Tom Hansen (currently national coordinator for the Mexico Solidarity Network) was at that time the director of Pastors for Peace, a U.S.-based NGO that had been working in Chiapas since the uprising. Hansen helped me make initial contacts with Chiapas NGOs and shared his contact list to raise funds for the first equipment. This primary list of individuals was the initial direct mail list that provided significant support early on and that we still use to this day. Via one of Hansen’s contacts in Mexico City, I met Jose Manuel Pintado, an independent video producer based in Mexico City, who had earlier introduced me to Monteforte and to Fabio Meltis, an Indigenous youth organizer in Mexico City, who encouraged many Indigenous young people to participate in the first workshop.

Another key actor in the formation of the CMP/Promedios was Francisco (Paco) Vázquez, a Nahua youth from near Mexico City, who partici-
pated in the first workshop. Vázquez had been involved in his community’s collective projects and had a built-in sensitivity about dealing with the communities in Chiapas. Without Vázquez, the project would never have advanced beyond the first workshop. When I met him, he was a self-taught, fluent English speaker, and he became my default translator/partner, since I could barely speak Spanish during the first one and a half years of the project. Vázquez helped me navigate the Indigenous cultures, understand Mexican bureaucracy, and in many ways served as my protector the numerous times the Mexican military and immigration authorities stopped me at roadblocks and checkpoints.

**FIRST WORKSHOP**

For me it is an awakening, because before we’ve never even seen this kind of equipment that is now in our hands. But now we see we can do this work.

—Emilio, Zapatista participant in the first workshop in Ejido Morelia (personal communication, February 1998)

The first workshop was held in February of 1998 in the town of Ejido Morelia. Through our existing network of contacts, we met Miguel, a Zapatista authority who served as our link to the local and regional authorities and who was key in planning the project. Through Miguel we began to understand the governing structure of the Zapatista civilian authorities. We found that communication and logistics were much smoother when one person per community served as a “key person.”

From the beginning, we realized that we had to work in the given organizational structure of the Zapatistas. There is no cookie-cutter “Zapatista structure”; each community and each region differ, and it is crucial to understand the dynamics on a local level. By respecting how each individual community works, we were able to work with them. This was only possible by asking and listening to the experts who were living in that community.

Due to the larger political and military actions undertaken throughout Chiapas by the Mexican government, it took two years to fund and organize the first workshops. Street Level Youth Media was a Chicago-based youth organization that I contacted to participate in the first workshop. It was made up of inner-city, mostly Chicano, youth. Street Level provided me with a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status in the United States that was helpful in soliciting funds. However, the Acteal Massacre in 1997
created panic in the Street Level Youth Media group, and we had to reorganize some of our initial plans. In February 1998, we held the first binational workshops as part of a youth intercultural exchange project under the name Chiapas Youth Media Project; the participants were Street Level Youth Media from Chicago, Meltis’s group of Indigenous youth from Mexico City, and Monteforte’s group of Indigenous video-makers from Oaxaca. A grant from the U.S.-Mexico Fund for Culture, based in Mexico City, funded these first workshops.

During our time in Ejido Morelia, there was a lot of tension due to non-Zapatista illegal logging in the community. This situation resulted in a rock-throwing incident in which a Zapatista member of the community was hit in the head. Miguel and other local authorities asked us to assist them in documenting the injury and, if necessary, to help transport the person to a hospital in a nearby town. The staff of Street Level, the Chicago group, fearful of the violence, did not want any of their youth involved and forced them to stay behind, locked up for safety. The staff of Street Level wanted constant assurances that “nothing would happen,” and even very minor incidents added tension to an already tense situation. The entire situation illustrated the difficulty of organizing cultural exchanges in a highly conflicted area.

WHAT CAN WE PLUG IN AND WHERE?

[We are giving a hand to the compañeros here in Chiapas who are interested in receiving this video workshop]. . . . We lost the lights and we had to use the electrical generator from the clinic, then we got started. And the dogs ate our food last night and we had to return [to San Cristóbal] to get more food. These are the different problems that we’ve had in doing these workshops.
—Sergio Julián, Oaxacan Indigenous video instructor during first workshop in Oventic (personal communication, February 1998)

During the first meetings with the Zapatista authorities David and Miguel, we asked many questions about infrastructural issues such as electricity, (relatively) weatherproof buildings, security for the equipment, and so on. In both Oventic and Ejido Morelia, only ungrounded electricity was available—lines pulled from the government electricity grid in the area. Community leaders explained that there was no guarantee of consistent electricity or voltage. We understood this to mean that there would be inevitable interruptions of the workshops.
The first equipment we purchased consisted of s-vhs and vhs camcorders and s-vhs editing systems. Early on, we accepted used equipment from sympathetic U.S. supporters, but we quickly realized that these donations had a very short life span and were too hodge-podge. We recognized that people were attempting to be altruistic by sending us their used equipment, but we quickly learned to say, “If you won’t use it, we don’t need it!” The Zapatistas needed good equipment and training, not the castoffs from technology-saturated American consumers.

**HOW DO WE ORGANIZE?**

We decided that the television was saying pure lies about what happens in our Chiapas. Or they add or take out words but never say the truth. We also thought that it would be good to have a camera because there are so many soldiers on our lands, at any moment something could happen. This means that when the soldiers are beating us you can enter with the camera and shoot it, record testimony—denounce it.

—Moisés, Zapatista videomaker interviewed in *La jornada* (personal communication, October 2000)

After the success of the first video workshops in Ejido Morelia and Oventic, the Zapatista communities indicated their interest in continuing with the video training. In March of 1998, we decided to formalize the project as the Chiapas Media Project (CMP), a nonprofit organization based in the United States. Early on in the project, it became clear to me that there were certain aspects of my cultural conditioning (white, middle-class, college-educated North American female) that were causing conflicts in the project. My own cultural style of decision making—and my frustration at the long meetings with local Zapatista authorities and the slowness of decision making in the communities—created friction in our organization. Realizing that my strengths could be better utilized elsewhere, I removed myself from the day-to-day decision making in Mexico and focused on international distribution and promotion.

In 2001, the organization incorporated in Mexico as Promedios de Comunicación Comunitaria and became CMP/Promedios. CMP/Promedios is organized as a collective with no director or hierarchical structure but with three full-time staff members in Chiapas and one full-time and one part-time staff member in the United States. This organizational structure attempts to reflect that of the Zapatista communities with
which CMP/Promedios works. Currently, CMP/Promedios is assisting the communities in Chiapas to build and equip four regional media centers. We see ourselves as working for the communities, taking their lead and working with them to create an autonomous media network that reflects their needs.

**HOW DO WE TEACH?**

It isn’t easy to translate Indigenous Spanish into English. There is a complex, sometimes unclear mixture of expressions and sentence structures that on the surface shows inability of precise expression in a language that is not their own, and one that fills them with a complex of being dominated by mestizos who scorn them for not speaking it “properly.”

—Guillermo Monteforte (personal communication, April 1998)

I came into this project with very little knowledge of Indigenous media or its processes. My primary vision of the CMP/Promedios came from my background as a documentary videomaker/artist with my interest and curiosity focused on discovering what kinds of videos the Zapatistas would produce once they had the equipment and training. In my mind, I was facilitating the education of videomakers by transmitting technical skills to my peers. In the summer of 1998 we held our first video production workshop in the village of La Realidad. I was sitting next to Manuel, a local Zapatista authority who had a camera in his hands, when he turned to me and asked, “Don’t we need special government permission to use this equipment?” I was surprised at the question and asked him why he was asking. He replied, “Because all of the people who come here always have credenciales hanging around their necks, given to them by the government.” He was referring to the press and, after further discussion, I realized that Manuel thought ownership of video equipment had to be authorized by the government. After this, we made sure during the workshops to reiterate that the equipment belonged to the communities, that no government permission was needed, and that the training we were providing was professional and no different from what the people with the credenciales had received. Put simply: the villagers had just as much right as the people with the credenciales to tell their story and distribute it as they saw fit.

In the beginning of the video training process, we were all aware of the pitfalls of bringing in temporary “outsiders” to do the training, par-
particularly as “instructors.” Bringing in people from outside of Mexico would not work from either a sociopolitical or economic standpoint—we did not want to replicate the colonial model. With very rare exceptions, all of the introductory video and computer workshops the first two years were taught by either Indigenous videomakers from Oaxaca or by Mexican Promedios staff.

Promedios staff felt that it was extremely important for the instructors to be Mexican—preferably Indigenous Mexican—in order to provide a continuity of process and to connect Zapatista videomakers to the broader network of Indigenous videomakers in Mexico and Latin America. The development of a network of media centers is a long-term commitment that can only succeed if it is self-sustaining. In this respect, Promedios relies on good relations with Indigenous videomakers in Oaxaca and elsewhere who strengthen and broaden Promedios as a link in the larger network of Indigenous media organizations.

In the first workshops, the students were primarily local authorities, put there to check us out and make sure we “weren’t up to no good.” We found this out later after working in the communities for a while, when we noticed that certain people were dropping out of the courses whom we would later encounter in leadership positions. Another dynamic operating was the presence of so many “outsiders.” Many people of goodwill came (and continue to come) from around the world to Chiapas with the intention of assisting the communities. Yet many broken promises have left locals wary of first-time visitors. We knew from the beginning that we could not make any promises we could not fulfill and that the most important thing was continuity—to maintain a presence (see figs 8.1–8.5).

THE HYDRA OF FUNDING

The Funds Executive Committee has agreed on a grant of $21,400 for the development of the above mentioned project (Chiapas Youth Media Project). The award of the funding assigned to the granted projects is established through an agreement signed by the Fund and the person appointed as project manager, who will be responsible for signing the agreement, receiving the checks and keeping the Fund informed on the development of the project as well as the application of the funds granted.

—Marcela S. Madariaga, program coordinator, U.S.-Mexico Fund for Culture, notification letter of first grant to Promedios, August 1997
(this page and opposite) Zapatista Women, First Women’s Video Workshop, Ejido Morelia, 1998. COURTESY OF FRANCISCO VÁZQUEZ / CHIAPAS MEDIA PROJECT / PROMEDIOS.

(above) Zapatista video makers editing, 1998.

(left) Zorida shooting during First Women’s Video Workshop, Ejido Morelia, 1998.

COURTESY OF FRANCISCO VÁZQUEZ / CHIAPAS MEDIA PROJECT / PROMEDIOS.
We entered the project knowing that neither goodwill nor passion would buy us a video camera or a Final Cut Pro editing system. Self-sustainability also requires a media product that can be shown, distributed, and sold. Unfortunately, selling Indigenous-made videos does not often generate enough revenue to support the project on its own. Working in a political movement that offers a potent critique of international capitalism means that organizers and participants are suspicious of both government support and corporate interests. We needed to respect this political framework, balancing it with the need for consistent funding. Therefore, for the first five years, the U.S. side of the project took full responsibility for securing funding.

The costs involved in equipment maintenance alone necessitated some creative strategies for self-generating funds. In addition to foundation/corporate funding and personal altruism, we also created a system of self-generating income: video sales and university presentations. It is in this element of structural financial solvency—a sustainable infrastructure—where outsiders can provide the clearest support. But it is also one of the most complicated aspects of Indigenous media making.

When we first began discussions with the communities about the project, we explained that the equipment was theirs to do whatever they wanted with, but that if they decided not to produce videos for outside consumption (a product to sell to the outside world), it would be hard to maintain financing. In the spring of 1998, in Ejido Morelia, workshop participants made the first video produced by the communities, *La familia indígena* (*The Indigenous Family*). It was a very simple, straightforward video about the differing roles/jobs of men and women in the community. People on the tape spoke Spanish rather than a Mayan language; this was a long time before they began recording in their own language for international distribution. The tape was well received, and we sold at least 150 copies in the first six months. CMP/Promedios used this tape as our first promotional video. We organized our first U.S. tour with this video and developed a viable model for doing presentations that generated income and raised the visibility of the project.

**CMP/Promedios** is currently distributing more than two dozen videos internationally produced in Chiapas and Guerrero, with most distribution done via our Chicago office. Video sales in 2005 exceeded seventeen thousand dollars, with university sales making up the majority of the income. The presence of **CMP/Promedios** at large academic conferences like the American Anthropological Association (AAA) and the Latin...
American Studies Association (LASA) has been instrumental in raising our visibility in the academy, greatly increasing our video sales, and adding names to our direct mail list. One of our other main sources of self-generated funding is honoraria from university presentations. Currently, video sales cover the monthly satellite Internet connection fees in all four of the regional media centers.\(^{15}\)

\(\textsc{cmp}/\text{Promedios}\) also seeks funding via philanthropic resources. At the beginning of the project, we decided that we would apply for grants only when no strings were attached and only when the foundation had no political agenda that conflicted with our agenda or the community’s. We have found that we are indeed able to secure funds that will allow us to maintain our artistic and political freedom. It took us a while to identify which foundations had funding priorities that matched our work and were willing to take a risk on a project such as ours. Support from private foundations has made it possible for us to grow as an organization, although, at times, it has also proved a source of tension. These problems were often premised on a foundation’s desire for us to recreate its preconceived cultural context, one that was often totally unrelated to the cultural context in which we are operating. A good illustration of this is that many foundations want a certain level of gender equality in the composition of workshops. In the early days of the \(\textsc{cmp}/\text{Promedios}\) project, we spent a lot of time talking with local Zapatista authorities about the need for women’s participation. We would then see women participating in the introductory workshops but not returning to subsequent workshops. We soon understood that our input really made no difference and that women’s participation was the decision of the communities, not that of outsiders, however well meaning. We realize that foundation support will not last forever, and we are hoping that we will be able to maintain our funding relationships long enough to finish the infrastructure needed to make all of the regional media centers completely operational and self-sufficient.

\textbf{CONCLUSION}

We set up the projector and a white sheet over the wall of one of the classrooms. It was getting dark and people started to come out and sit on the grass. . . . Out came the first image: color bars. I heard “ooohs and ahhs” . . . but what was even more impressive than the response to the color bars was to see
these people moved by a video produced in their own language by their own people: men, women, and children [showing] a sense of pride as well as excitement to be able to see themselves speak about their work, their organization and their struggle.

—Cruz Angeles, filmmaker and cmp / Promedios intern (personal communication, 2000)

Over the past ten years, cmp / Promedios has trained more than two hundred Indigenous men and women in basic video production; built and equipped four regional media centers in Zapatista territory with digital video production, postproduction, audio, and satellite Internet access; enabled the production of twenty-four videos for international distribution; and provided the means to make hundreds of videos utilized internally by the Indigenous communities in Chiapas. Over the years, there has been a significant improvement in the quality of production in the videos. All productions (those intended for both external and internal use) go through some type of community consensus about topics and content.

As I have noted, cmp / Promedios is not the only model for supporting Indigenous media initiatives; the possibilities are myriad. In Latin America, there are a number of important and successful Indigenous media projects (see Salazar’s and Córdova’s essay in this collection). In addition to the better-known organizations, such as the Coordinadora Audiovisual Indígena Originaria de Bolivia (caib, Indigenous Audiovisual Coordinator of Bolivia), Brazil’s Vídeo nas Aldeias (vna, Video in the Villages), and the Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador (conaie, Confederation of the Indigenous Nations of Ecuador), there are a number of smaller initiatives whose work does not receive wide recognition or distribution. Video production and dissemination in the communities has become a regular feature of Indigenous life.

There is an important role for “outsiders” to play as collaborators with Indigenous communities / organizations in fostering media initiatives—namely, in the initial transfer of media technology and the creation of infrastructure and sustainability. My own most important contribution has been my ability to raise the initial funding that supported the creation of a permanent infrastructure and my current role in getting the videos distributed to the widest audience possible.

The communities in Chiapas have adapted video technology as an
important tool for internal communication, cultural preservation, and defense of their human rights. They also have used it as a vehicle for communicating their own truths, stories, and realities to the outside world. The ability of Indigenous communities and other marginalized groups to record, edit, and distribute their own story is vital to a functioning society. Indigenous-controlled video has the power to make connections in communities and to extend communication/information internationally to non-Indigenous people. All of us have a role to play in supporting these important processes.

The work of video has really moved us; it has a great importance in helping us to construct our indigenous history. We can see that we will be able to do many things for our well-being and the future of our children.
—Estella, Zapatista videomaker, April 2003, letter written to CMP/Promedios

With this group of young people or not so young people, it’s my intention to insist that they learn more, that they prepare more, in order to be able to make a testimony or tell a story, all of this is recorded so that the town can see that the work is moving ahead.
—Miguel, local Zapatista authority, Ejido Morelia (personal communication, February 1998)

NOTES

I would like to thank Shayna Plaut, Guillermo Monteforte, and Luisa Ortiz Pérez for their generosity and help in writing this chapter.

In this essay, I use only first names to refer to Zapatista persons. All of the Zapatista authorities and many of the Zapatista videomakers only use a first name, a nombre de guerra, which usually has no relation to their actual name.

1. The origin of the Zapatista name is worth mentioning. From 1910 until his assassination by the Mexican military in 1919, a charismatic farmer, Emiliano Zapata, took up the revolutionary struggle for agrarian reform during the Mexican Revolution. Zapata’s Ejército Libertador del Sur (Liberation Army of the South) claimed that “land belonged to those who worked for it”—quite a revolutionary statement coming from those who worked the land and endured the hardships of exploitation by the hacendados (landowners). Since that time, Zapata’s legacy has inspired many of the campesino grassroots movements and provided the name for the EZLN, which publicly appeared in Chiapas during the presidency of (and in response to the policies of) Carlos Salinas de Gortari in 1994, calling for the agrarian struggle and political
respect for Indigenous peoples. This rebel movement not only took Zapata’s name for its struggle but also embraced the task of guarding and preserving the Zapatista spirit, a task the Zapatistas have honored to the present day.

2. The Zapatistas had been organizing secretly for many years before their public appearance on January 1, 1994.

3. The EZLN said that NAFTA was not going to benefit Mexico’s Indigenous peoples in particular or its poor people in general—unfortunately, this unheeded warning has proven accurate.

4. This term refers to those of mixed European and Indigenous ancestry.

5. The Zapatista communities make decisions through consensus, and local leadership is rotated on a monthly/yearly basis.

6. Our office has been inundated with requests for interviews, office visits, and access to the communities.

7. Tom Hansen, instrumental in helping start CMP/Promedios, was kidnapped and expelled by Mexican immigration authorities during a delegation bringing video equipment to Ejido Morelia in February 1998.

8. The San Andrés Accords were an agreement signed between the Zapatistas and the Mexican government in 1996. Even though the accords were never formalized into the Mexican Constitution, the Zapatista communities used them as a framework for actions/work they have assumed since 1996. Video is one example of these actions.

9. The project would not have been possible without developing relationships with NGOs in the area, and we work hard to maintain those relationships.


11. Although the Zapatistas’ first language is Mayan, in order to facilitate communication with us, they decided to hold their meetings in Spanish, the default lingua franca.

12. Our contacts initially were with local authorities and now are via regional media coordinators and the Good Government Assemblies.

13. In reaction to the increasingly volatile internal Mexican political environment, we decided to insure the safety of the youth delegation by asking PRD deputies to escort our group through immigration checkpoints to Ejido Morelia.

14. In the first video productions, Spanish was used, because the videos were seen as productions for all of the Zapatista autonomous municipalities, where Spanish is the common language. As the project became more integrated on a local and regional level, local languages began to be used.

15. The regional media centers are equipped with satellite Internet access. This involves a computer that controls the positioning and programming of the satellite dish. The communities use the Internet for e-mail correspondence.
with fair-trade projects that distribute their products, for news gathering, and for communicating with the other regional media centers.

16. In 2000, we began work in Guerrero with the Campesino Environmentalists of the Sierra de Petatlán.

17. The Zapatista videomakers produce videos in collaboration with their community, region, and/or municipality.
PART III

CULTURAL IDENTITY, PRESERVATION, AND COMMUNITY-BUILDING THROUGH MEDIA
CHAPTER 9

THE SEARCH FOR WELL-BEING: PLACING DEVELOPMENT WITH INDIGENOUS IDENTITY

Laurel Smith

In 1997, members of Grupo Solidario de Quiatoni, an Indigenous community-based organization in the southern Mexican state of Oaxaca, produced the video Buscando bienestar (Searching for Well-Being). Early in this video, group member Pedro Santiago explains: “The little we plant here isn’t enough to live on—that’s why people go elsewhere to earn a living. But some of us think that there are ways to work together: to live better, to find well-being for our community.” Later, when the group’s founding leader, Eucario Angeles Martínez, speaks to the camera, he says that the Grupo Solidario thought outside-orchestrated development projects would “put an end to the crisis, scarcity, to the sadness and poverty that our fellow community members suffer.” However, he notes, things did not work out as anticipated, and he explains how, after collective reflection, the group turned their attention to studying “the signs, the stories, the ways of the past, the knowledge of how to live.” Angeles Martínez tells viewers why group members have chosen this pathway to community well-being:

We think that this is how we must work in order to get ahead. We shouldn’t bring things from outside, but take advantage of what is ours. We should revive and use the customs of the past. It would be good if the only things brought from the outside were things we cannot make here. . . . we want to depend less on outsiders. We also need to know who we are today in order to study our own knowledge and wisdom. This is how we want to progress.

Delimited through these evocations of “elsewhere,” an “outside,” and “outsiders,” is a place called Quiatoni. San Pedro Quiatoni is the name of
a municipio (a geopolitical unit) in the mountains of southeastern Oaxaca, as well as the name of the pueblo serving as its administrative seat. According to the 2000 Census, almost all (98.9%) of the 9,570 inhabitants of this municipio speak an Indigenous language, a distinctive form of Zapoteco. Local authorities are elected by usos y costumbres, a catch-all legal term referring to open elections in which community assemblies select representatives. Oaxaca de Juárez, the state capital, is six hours away from the pueblo of San Pedro Quiatoni; it takes three hours of traveling up and down dirt roads to reach the highway. The members of thirty-four families from settlements sprinkled throughout the municipio of San Pedro Quiatoni came together to establish Grupo Solidario de Quiatoni in 1984. Like them, I use Quiatoni to refer to a place that is spread unevenly, a place that embodies the sense of community summoned forth by the above quotes. Despite the cartographic distance and cultural differences that mark Quiatoni, these quotes (and their translations) indicate how ideas, images, practices, commodities, technology, and people travel from, into, and out of this place. They also suggest how some residents represent and grapple with the uneven processes of globalization currently changing the place in which they live.

NETWORKING INDIGENOUS IDENTITY

Latin American social movements presently use indígena as a category that connects ethnic groups to territorial claims, cultural heritage, and socioeconomic location. These ethnopolitics locate Indigenous identity in an ongoing struggle to maintain place-based values, practices, and knowledge while grappling with the violent change wrought by centuries of genocide, economic exploitation, and forced acculturation intensified by the processes of globalization (Kearney and Varese 1995; Varese 1996). Such politics of representation establish a position for challenging state policies on a historical and moral basis and, at the same time, for asserting citizenship rights with demands for greater inclusion in the formulation of state programs, particularly those relating to development. With the strategies of ethnopolitics, Indigenous movements refashion development practices, restructure state institutions, expand the spaces of democratic participation, and reimagine national identities (Yashar 1999; Radcliffe 1999). Place-based Indigenous identity in Latin America should not, however, be essentialized as inherently inclusive or isolated from other political currents (Calderón, Piscitelli, and Reyna...
The global politics of local identity rely on shared images of custom, community, and ethnicity, and though these may be marshaled in defense of cultural resources, they may also be reactionary and deeply gendered, classed, and racialized (Paulson and Calla 2000). Furthermore, Latin American ethnopolitics intersect (sometimes successfully, at other times uneasily or not at all) with national-popular political initiatives such as labor and peasant movements (Hale 1994).

Increasingly, Indigenous activists and organizations link place-based collective action to projects undertaken by state agencies and national, supranational, intergovernmental, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), foundations, and agencies with specific interests such as the environment, agriculture, women, education, and religion. Their work taps into transnational networks of advocacy (Keck and Sikkink 1999) that stretch their sociospatial relations and amplify the impact of ethnopolitics (Brysk 2000). Daniel Mato (1997: 184) notes how making such transnational connections requires “negotiations, social and institutional learning, and transformations of all the actors’ self-representations and agendas.” Mato’s research on Latin American Indigenous organizations and their more globalized allies reveals similarities between sociopolitical agendas and the language used to express them and underscores how Indigenous leaders critically appropriate ways of speaking and bargaining in order to understand and address threats to territorial and cultural autonomy (Mato 2000a). Mato (2000b) also points out that differentiated access to technology and uneven levels of knowledge about network mechanisms and modes of operation characterize activist-advocate relations.3

If and when groups gain access to them, communication technologies (hereafter comtechs) can enhance dialogue and the exchange of information among grassroots organizations, international NGOs, and other sources of support that comprise transnational networks of advocacy. They have, for example, played an important role in protecting and empowering the grassroots Zapatista movement (Froehling 1997; see also Alexandra Halkin’s essay in this book). Comtechs channeled through advocacy organizations also provide the means to market the crafts and commodities of marginalized communities far beyond their site of production. Additionally, with comtechs, data based on local knowledge may be authoritatively rendered and then mobilized in the interest of those who, until recently, have not had a voice in planning development projects. In short, comtechs can relocate the politics of representation at a
variety of scales: community, regional, national, and global. Video technology operates in this fashion when it aids Indigenous communities fighting to assert local autonomy and territorial integrity. Indigenous cultural activists use the social relations of media to negotiate alternative images designed to rework power relations from their own perspective (Ginsburg 1997). Video self-representations thus displace the authority of social scientists to represent people and processes (Turner 1990; Ruby 1992). Due to its high cost, the use of video technologies is an inherently collective process, and rare is the individual or organization that can rally these resources alone. Research on Indigenous video illustrates how the governing bodies that are largely responsible for the marginalized social location from which these cultural interventions are produced are often also responsible for the access to comtechs by Indigenous communities (Ginsburg 1993; Langton 1993; Michaels 1984). Furthermore, the prominent role played by advocates working to make video technology and skills available to cultural activists complicates matters of authorship (Ginsburg 1997: 127).

THE CULTURAL POLITICS OF INDIGENOUS IDENTITY IN OAXACA

After the Mexican Revolution in the first decades of the twentieth century, Indigenous identity demarcated an anthropologically defined category of difference that functioned as a key component in the scripting of both state and popular Mexican nationalisms (Hernández Díaz 1993). Based on evolutionary assumptions about an inevitable pathway to assimilation, the state policy of indigenismo was designed to acculturate Indigenous peoples into the dominant mestizo national “imagined community” (B. Anderson 1983; Parra Mora 1993) through education and development (Favre 1999). Development programs formally recognized Indigenous peoples as campesinos: a production-based identity that emphasized their role in feeding the industrializing cities, seen as the engines of national progress. The imposition of a nationalist peasant identity denigrated Indigenous cultural practices and values and helped solidify the social location of Indigenous peoples at the bottom of Mexico’s politico-economic hierarchy (Kearney 1996).

Some Mexican intellectuals and academics evoked idealized images of “the Indian” as models for revolutionary politics or modern citizenship, but these constructions also identified Indigenous peoples that failed to fit the models as backward, irrational, and in need of paternalist uplift.
(Maldonado 2000; Dawson 1998). Hegemonic representations disseminated by the cultural industries, such as radio and television, have valorized, exoticized, or ridiculed Indigenous identity as national patrimony (Pérez Montfort 1994). For example, Néstor García Canclini (1995) argues that the National Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City exhibits Indigenous identity as a pacified and “pure” heritage that is frozen in time. Such representations erase historical and contemporary conditions of cultural violence, deny the cultural hybridity and socioeconomic diversity arising from the process of translating tradition through modernity, and thus silence contemporary Indigenous peoples. It is exactly these politics of representation that Indigenous cultural activists in Mexico seek to rewrite with the strategies of ethnopolitics (e.g., Garduño Cervantes 1985).

Because its large continuous Indigenous population negated evolutionary narratives of nationhood, the southern state of Oaxaca has historically been represented as the opposite of modernization, an obstacle to progress and a site devoid of agency (Chassen-López 2001). Recent census data indicates that 7 percent of the Mexican population over the age of five speaks an Indigenous language; Oaxaca is home to half of Mexico’s speakers of an Indigenous language, and they comprise 37 percent of the state’s population over the age of five. Although most researchers classify these peoples into sixteen different ethnolinguistic groups, there has been extensive debate over how the character trait of speaking an Indigenous language structures ethnic and peasant identity in Oaxaca (e.g., Campbell 1996). Often speakers of Indigenous languages identify themselves not as members of an ethnic group but as campesinos or as people from particular communities or regions. Ethnicity is difficult to isolate and identify in Oaxaca because it is not an essential category entered at birth but rather a constructed identity formulated in relations of power and difference (Stephan 1996). In Oaxaca, grave socioeconomic inequalities and ongoing racist denigration of Indigenous cultural practices have shaped the growing influence of ethnopolitics (Hernández Díaz 1992).

In the late 1980s the Mexican state began to modify its policy of repressing nonstate-sponsored social movements; and Indigenous organizations were able to extend their regional and local linkages (Sarmiento Silva 2001). The expansion of Indigenous collective action at the national level contributed to the modification of the Mexican constitution, which on the five-hundred-year anniversary of the arrival of Europeans recognized the nation’s multicultural composition. In 1994, the Zapatista uprising in
Chiapas garnered wide popular support and resulted in the signing of the San Andrés Accords. The state of Oaxaca has been the most responsive to the Indigenous movement’s demands for self-determination and autonomy. Its constitution was reformed in 1995 with an article acknowledging the state’s extensive cultural diversity. Later that same year, community elections based on usos y costumbres were legalized. Furthermore, the growing transnationalism of Indigenous migrants from Oaxaca has contributed to “the appearance of ethnicity as a self-conscious sense of peoplehood” (Kearney 2000: 177). Dismal working conditions and racist repression of Indigenous migrants both in the United States and Mexico “nurture a more collective and conscious conception of what it is to be indígena” (ibid.: 185) and illustrate the utility of human rights political discourse (Nagengast, Stavenhagen, and Kearney 1992; Nagengast and Kearney 1990). Furthermore, an international community of scholars, whose work is embedded in transnational networks involving NGOs, universities, and private foundations, uses their positions to examine and empower the ethnopoltics of cultural plurality in Oaxaca (e.g., Bartolomé and Barabas 1996).

Additionally, the transnational relations shaping structural adjustment programs and related institutional decentralization dramatically revamp state development programs in rural Mexico. According to Jonathon Fox (1996), since the early 1980s changes in bargaining relations between rural development agencies and Indigenous organizations have, to varying degrees, empowered local social actors and led to the thickening of civil society in Oaxaca. That is to say that increasingly (but sporadically), action orchestrated by civic groups and cultural collectives concerned with development unfolds outside the purview of the state. While authoritarian clientelism (“the threat of the stick”) continues to discourage translocal linkages in some places, in others it is increasingly replaced by semiclientelism (“the threat of the withdrawal of carrots”) that fosters independent organization and greater local control of resource allocation. These changing state-society relations contribute to greater social capital and regional linkages that empower community development initiatives. Although diminished funding and political shifts in the last few years have reduced state support, community-based organizations utilize the skills they learned through their participation in state programs to engage with the growing numbers of development NGOs operating in Mexico.
In the early 1980s, the Mexican government established Culturas Populares, a new bureau in its public education system (Reuter 1983). Stefano Varese, an Italian-Peruvian anthropologist, became the first director of Culturas Populares in Oaxaca. Varese brought with him the desire to reform state policies of cultural assimilation. Like many of his Latin American colleagues, Varese emphasized the violent disruption of Indigenous life through the intrusion of colonialism and the continued assault of state neocolonialism. In the name of cultural plurality, these researchers advocated the rescue and revitalization of ethnicity (e.g., Varese 1983; Bonfil Batalla and Rojas Arevena 1982; La cuestión étnica, 1981). Varese set out to arm Indigenous peoples with a theoretical tool they could use to analyze their socioeconomic locations. He sought to educate a “militant ethnic nucleus” about the historical processes of the “‘ghettoization’ of Indian culture and language . . . because this nucleus will provide the intellectuals and leaders who will develop an active consciousness of the different self, a militant ethnic consciousness” (Varese 1985: 204–8). While director of Culturas Populares from 1981 to 1986, Varese supervised the training of thirty-six bilingual individuals from Indigenous communities. The goal was to equip these individuals with the skills “to systematize ‘popular ethnic knowledge and thought’ and enhance its value by critically comparing it with universal knowledge, and enriching it thereby” (ibid.: 212). Culturas Populares then employed many of the participants as “cultural promoters,” whose job was to research and implement etno-desarrollo (ethnic development), or culturally appropriate development projects in Indigenous communities.

Eucario Angeles Martínez was one of the original thirty-six participants in the Culturas Populares training program. In 1969, when he was eleven, Angeles Martínez left Quiatoni, following his older brothers to the capital city of Oaxaca, where they had gone to finish their education and find employment. As he grew up, Angeles Martínez was very active in the base community centered in his urban church parish. Drawing on the liberation theology movement in the Catholic Church, base communities sought the spiritual and material betterment of their members (MacNabb and Rees 1993). Angeles Martínez’s activities and related travels shaped his goals of organizing collective action and morally encouraging those faced with the hardships of socioeconomic marginalization. His
experience, in tandem with his settlement in the city, equipped Angeles Martínez for the training program that he entered in 1983, and then led to his position with Culturas Populares. Angeles Martínez linked the cultural revitalization aims of etnodesarrollo with his own goals and, in 1984, he helped establish the Grupo Solidario de Quiatoni. Throughout the 1980s, the group undertook agricultural projects that were supported by state development agencies and later by international aid agencies and NGOs. Most of these development initiatives required initial group financing and voluntary labor. They also entailed filling out numerous forms in Spanish, traveling to far away institutional headquarters and often waiting hours to appeal for support in person. Because of his location and bilingual literacy, Angeles Martínez often represented Grupo Solidario, and he usually spearheaded their petitions for resources.

Grupo Solidario benefited from Angeles Martínez’s urban bureaucratic position and connections to researchers and institutions based far from Quiatoni. For example, after making Angeles Martínez’s acquaintance, the U.S. anthropologists Martha Rees and Arthur Murphy brought students to Quiatoni for a summer field course in 1989 (Murphy 1989), and in 1999 Rees brought Angeles Martínez to the United States to speak about his work with Grupo Solidario. Earlier, after learning of the group’s desire for computers to further their collection of local history, legends, and myths, Rees and Murphy had arranged for the donation of second-hand computers (Rees, personal communication, January 24, 2002). Eventually the results of these long-term investigations appeared in two books published by Culturas Populares (Angeles Martínez 1997a, 1997b). Paola Sesia (1990), an Italian researcher pursuing participatory research projects in the region, also visited Quiatoni and assisted members of Grupo Solidario with their compilation of traditional healing practices. Sesia also helped edit the history of the group that Angeles Martínez wrote in order to share their experiences in self-organization and community development (Angeles Martínez 1994). With Sesia’s assistance, Grupo Solidario submitted a grant proposal to the U.S.-based Kellogg Foundation that led to the group’s acquisition of a video camera and the undertaking of self-evaluations in 1994 (Sesia, personal communication, February 8, 2002).

While membership numbers had always fluctuated, around this time the organization underwent a crisis of confidence that left only a core of about twenty members (from its peak of more than 100). Many disengaged themselves from the group because their development projects
had repeatedly proven unprofitable. Indeed, due to the lack of promised technical assistance, unfavorable prices, and costly transportation, many were outright disasters. Debates over the misuse of organizational funds also reduced enthusiasm and the group’s size. Finally, some members withdrew from the organization because they were tired of the forceful yet often absentee leadership by Angeles Martínez who, along with his extended family, lived in the city of Oaxaca. Those who remained with the Grupo Solidario decided to be far more cautious about outside funds and initiatives. Continuing to work with Angeles Martínez, they founded the Centro de Investigación, Experimentación y Desarrollo Indígena (Center for Indigenous Research, Experimentation, and Development). They focused their efforts on researching and applying local knowledge about practices such as water divination and curing.

Also in 1994, the Instituto Nacional Indigenista (INI, National Indigenous Institute) established the Centro de Video Indígena (CVI, Indigenous Video Center) in the city of Oaxaca. Guillermo Monteforte, an Italian Canadian who had been working in INI’s Audiovisual Archives Department, was the founding director. Monteforte collaborated in INI’s Media Transference Program, which provided thirty-seven Indigenous organizations with video production and editing equipment and training for organization members. Monteforte and others at the CVI worked to enhance Indigenous self-representation by facilitating access to video technology. While the Grupo Solidario did not participate in the initial transference program, Angeles Martínez’s activism and Monteforte’s advocacy brought them into contact, and eventually their work began to overlap. Angeles Martínez was eager to produce a documentary with the many hours of video footage shot in Quiatoni. Toward this end, Monteforte accessed financial resources from INI to add to the support by Culturas Populares.

In the summer of 1997, two women from Quiatoni, María Santiago Ruiz and Eugenia Martínez Reyes, became involved with the video. Both women were heavily involved in Grupo Solidario’s collection of local knowledge. Partly because Santiago Ruiz and Martínez Reyes were single women and thus able to spend weeks away from home, they were willing to participate in workshops at the CVI, where they learned to shoot and edit video. Angeles Martínez, Santiago Ruiz, Martínez Reyes, and Monteforte worked together to record more material and edit it together with previously shot footage to produce the twenty-seven-minute video Buscando bienestar (1997). All editing, production, and postproduction took
place at the cvi, since this is where the equipment and assistance were located. Monteforte and other cvi personnel provided technical support, and Angeles Martínez contributed input on content, but it was Santiago Ruiz and Martínez Reyes who spent weeks at the cvi, sequestered in the editing suite wrestling with the new technology. They found the process arduous and tedious (especially Martínez Reyes, who had her infant with her), but fruitful and ultimately satisfying.

The first shots of Buscando bienestar locate Quiatoni: its hillside location, the central plaza filled with people watching dancers perform, people working in their homes and the fields, and “San Pedro Quiatoni” written across the municipio’s administrative headquarters. Accompanied by the camera’s pan across dry terrain, a man remembers how there used to be more rain, how houses were built with materials that withstood mudslides, and there was always plenty to eat. Seated next to a dry creek bed, an old man testifies about the fish that used to swim there when he was a boy. Against the backdrop of three photographs—two of which feature Angeles Martinez addressing group members—a woman (the credits indicate it is Martínez Reyes) narrates the establishment of Grupo Solidario. They came together in 1984 “to think and talk about the problems we had” and to solicit funds from “outsiders” in order “to get ourselves out of poverty.” With images and interviews, Buscando bienestar details the outcomes of some of these development projects. It shows insect-infested tomato plants and offers insight into a pig-raising initiative that fizzled because it overextended water supplies. Following this overview of frustrations is a head and shoulder shot of Angeles Martínez delivering a monologue about Grupo Solidario. This scene stands out from the rest of the video because of its professional lighting and because, at almost three minutes, it is much longer than any other interview. Recorded in the cvi, this is the only scene not shot in Quiatoni. Here Angeles Martínez recalls the failure of development projects and notes that, in addition to low prices and sales, “we were having problems because money is not part of our culture.”

The remainder of the video examines the activities of the Center for Indigenous Research. In between montage and music, members describe the group’s dynamics, review their experiments, and outline their research methods. One man reviews his experiments on rain prediction, and viewers are introduced to the Zapotec calendar that resulted from them. Other men dig a well and use the water to irrigate corn planted with organic fertilizer. Yet another man notes how the combination of
low prices and the high cost of transporting the tomato harvest to the city made the venture unprofitable. We see a group of women including Santiago Ruiz and Martínez Reyes examining plant samples. As narrator, Martínez Reyes tells us they classify the plants to learn about and utilize their qualities for medical balms and soap. A man’s voice says, “We all work . . . all family members have been working. Here the elderly, the children and women work, the whole family.”

During scenes of people gathered for a meeting, this same man continues by pointing out that, while not everyone attends the meetings, “We all participate.” He then explains their research methods. “We want the work to turn out well; this is why we take three years to do it. We repeat the experiment to see if we get the same results . . . that is why we programmed three years for the project, so we can be sure.” At this point, a young woman named Carmen Martínez addresses the camera, observing that not everyone has the power to heal, but some of us do. She is followed by Santiago Ruiz, who briefly talks to viewers about the relationship between the moon’s position and healing practices. Then comes footage of traditional cures such as bleeding. An elderly man reminisces that “my grandparents used to say that we should plant when the moon is full.” In response to questions from Angeles Martínez, a man describes the organic fertilizers he is using to grow garlic and herbs. Accompanied by music, shots of women boiling and pounding plant leaves fade into the finished products with handwritten labels identifying them as soaps or healing ointments. Next is a still shot of local produce laid out on a small woven mat. The music stops as Carmen Martínez once again addresses the camera saying: “We have already begun, we have it all set up, though there is no money to support this project. We will continue to work as long as we can, even if it takes a long time.” The music starts again as we see the final series of images—someone measuring an ear of corn with their hand span, women admiring harvested carrots, children eating at the table and then playing, and finally young boys and girls performing a dance in the central plaza where the video began.

From the start, *Buscando bienestar* points to the past as a site of guidance during uncertain times. The video revalorizes local practices and knowledge by connecting them to a time when the community did not have to cope with shortage and the need to migrate, and by comparing them to failures of imported practices and knowledge. *Buscando bienestar* defines development as a profoundly cultural project that should include wide community participation and follow local criteria for success and
happiness. That is, development projects must culturally fit the place where they are undertaken. Although this video visualizes Quiatoni-based collective action, it is far from a strictly local project, largely due to Angeles Martínez’s mediation. His long speech and photographic presence suggest how he functions as a cultural broker whose ideas and activities are central to the organization. In his monologue, Angeles Martínez appropriates the scholarly concept of etnodesarrollo with his calls for the investigation of traditional approaches to land management and production through research and testing. The scientific methods used to interrogate the usefulness of Indigenous knowledge and the utilization of video technology to disseminate Grupo Solidario’s efforts also reflect institutional linkages and connections to networks of advocacy.

CONCLUSIONS ABOUT IMPACT

Journeying through transnational networks orchestrated and maintained by advocates and activists between 1998 and 2000, Buscando bienestar was screened at international Indigenous film and video festivals in Ecuador and Guatemala (where the video won awards) and then later in Madrid, New York City, and Paris. These travels and Monteforte’s assistance led to funding from the MacArthur and Rockefeller Foundations for the production of two more videos by Grupo Solidario. Their subsequent video, El árbol de jabón (The Soap Tree), suggests that women in Quiatoni should turn off their televisions and consider locally produced soap products. This video has in turn led to an environmental impact study and the possibility of manufacturing health and beauty commodities in Quiatoni. Both Buscando bienestar and El árbol de jabón demonstrate how comtech-mediated transnational networks of advocacy project a community’s struggles with, and its proposed solutions to, globalization far beyond the local scale.

Production of the second video for which Grupo Solidario has received funding has been stalled for a year now, which draws our attention back to the local scale. Although Angeles Martinez continues to credit his Culturas Populares projects to Grupo Solidario and remains a strong presence in their favorable coverage in the local press (Esteva 2001a, 2001b), he did not travel to Quiatoni between 1999 and 2000. He says that his absence was an effort to address accusations of paternalism and a reflection of his current focus on the urban children of migrants from Quiatoni. Other people familiar with the situation suggest that Angeles...
Martínez did not visit Quiatoni because he had so alienated local authorities and residents with his claims to speak for them that he was no longer warmly welcomed. The recent shift in local community leadership in Quiatoni at the start of 2002 had everyone hoping the postponed video’s production will begin soon.

The ways in which entangled institutional linkages and the concept of etnodesarrollo shaped the production of *Buscando bienestar* reveal the importance of urban, bureaucratic nodes in the networks of advocacy seeking to facilitate Indigenous self-representation in Mexico. As the recent tensions in Quiatoni suggest, however, jumping scales and transnational success at making development cultural cannot alone solve problematic sociospatial relations at the local level. Indeed, due to the politics of representation, it may exacerbate them. Although *Buscando bienestar* never directly mentions Indigenous ethnicity per se, theorizations of Indigenous identity and place-based politics of representation help explain the video’s look at community development. Grupo Solidario utilizes ethnopolitics to ground its representations of Quiatoni. While its representation cautiously attempts to police borders (identify what fits this place), mine has focused on the ways place and geographies of belonging are rewritten through video and the relations that made its production and mobility possible.

**NOTES**

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1. The video’s Zapotec title is *Beeŋ rgįł gialbzak*. This is also the Zapotec name of Grupo Solidario de Quiatoni (Quiatoni Solidarity Group), often translated as “People Looking for Well-Being.” Although the video’s dialogue is in Zapotec, and the video was originally released with Spanish subtitles, I relied on the English translations finalized by Martha Rees, an anthropologist who has long-standing relations with Grupo Solidario de Quiatoni.

2. All quotes are directly from the film’s English subtitles.

3. Activists lobby for causes with which they self-identity and advocates lobby on the behalf of the identity and livelihood of others.
4. The federal government has since effectively stalled their implementation and intense debate continues to hinder legislation based on the signed accords.

5. See the discussion by Fox (1996) regarding the concept of the “thickening” of civil society.

6. Information about Angeles Martínez’s life stems from interviews and conversations with him and people in Oaxaca who have worked with him.

7. Grupo Solidario worked with Mexican institutions such as the Secretaría de Agricultura, Ganadería, Desarrollo Rural, Pesca y Alimentación, and the Instituto Nacional Indigenista. The group also drew on the support of the Dutch Embassy, the Italian NGO Movimiento Laico América Latina, and Grupo de Apoyo al Desarrollo Etnico, an NGO established by Varese and other advocates in the mid-1980s in order to channel resources garnered from the U.S. Inter-American Foundation.
"To breathe two airs":

EMPOWERING INDIGENOUS SÁMI MEDIA

Sari Pietikääinen

Sámi media exist so that it would be possible for the Sámi people to live as Sámi.

—Niila, veteran Sámi journalist, personal communication, March 2003

To be a Sámi today is “to breathe two airs,” to quote a Sámi saying.¹ Sápmi, the Sámi homeland spreading across four countries—Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia—is a region in which majority and Indigenous cultures, languages, and ways of living have coexisted in the same territory for centuries. Today, the Sámi community is transnational, multilingual, pluricultural, and partly diasporic, including—depending on the criteria used—approximately fifty thousand to eighty thousand people, of whom seven thousand to seventy-five hundred live within the borders of Finland and nearly half of them outside the Sámi homeland (Aikio and Aikio 2001; Aikio-Puoskari 2001).² According to the legal definition, which is primarily based on linguistic criteria, a Sámi is a person who identifies himself or herself as a Sámi and who has, or at least one of whose parents or grandparents has, learned Sámi as a first language. Being Sámi also means belonging to and participating in a complex network of families, shared histories and circumstances, and cultural practices. Definitions of Sámi have been contested and renegotiated from time to time, a typical consequence of both colonialization and the self-empowering goals and aspirations of the Sámi people (cf. Kulonen, Seurujäriv-Kari, and Pulkkinen 2005).

Sámi history provides a story of how Indigenous culture and language become endangered. Starting in the sixteenth century with wider political and cultural transformations—such as the migration of settlers from

² Created from uwsau on 2018-11-29 03:26:02.