The Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca (APPO)

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Summary

The summer and fall of 2006 saw a violent, protracted conflict in Oaxaca, Mexico between the state government and the Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca (Asamblea Popular de los Pueblos de Oaxaca, APPO). What began as a contentious labor negotiation between the local government and the teachers' union soon became a popular protest and mobilization throughout the state, especially in the Valles Centrales region, home to the state capital. The governor's repressive actions against critics and opponents of his administration led the *asambleístas* to a consensus demanding his removal. The result was a government in paralysis, with none of the three constitutional branches able to exercise their normal authority or carry out their activities. The APPO achieved territorial control with the erection of hundreds of barricades throughout the capital to protect themselves from sneak attacks by irregular units of the state police; with its occupation, operation, and diffusion of public and private media outlets; with a permanent mobilization of its members; and with the construction of a popular government, the Oaxaca Commune, to manage public affairs and services. This experience of popular autonomy involved the dismantling of the local system of domination and also the authoritarian, clientelist, patrimonialist, and patriarchal relationships within the organizations of the APPO itself. It ended in violent repression.

Keywords

System of domination, public education system, teachers' union, popular organizations, social protest, *Comuna de Oaxaca*, communication media, repression, organizational conflicts

The Political Crisis and the Formation of the APP

Despite the opposition's accusations of electoral fraud,[1] Ulises Ruiz Ortiz was declared the winner of the gubernatorial election in Oaxaca for the period 2004-2010. His victory, however, confirmed the state's decline in votes for the PRI in recent decades.[2] Ruiz Ortiz had declared in his campaign

[1] In July 2004, the *Colectivo por la Democracia* documented pressure tactics in favor of votes for the gubernatorial candidate of the *Nueva Fuerza Oaxaqueña* alliance. *La Jornada*, "ONG: no será limpio el proceso en Oaxaca; Murat impugna a Fox," México D.F., 30 July 2004. http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2004/07/30/038n1est.php?origen=estados.php&fly=1. [accessed 12 May 2014]. See also *La Jornada*, "Las anomalías en Oaxaca, sutiles y sofisticadas: ONG," México D.F., 19 August 2004. http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2004/08/19/038n2est.php?origen=estados.php&fly=1 [accessed 27 May 2014]; and *La Jornada*, "Por la inseguridad, contarán en la capital de Oaxaca votos de 10% de municipios," México, D.F., 7 October 2004. http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2004/10/07/037n1est.php?origen=estados.php&fly=1 [accessed 27 May 2014]. On the municipal post-electoral conflicts, see Silvia Bolos and Héctor Jiménez (2013), "Antecedentes y desarrollo del movimiento social de 2006 en Oaxaca," in Marco Estrada Saavedra and Silvia Bolos (coords.), *Recuperando la palabra. La Asamblea Popular de los Pueblos de Oaxaca*, México, Universidad Iberoamericana, pp. 35-98.

[2] See David Recondo (2007), *La política del gatopardo. Multiculturalismo y democracia en Oaxaca*. México: CIESAS-CEMCA; and Kunle Owali (2004), "¿La legalización de los 'usos y costumbres' ha contribuido a la permanencia del gobierno priísta en Oaxaca?", en *Foro Internacional*, 177, July-September, vol. XLIV, No. 3, pp. 474-508.

that he "would apply the rule of law" to prevent protests from interrupting the "public peace" and "economic activity" in Oaxaca. This was among the few campaign promises he would fulfill, antagonizing opponents and critics of his government. The new governor tried to imprison his opponent in the election, former Oaxaca mayor Gabino Cué Monteagudo, on trumped-up charges. He also tried to destroy the only local daily newspaper, *Noticias*, which had offered its readers critical and reliable information about the previous administration and the election campaign. He antagonized popular, indigenous, and rural organizations, sending several of their leaders to prison. Less than 200 days into his administration, he had been accused of responsibility for 15 political assassinations and 152 political prisoners.[3] All types of protest were criminalized, treated as issues to be resolved by using the police.[4]

Although Ruiz Ortiz fully carried out his "pacifying" purpose, he took a cautious approach to the teachers' "day of struggle" in May 2005. To everyone's surprise, Section 22 of the National Union of Education Workers (Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación, SNTE). the major opposition in Oaxaca since 1980, was not a target of the governor's repressive policies. And labor negotiations that year between the government and the teachers' union were unusually cordial and very advantageous to the teachers. However, the attitude of the government toward Section 22 raised the suspicion that the union representatives had been coopted:[5] both inside and outside the union, it was thought that the leadership had entered into a corrupt alliance with the governor. However, the relationship between them would undergo a radical change in the year to come.

The Teachers' Encampment and Its Removal on June 14, 2006

As they had every May 1st since 1980, the teachers began public demonstrations in preparation for contract negotiations in 2006. In general, these demonstrations would conclude on the 15th of the month, Teachers' Day, with an announcement of the agreements reached. This year, however, things were different: after three weeks of contentious and fruitless negotiations, the more than 70,000 unionized teachers and administrative workers called a work stoppage until their list of demands was met in full. As a pressure tactic, the teachers set up an encampment in the Zócalo, the main square of the capital, which included almost all of the surrounding streets. To reinforce the encampment, the Section 22 leadership appealed to the solidarity of the mass popular organizations in the state. Their appeal was successful for two reasons. First, many of them included teachers among their leaders and political cadres who could convince their rank and file to take part in the teachers' protest. Second, the governor's constant repression of his opposition prompted these organizations to join the encampment in order to confront "the common enemy." These organizations were confident that the government would not repress Section 22 and that this protection would allow them to air their complaints and demands to the governor.[6]

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[3] *La Jornada*, "En Oaxaca vivimos un espacio de excepción de facto, acusan ONG," México, D.F., 14 June 2005. http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2005/06/14/index.php?section=estados&article=035n1est [accessed 7 March 2014].

[4] José Sotelo Marbán (2008), *Oaxaca: insurgencia civil y terrorismos de Estado.* México: ERA.

[5] Samael Hernández Ruiz (2006), "Insurgencia magisterial y violencia gubernamental en Oaxaca." In Joel Vicente Cortés (coord.), *Educación, Sindicalismo y gobernabilidad en Oaxaca*. Oaxaca: SNTE, pp. 87-123.

[6] Marco Estrada Saavedra (2016a), *El pueblo ensaya la revolución. La APPO y el sistema de dominación oaxaqueño*, México, El Colegio de México.

Three weeks later, in the early morning hours of June 14th, the state and local police violently removed the encampment from the Zócalo. However, a few hours later, the teachers and members of popular organizations regrouped, and with the unexpected support of city residents, indignant at the government's treatment of "their" teachers, they confronted the police. This reaction of solidarity took the police by surprise, and they found themselves caught up in a confrontation, lasting several hours, in which they lost control of the Zócalo and were for practical purposes demobilized. They would not be seen in the city, at least not in uniform, until the end of November. Agents of the police caught by APPO members were harassed, beaten, and detained. Officials responded by ordering police to remain in their barracks, and the APPO set up encampments around the barracks to prevent any mobilization. With this measure the APPO was later able to take social and spatial control of the city for almost six months.[7]

On June 17th, Section 22 and more than 300 trade unions, associations, popular organizations, communities, NGOs, collectives, and hundreds of thousands of self-identified "independent" citizens,[8] with political demands ranging from electoral reform to the establishment of a socialist republic, and with ideologies ranging from Stalinist communism to feminism to liberalism to anarchism, established the APPO. That same day, they demanded the governor's resignation. In subsequent months they would concentrate on forming a "popular government."[9]

The APPO As a System of Protest

The APPO has been called, among other things, a "convergence of movements and organizations,"[10] a "popular movement,"[11] a "movement of movements," an "anti-authoritarian popular movement,"[12] a "movement," a "space [of convergence]," and a "collective actor."[13] These terms share a sense of surprise at the extreme heterogeneity of its membership, its "horizontality" and "spontaneity," the absence of "leaderships," and the lack of "real guidance" behind its actions. This plurality of terms is suspicious, however, because it indicates a lack of conceptual consideration of the particularity of its object, and, more importantly, because it is the product of a habit of thinking about social move-

[7] Marco Estrada Saavedra (2016a)

[8] "Independent members" of the APPO refers to those who were "not militants" in any of the popular mass organizations or trade unions. The term "independent" is a category used by the members themselves to distinguish themselves from "organized members." The distinction suggests that the latter do not act autonomously, but follow the orders of their organizational leaders.

[9] For a journalistic account, see Víctor Raúl Martínez Vásquez (2007), *Autoritarismo, movimiento popular y crisis política: Oaxaca 2006*. México: UABJO, Instituto de Investigaciones Sociológicas, Centro de Apoyo al Movimiento Popular Oaxaqueño, A.C., EDUCA, Consorcio para el Diálogo Parlamentario y la Equidad; and Diego Enrique Osorno (2007), *Oaxaca sitiada. La primera insurrección del siglo XXI*. México: Grijalbo. Silvia Bolos and Héctor Jiménez (2013) offer a sociological analysis of the Oaxacan political crisis.

[10] Gustavo Esteva, Norma Giarracca, Rubén Valencia, and David Venegas (coords.) (2008), *Cuando hasta las piedras se levantan. Oaxaca, México, 2006*. Buenos Aires: Antropofagia.

[11] Eduardo Bautista Martínez (2010), Los nudos del régimen autoritario. Ajustes y continuidades de la dominación en dos ciudades de Oaxaca. México: Miguel Ángel Porrúa and IIS-UABJO.

[12] Martínez Vásquez (2007).

[13] David Recondo (2007) and David Recondo (2009), "La 'comuna de Oaxaca': ciudadanía emergente en un enclave autoritario," in Francis Mestries, Geoffrey Pleyers, and Sergio Zermeño (eds.), *Los movimientos sociales: de lo local a lo global*, Mexico. D.F., Antropos-UAM, 2009, pp. 249-263.

ments in terms of an assumed unity and identity. These generic labels are applied in order to bridge the gap between concept and phenomenon.

In order to add precision and coherence to the analysis, I propose a change in perspective. In theoretical and methodological terms, I conceive of the APPO not as a social movement, but as a "system of protest."[14] This is a special form of social system,[15] characterized by its formation and reproduction through communications oriented around a conflict. These communications are expressed thematically as mobilizations of protest against different opponents (such as the government, church organizations, businesses, and communications media) or against unforeseen consequences in the operation of functional social systems (such as politics, law, the economy, science, and art).

The complexity of a system of protest can be seen through the distinctions made in multiple levels of analysis. Through the distinction of *system/surroundings* we can observe a system of protest in its *internal* elements, processes, functions, and structures, as well as in relation to its *external* communications, structural interpenetrations, and linkages with other social systems (including functional systems) in its surroundings. This fundamental distinction is complemented by three others: *interaction, the organization*, and *society*. While the latter belongs analytically to the surroundings of the system of protest, the first two have to do with its internal constitution. In other words, the participants in the system of protest can be observed either in their daily interaction in their respective life worlds; as members of the systemic organization in their different roles, positions of authority, and relations of power; or as a collective unit operating among functional systems or introduced into a conflict with a least one opponent and forming relationships of alliance and opposition with different actors, groups, and organizations. This complexity allows the system of protest to simultaneously refer to diverse functional systems and their respective organizations.

According to these analyses, the APPO can be considered a system of protest because 1) it differentiates itself from its surroundings; 2) it achieves its *autopoeisis* by creating its own structures of communication, organization, mobilization, production, and distribution of resources and collective goods; 3) it creates its own form: protest; 4) it constructs a perspective of observation: sociopolitical critique and oppositional accusation; 5) it develops mechanisms of leadership (elites and leaders), recruitment (motivation and selection of members), and identity (differentiation from its surroundings); 6) it forms alliances and networks of communication and interaction with other systems of protest, organizations, opinion makers, and non-governmental organizations; 7) it initiates protest events and confrontations with other social systems, especially with the organizations of functional systems (e.g., universities, businesses, churches, political parties, newspapers); and 8) it criticizes the unforeseen effects of functional systems.[16]

With respect to its organizational composition and the origin of its constituent elements, the APPO can be divided, in methodological terms, into five segments: 1) trade unions (like Section 22 of the SNTE or the Trade Union and Democratic Organization Front of Oaxaca [Frente de Sindicatos

[14] On the philosophical, epistemological, and theoretical differences involved in the approach to social movements and collective action as social systems, see Marco Estrada Saavedra (2015), *Sistemas de protestas. Esbozo de un modelo no accionalista de los movimientos sociales*, México, El Colegio de México.

[15] On the concept of the social system, see Niklas Luhmann (1987), *Soziale Systeme. Grundriss einer allgemeinen Theorie*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.

[16] In this enumeration, points 1-5 correspond to the levels of analysis of interaction and organization, and 6-8 to that of society. In this article, I focus mainly on the systems of politics, education, and media. In Estrada Saavedra (2016a), I also address the APPO's relationship with the systems of law, art, and science.

y Organizaciones Democráticas de Oaxaca, FSODO]), 2) popular organizations, 3) non-governmental organizations, 4) indigenous communities, and 5) the "independent" population. These five segments are divided in turn into different groups, fractions, political tendencies, and ideological currents, making it reductionist to assume a homogeneous system of protest.[17] Each of the elements of the APPO thus has, in addition to the general orientations of communication and action, particular orientations that in specific moments might be compatible and in others divergent and in mutual contradiction. For example, the trade union segment typically determines its communications and collective actions in accordance with the interests of the union struggle, negotiation, and conflict that are inherent in the state and federal political system and the legal system. Mass popular organizations, however, generally define their behavior outside of and against the political system, while non-governmental organizations form relationships primarily with actors and organizations of national and international civil society.

The Specialized Subsystems of the APPO

To allow for its reproduction, the APPO had to solve various problems. To this end, it organized different subsystems with specialized functions, briefly described below.

Coordinated mass mobilization. This subsystem was made of up trade unions and popular organizations with large memberships (either as union members or its "social base"). Its main function was the mass mobilization of its members. In this way, it carried out collective action for the adversarial expression of disagreements, grievances, and social and political demands, as well as for the production of collective goods.

Symbolic protest. This subsystem, made up of groups of artists, musicians, and anonymous graffitti artists, took on the general task of creating artistic forms for the APPO's "symbolic protest." Its functional performance re-specified itself in the generation of a perspective of observation, in its capacity to reflect on the conflict, and on the social and political project of the organization. This subsystem allowed for the elaboration and preservation of systemic memory, and also favored the identification of the *Appistas* with the organization's project.

Political directorate. This subsystem was made up of the councilors of the General Assembly and the members of the provisional collective directorate (later called the state council). Its responsibility was the APPO's representation and leadership. In taking on informative, deliberative, and decision-making tasks, it linked to the political system.

Security. This subsystem was made up of participants on the barricades and protective groups like the "security team," the Oaxacan Teachers' Police (Policía Magisterial Oaxaqueña, POMO), and the Honorable Corps of Topiles (a kind of sheriff in indigenous communities). Their purpose was oriented toward the self-defense of the APPO against physical aggression, the local micro-self-organization of the "independents," the occupation and spatial control of the city, and the definition of a perspective of observation that identified the participants on the barricades as "the people."

Planning. This subsystem consisted of the non-governmental organizations that called themselves "civil space." Their specialized function within the APPO was the elaboration of "strategic projects." With their professional and technical expertise in different areas (such as human rights, gender, education, community development, and audiovisual communication), they prepared analyses of the

[17] An extensive though incomplete list of the different collectives that were members of the APPO can be found in Martínez Vásquez (2007: 69ff).

conflict and possible solutions, made legal and political recommendations to formulate the organization's demands and actions, documented and filed complaints regarding human rights violations, and defended political prisoners.

Media outreach. This subsystem was made up of the self-administered, occupied, and independent media, which took on the task of publicizing the reasons for the APPO's protest and its objectives. Its functional reconfiguration allowed it to serve as an internal coordinating mechanism, create an observational perspective, and contribute to identification with the organization.

These six subsystems described the internal setting of the APPO. However, there was an additional kind of social system that took the form of conflict, that is, of continual rejection of the communications from the system of protest. This included the challenges to these communications by emerging organizations, like the Coordinating Committee of Oaxacan Women (Coordinadora de Mujeres Oaxaqueñas, COMO) and the groups of young anarchists, including Oaxacan Voices Building Freedom and Autonomy (Voces Oaxaqueñas Construyendo la Autonomía y Libertad, VOCAL), the Black Bloc, and the Libertarian Social Center (Centro Social Libertario, CESOL). Although COMO can be seen as a component of the subsystem of coordinated mass mobilization, and the youth groups can be understood as members of the security subsystem, it is useful to treat them analytically as "systemic parasites"[18] that provoked and scandalized the APPO not only through what they did ("direct action") or demanded ("equality of men and women"), but also because they demonstrated its limits and contradictions precisely by revealing, on the one hand, the distance between discourses and expectations, and on the other hand, the actions and reality of the APPO—in the context of a system of domination that functions through authoritarianism, inequality, exclusion, racism, patriarchy, and violence.

Although the anarchist groups did not offer realistic or viable political proposals, or a coherent political project (mainly because of their lack of political experience and responsibility), their "contradictory function" manifested itself in interfering with the deliberative processes and decision making by the dominant actors in the system of protest, as a kind of moral counterweight. It also served to insist that certain uncomfortable issues were not forgotten. With its contrary arguments, the parasite or "excluded third party" recalled what the APPO did not want to see or hear: the presumed necessity for violent direct action to dismantle the Oaxacan system of domination.

The Centralization of the Education System

The post-revolutionary national-popular state continued the process of political and administrative centralization begun during the Porfiriato,[19] and public education did not escape its effects. Indeed, at least from the moment that Article 3 declared public education a Constitutional right, education and politics were intertwined. The state took on the exclusive ordering and regulation of the country's primary, secondary, and normal education in 1934, and was thereby required to organize and provide this service to the entire population. It had to construct a bureaucracy, the Secretaría de Educación Pública (SEP), and train a corps of specialists: the teachers. In 1943, virtually the entire teachers' profession was required to join the SNTE, and to this day it is the only union recognized by the authorities to represent teachers' interests.

[18] The term "parasite" should not be understood as a moral or political devaluation. It is a philosophical and sociological concept that refers to the logic, position, and function of the figure of the "excluded third." See Luhmann (1987), especially pp. 122f, 285, and 507.

[19] Soledad Loaeza (2010), "La metamorfosis del Estado: del jacobinismo centralizador a la fragmentación democrática," in Soledad Loaeza and Jean-Francois Prud'homme (coords.), *Instituciones y procesos políticos*, vol. XIV of *Los grandes problemas de México*, México, El Colegio de México, pp. 24-70.

The federal government's assumption of responsibility for public education resulted in a greater extension of schooling throughout the country. The education budget, the number of teachers, and the administrative bureaucracy all grew. However, by the middle of the twentieth century, the negative effects of educational centralization became evident and threatened the efficiency and governability of the system. A variety of decentralization projects were attempted (for example, in 1958 and in 1969-70), but none of them achieved their goal, among other reasons because of the opposition of the SNTE.[20]

The Formation of Democratic Teachers' Organizations in Oaxaca

The structural problems became more acute with the country's accelerating demographic growth and the resulting increase in school matriculations. In the administration of José López Portillo (1976-1982), a new policy of "decentralization" was established that sought to rationalize aspects of education and take control of teacher hiring and promotion from the SNTE leadership by establishing offices of the SEP in every state. With this measure, the government hoped to weaken the union's growing influence over the national educational system.[21] The union had used this influence to attain a patrimonialist appropriation of public resources, and at the same time achieved a corporatist discipline over teachers' labor demands and insured their votes for the *oficialista* Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), contributing to the stability of the political regime.

The educational reform of the late 1970s generated a rift between the SEP technocracy and the SNTE leadership, which some union locals were able to use to demand truly free and democratic unions. It was a rank and file movement,[22] which in 1979 formed an organized dissidence within the SNTE, the National Coordinating Committee of Education Workers (Coordinadora Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación, CNTE).[23] In Oaxaca, the dissident teachers in Section 22 managed to expel the representatives of Vanguardian Revolucionaria, then the dominant group in the SNTE, in May 1980.[24] Since that time the leaders and union representatives at all levels of Section 22 have been overseen by union members, thanks to the broad and active participation of the rank and file and the introduction of different mechanisms (or "extra-statutory bodies"), including coordinating committees, state assemblies, pre-conferences, guiding principles, and the promotion of different currents of union politics that, together, serve as an internal system of checks and balances.[25] These

[20] For an extensive and thorough treatment of the topic, see Alberto Arnaut (1997), *La federalización educativa en México. Historia del debate sobre la centralización y la descentralización educativa (1889-1994)*. México: El Colegio de México.

[21] On this point, see Susan Street (1992), *Maestros en movimiento. Transformaciones en la burocracia estatal (1978-1982)*. México: CIESAS.

[22] It was active mainly in Tabasco, Chiapas, Morelos, Hidalgo, Valle de México, Guerrero, and Mexico City. It should be noted that in the southern states, a large part of the CNTE rank and file was made up of bilingual indigenous teachers who worked in rural areas. Their employment and economic situation was more precarious than that of their *mestizo* counterparts working in cities.

[23] On the origin, organization, and development of the CNTE, see Maria Elena Cook (1996), *Organizing dissent. Unions, the State, and the democratic teachers' movement in Mexico*. Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press; and Joe Foweraker (1993) *Popular mobilization in Mexico. The teachers' movement 1977-87*. Canada: Cambridge University Press.

[24] On the history of the dissident teachers of Section 22 of the SNTE, the essential work is still Isidoro Yescas Martínez and Gloria Zafra (2006), *La insurgencia magisterial en Oaxaca*. 2nd ed., Oaxaca: IEEPO-IISUABJO.

[25] These mechanisms, bodies, and principles of the MDTEO are not part of the SNTE bylaws; for this reason they are referred to as "extra-statutory." As a practical matter, they organize and control the internal affairs of Section 22.

measures have avoided the authoritarian predominance of any group, and demonstrate the strength and unity of the Democratic Movement of Education Workers of Oaxaca (Movimiento Democrático de los Trabajadores de la Educación de Oaxaca, MDTEO).[26]

The Colonization of the Education System and the Tensions Between Section 22 and the MDTEO

The history of Oaxaca's teachers was the result of various coinciding factors, among which the most important were the arrival of Carlos Salinas de Gortari to the presidency (1988-1994), the ousting of the "leader for life" Carlos Jonguitud Barrios of the SNTE, and the latter's replacement by Elba Esther Gordillo. In this situation, the new president sought to revive the policy of education reform to solve the serious problems in the country's system of public education.[27] The "federalization of education" in 1992, as described in the National Agreement for the Modernization of Basic Education (Acuerdo Nacional para la Modernización de la Educación Básica, ANMEB), had the effect at some point of making Section 22/MDTEO the dominant local actor in the process. Under this agreement, state governments assumed responsibility for the direction and operation of primary, secondary, and normal education within their jurisdictions.[28] To accomplish this, they created decentralized local bodies to oversee personnel, operations, maintenance of school buildings, and all the functions transferred by the federal government. In Oaxaca, this body was called the Oaxaca State Institute of Public Education (Instituto Estatal de Educación Pública de Oaxaca, IEEPO).

In this way, the "co-participation" of Section 22 in the Oaxaca education bureaucracy assumed the formal granting of positions of management, power, decision making, and veto power over the local education system. Here began the process of union colonization of the IEEPO.[29] This process allowed for a paradoxical effect that explains many of the local and national political, union, and education conflicts of recent years, and in particular that of 2006. There was a growing structural linkage between Section 22 and the IEEPO that allowed the union, through the system of "co-governance," to broaden its influence in matters concerning local education policy. However, with the assumption of greater responsibility in management, and the co-administration of public resources and decisions about hiring and promotion, there was a narrowing of Section 22's room for maneuvering and decision making beyond what was acceptable from the perspective of the MDTEO—that is, the rank and file. This led first to a major divide and later to a growing distance between Section 22 and the MDTEO.[30] Thus, neo-corporatist, clientelist, and patrimonialist practices, along with discretional distribution of privileges and resources, reappeared within the union, but without the consolidation of any hegemonic group. Likewise, the political and ideological struggles within the union were no

[26] On the complex relationship between Section 22 and the MDTEO, see Marco Estrada Saavedra (2014), "Disidencias y connivencias: la colonización del sistema educativo oaxaqueño por parte de la Sección XXII del SNTE," in Alejandro Agudo Sanchíz and Marco Estrada Saavedra, *Formas reales de dominación del Estado. Perspectivas interdisciplinarias del poder y la política*, El Colegio de México, México, pp. 153-196.

[27] Arnaut, 1997.

[28] Acuerdo Nacional para la Modernización de la Educación Básica (1992). http://educacionespecial.sepdf.gob.mx/educacioninclusiva/documentos/PoliticaNacional/AcuerdoModernizacionEB.pdf [accessed 14 June 2012].

[29] For a detailed analysis of this process on the national level and in Oaxaca, see Aldo Muñoz Armenta (2005), *El sindicalismo mexicano frente a la reforma del Estado. El impacto de la descentralización educativa y el cambio político en el Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación 1992-1998*. México: Universidad Iberoamericana. On the colonization of the IEEPO, see Estrada Saavedra, 2014.

[30] The Section 22/MDTEO distinction is an analytic one.

longer oriented toward an authentic and democratic representation of the interests of the rank and file, but toward obtaining positions of authority in the bureaucracies of Section 22 and the IEEPO. This allowed them to appropriate union and public resources, and to increase their influence among teachers and among various popular mass organizations in Oaxaca.

With the linking of Section 22 and the IEEPO, the extra-statutory bodies of the MDTEO were partially reorganized as political and administrative tools of control over the rank and file, and over dissident groups within the union. There was fatigue among the rank and file from continual strikes and the annual "days of struggle" that were not always successful, and growing distrust toward the leadership caused by different cases of corruption, especially from the mid-1990s to the present day. The original spirit of these bodies has been replaced by mechanisms that combine control with incentives to participation in mobilizations, even where such participation is already compulsory.[31]

In an important sense, the failure of the labor negotiations in 2006 and the radicalization of the conflict in Oaxaca had to do with the intra-organizational struggle of these political and ideological currents within the union, which accused the current leadership of Section 22, not without reason or evidence, of corruption and involvement in various scandals that put the teachers' autonomy at risk. The paradox is that the leaders of the opposition had been no less venal during their own time in the union leadership.[32] Thus, to demonstrate their independence of the government of Ulises Ruiz, the Section 22 leadership began to radicalize its oppositional discourse, knowing that this verbal gesture would reactivate the emotional identification of the rank and file with the MDTEO and silence its internal critics. These critics, however, raised the symbolic stakes in the labor negotiations[33] and increased pressure on the leadership to such a degree that it went from making incendiary declarations—which were in fact meant exclusively for internal consumption within Section 22, not for the public, and much less for the local government—to forceful action, like the open-ended strike called in the third week of May. Governor Ruiz Ortiz's clumsy, ill-advised decision to evict the demonstrators from the Zócalo in mid-June prompted the interest groups within Section 22 to leave aside their differences and present a united front.

Ungovernable Oaxaca

After the failed eviction of the teachers from the Zócalo, dialogue with the government of Ulises Ruiz was canceled. APPO members thus began to discuss possible resolutions of the conflict through the national political arena, combining their political mobilization with the search for an institutional solution. They asked the national senate to use its power to declare the "dissolution of constitutional powers" in Oaxaca and call new state elections. In principle, this legal device has the effect of reestablishing law and order in a state that has become ungovernable. In practice, it is nearly impossible to carry out, as would become clear.[34]

To this end, APPO brigades stepped up their "direct actions" to highlight the chaos in Oaxaca. Among these actions were the seizure and closing of federal and state government offices, the tem-

[31] Estrada Saavedra (2014) and Hernández Ruiz (2006).

[32] Juan Manuel López Alegría (2006), "Lo negro de la Sección XXII del SNTE: Enrique Rueda, acusado de corrupto por quienes antes lo defendieron." In Cuauhtémoc Blas López, Víctor Leonel Juan Martínez, and Juan Manuel López Alegría, *Oaxaca 2006. Autoritarismo, mitos y daños. (Crítica al gobierno y magisterio)*. Oaxaca: Editorial Siembra, pp. 49-57.

[33] They would, moreover, have produced satisfactory results, even if they would not have covered all the items on their list of demands.

[34] Rogelio Hernández Rodríguez (2008), *El centro dividido. La nueva autonomía de los gobernadores*, México, El Colegio de México.

porary occupation of large tourist hotels, the hijacking and burning of buses, the blocking of the cultural-tourist event of La Guelaguetza, the neutralization of the police, the occupation, control, and operation of the Corporación Oaxaqueña de Radio y Televisión (CORTV) and private radio stations, and the setting up of more than a thousand barricades throughout the city.

The governor was no less interested than his opponents in producing his own version of the chaos, with the paradoxical purpose of inviting federal intervention by the Federal Preventive Police (Policía Federal Preventiva, PFP) to reestablish "order and security" in the state. He put into effect what was called "Plan Hierro" ("Operation Iron"), with the intent of recovering control of the public space that was supposedly in the hands of "subversive groups" and "urban guerrillas."[35] The government offensive to enforce what it euphemistically called the "rule of law" consisted of sending para-police commandos to shoot at APPO members. The numbers of these irregular forces and the terror and death they brought caused APPO members and the media to refer to them as "the death caravans." In order to counteract the APPO's strategy of generating ungovernability, the government of Oaxaca paradoxically implemented these illegal operations, among others, precisely to demonstrate that there was indeed an authority in the state "guaranteeing order and security to the citizenry."

The APPO made two attempts to initiate the constitutional mechanism to dissolve the powers of the state government. The first, before a federal election replaced members of the federal Congress, won a majority in favor of the motion. However, the Oaxacan state government presented a legal challenge, and the Supreme Court ruled that the legislators' legal basis for declaring the dissolution was not in accordance with the law.[36]

The second attempt was ill-fated because of the campaign, then in its final stages, to elect a new president and some new senators and deputies. The upcoming election paralyzed any serious attempt to address the situation; the federal government concentrated its efforts on the close race between the *oficialista* candidate of the Partido de Acción Nacional (PAN), Felipe Calderón Hinojosa, and the candidate of the left coalition, Andrés Manuel López Obrador.

The APPO's expectations that the legal and institution path would lead to a solution to the conflict were dashed with the close outcome of the presidential election, in which the declared winner, Calderón Hinojosa, outpolled the leftist candidate by just a few tenths of a percentage point in a race with high turnout. López Obrador claimed electoral fraud and rallied his supporters to occupy the major streets of Mexico City, establishing his "mega encampment" for several months to demand recognition of his "victory." The PRI, which had been left as a very reduced third political force in the Congress, took advantage of the situation to improve its influence and position in the new political context. It offered the PAN its deputies' and senators' approval of Calderón's questionable victory in exchange for, among other things, recognition of Ruiz Ortiz's

[35] Dirección General de Seguridad Pública del Estado (DGSPE) (2006), Información.

[36] As the case of Oaxaca eloquently showed, the dissolution of powers of state governments has, in its current form, turned out to be an unworkable legal monstrosity that does not serve to reestablish order where governors abuse their power. "As the parties recognized, the only solution was for the governor to request a voluntary leave of absence, because there was no way to force him to do so. . . . The dissolution of powers has always been a threatening figure, but an unworkable one, because it does not take into account the political instability, seen in social confrontation and violence, as proof of the incapacity, not of state power but of the governor. . . . The legal mechanism has always existed, but in the past it was irrelevant because presidential authority was imposed on the governors" (Hernández Rodríguez, 2008: 314).

authority as governor of Oaxaca. The PAN national leadership accepted the offer, and the fate of the APPO was sealed.[37]

A few weeks later, after the failure of negotiations between the APPO and the Secretaría de Gobernación and the increase in political violence in Oaxaca, the federal government decided to send the PFP, with assistance from the army and navy, to pacify the state. For almost a month they tried to prevent confrontations between the APPO and the PRI, even clashing violently with the APPO. But after negotiations with the Secretaría de Gobernación, and without APPO participation, the teachers' leadership decided to end the strike and begin the school year four months late. The APPO coalition weakened and the most radical groups took over direction of the collective protest. On November 25, one week before the swearing-in of the new president, the police operation began that would come to a bloody end with the Oaxaca Commune.[38]

The Capture of the City

The APPO's permanent mass mobilization—whose "megamarches" were said by newspapers of the time to have drawn crowds of nearly a million protesters into the streets—and its territorial control of the capital and surrounding cities[39] enabled it to neutralize the public authorities and install a popular government.

The Barricades

The barricades can be thought of as the APPO security subsystem, given that they served four central functions for the reproduction of the protest: 1) its self-defense against the physical aggression by the state government through para-police groups or the PFP; 2) the micro-level local self-organization of the "independent" members of the APPO in the form of assemblies that deliberated and made decisions, collectively and inclusively, about the activities at the barricades and the political proposals and actions planned by the "collective leadership" of the APPO (the State Peoples' Assembly of Oaxaca, *Asamblea Estatal de los Pueblos de Oaxaca*); 3) the occupation and spatial control of the city to institute an alternative "social order": the Oaxaca Commune; and 4) the identification of those at the barricades as "the people" and their discourse as *pueblismo*.

Although APPO issued the general call to erect barricades, each of these functions made its own decisions according to a variety of contingencies and needs. In sociological terms, there was a segmented differentiation within the organization, of assemblies at each barricade to discuss and decide on courses of action, increasingly autonomous of the APPO leadership. Those at the barricades justified this autonomy saying "we are all APPO" and that "no one has the right to represent us."

The danger and deaths experienced behind the barricades reinforced the links among independent APPO members and generated a strong sense of community. Indeed, the mutual and unconditional

[37] Estrada Saavedra (2016a).

[38] Marco Estrada Saavedra (2016b), "Resistencia y represión: la violencia política en Oaxaca," in Viviane Brachet and Mónica Uribe Gómez (coords.), *Estado y sociedad en América Latina: acercamientos relacionales*, México, El Colegio de México, pp. 43-81.

[39] On the material and symbolic appropriation of the historic, public, and private walls of the city by urban or graffiti artists, and the creation of alternative public spheres, see Marco Estrada Saavedra (2012a), "Los muros están hablando. La protesta gráfica de la Asamblea Popular de los Pueblos de Oaxaca," in Marco Estrada Saavedra and René Millán (coords.), *La teoría de los sistemas sociales de Niklas Luhmann a prueba: horizontes de aplicación en la investigación social en América Latina*, México, El Colegio de México, pp. 391-444.

support in every type of situation and the possibility of participating in the discussions and activities at the barricades contributed to the construction of the collective imagination of the Oaxaca Commune, whose reality, members believed, was expressed in the barricades themselves and in the daily construction of an alternative social order, regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic origin, education, political position, or organizational affiliation. In this order "the people" were the central agents of the protest and of social and political change.[40]

Media Coverage of the Protest

On the state and national level, the majority of public and private media coverage was biased in favor of the state government. The APPO was well aware that the media had become a government resource to discredit them. In this regard, it undertook one of the most original and surprising actions of its protest: the capture of public and private media. It began with the refusal by CORTV on August 1 to grant an interview to a group of APPO women in which they could explain directly, in their own words, the reasons for the protest. Rather than accept the refusal and leave, the APPO decided to occupy the buildings of the public television and radio stations. That same night, they began broadcast of the programs they called TV APPO and Radio Cacerola. When, three weeks later, the "death caravans" destroyed CORTV's antennas, the APPO immediately took over 13 commercial radio stations. The majority of these would be handed back or their transmissions would be blocked by the Oaxaca government, and the APPO would continue to operate only the stations known as "La Ley" ("The Law"), which would be renamed "La Ley del Pueblo" ("The People's Law"), "Radio Universidad" ("University Radio"), and "Radio Plantón" ("Encampment Radio") , the latter becoming the radio station of Section 22.

Perhaps the most remarkable and original aspect of the takeover of the television and radio stations was this disruption of the hegemonic media logic. The APPO changed the relationship of the media to the public and the manner and meaning of their operation (for a time and, of course, only in the media outlets they controlled). Radio and television became self-managed media of the APPO not only because their installations were occupied and operated by its sympathizers, but above all because the APPO "public of radio listeners and television viewers" assumed the task of using the media as an instrument of communication both inside and outside the organization. In this way, the distinction between the roles of broadcaster and public were dislocated and merged. The APPO was both the medium and the message.[41]

What is more, hearing themselves speak on the radio and seeing themselves appear on television, "the people" recognized themselves as something more than the stereotyped images of public and commercial television in which they are portrayed as the object of police action or public assistance, as the subject of folklore, or as the object of mockery, belittlement, and discrimination. This recognition helped to reaffirm the emotional and intellectual identification of APPO members with the organization and its struggle. In this way, the APPO subverted the conventional aesthetic and linguistic codes of the media, modifying the meaning of radio and television communication to put it to the service of its popular struggle instead of the dominant logic of the market and the government. The media

[40] Estrada Saavedra (2016a).

[41] Marco Estrada Saavedra (2012b), "*Vox populi*. La difusión mediática de la protesta de la Asamblea Popular de los Pueblos de Oaxaca," in Marco Estrada Saavedra (coord.), *Protesta social. Tres estudios sobre movimientos sociales en clave de la teoría de sistemas de Niklas Luhmann*, México, El Colegio de México, pp. 45-104.

became virtual public spaces. Given the impossibility for most supporters to participate directly in the assemblies carried out in the Zócalo, radio broadcasts contributed to the construction of forums, the drafting of possible political projects, and the coordination of the organization's actions.[42]

The System of Domination in Oaxaca

The formation of the APPO must be understood within the framework of the system of domination in Oaxaca and the popular struggles to transform it. The origin of the system goes back to the colonial era,[43] and to this day it benefits the economic, political, military, and religious elites. From the beginning, it has been founded upon control over the population and its land and labor, and the appropriation and restriction of access to the apparatus of public administration. It has also served the purpose of establishing advantageous economic relationships between rural areas and the state's major urban centers, and between these cities and the capital.

The modern system of domination in Oaxaca was formed in the image and likeness of the national political system. The continuation after the Revolution of the centralization of political power begun in the last quarter of the nineteenth century involved an appropriation of the bureaucratic machinery by the national state, which subordinated state and municipal governments and robbed them of a large part of their political, administrative, and fiscal capacities. Paradoxically, for state governors this process meant a loss of responsibility for the principal tasks of government—now in the hands of the federal executive and administration—and greater freedom to exercise a dominance that was institutionalized (that is, not personal and temporary) within their states.[44]

Once they gained the approval and support of the national center, the governors of Oaxaca used their legal and extraconstitutional powers to suppress the state's legislative and judicial branches and control municipal governments, party cadres, unions, organizational leaders, local *caciques*, and indigenous communities—at least until the "transition to democracy" (1997). Like that of their counterpart in Mexico City, the power base of the governors had been institutional: with the end of their administrations, their influence largely disappeared. As a result, political and economic loyalties of influence groups and the elites would undergo a realignment in favor of the new governor and his political followers.

The challenges to this system of domination have come from the periphery. From the late 1960s to the present day, different popular actors have demanded changes to the system and at the same time their own inclusion in it, but independent of the corporatism of the PRI, with the immediate goal of real representation of their interests and, in the long term, a democratization of the regime.[45]

Since the 1970s, the demands of different actors in the so-called "Oaxacan popular movement" have been economic (defense of their land and its natural resources), sociocultural (recognition of indigenous identities, traditions, and cultures), and political (various public goods and services, defense of democracy, liberation of political prisoners, an end to repression by *caciques*). The constitutional

[42] Estrada Saavedra (2012).

[43] A historical and sociological overview of this system can be found in Jaime Bailón Corres (2002), *Pueblos indios, élites y territorios. Sistemas de dominio regional en el sur de México. Una historia política de Oaxaca*. México: El Colegio de México.

[44] On this topic, see the brilliant works by Rogelio Hernández Rodríguez (2008) and (2015), *Presidencialismo y hombres fuertes en México. La sucesión presidencial de 1958*, México, El Colegio de México.

[45] See Víctor Raúl Martínez Vásquez (1990), *Movimiento popular y política en Oaxaca (1968-1986)*, México: CONACULTA.

recognition in Oaxaca of "customs and usages" for indigenous self-government in the mid-1990s can also be seen as part of these diverse collective efforts to transform the Oaxacan order.[46]

The popular struggle to transform the system of domination and democratize the political system has also been carried out on the electoral level. With the legalization of left parties, electoral efforts to win control of municipalities involved tensions and protests over the selection of candidates within the PRI as well as the electoral fraud used to stifle the opposition. And when an opposition victory was recognized, conflicts then came to the fore over respect for the autonomy of municipal administrations and timely budgetary appropriations.

All of these factors testify to the lessening of legitimacy of the system of domination in Oaxaca. We can take as one indicator the percentage of votes received by the PRI in the gubernatorial elections from 1986 to 1995, which dropped from 92% to 50%. In the election of 2016, although the PRI (in coalition) retook the governorship after six years of opposition, it received only 32% of the total vote.[47]

It need hardly be stressed that the use of political violence to deal with the opposition is an eloquent index of the weak legitimacy of this type of domination. The relationship can be seen in the multiple rural, labor, electoral, student, popular, and guerrilla conflicts that have questioned that domination. Indeed, the persistence, the scale, and the ubiquity of political violence in Oaxaca demonstrate that its use is an everyday government resource. This point must be stressed: violence as a basis for political power in Oaxaca is not a last resort in the face of extraordinary situations, but a typical feature of the relationship with the opposition, including with the members of the system themselves who fail to satisfy their dominators' expectations of acquiescence and obedience.[48]

The Oaxacan system of domination has demonstrated a large degree of adaption to the institutionality of representative democracy, taking advantage of the new reality of the Mexican political system. The long transition to democracy had the effect of undermining presidentialism and removing its (meta-)legal controls used to subdue the states and other constitutional branches of government. This translated into a growing political autonomy and economic strengthening of state governments, as well as local groups and *caciques*. External mechanisms for overseeing the governors have turned out to be ineffective or have disappeared. As a result, there is greater opportunity for arbitrary, factional, corrupt, and illegal behavior, almost always with impunity, because the governors have almost unlimited control over public administration, legislative and judicial powers, "autonomous" institutions like those that oversee elections or defend human rights, and even, in many cases, opposition parties.[49]

The Rebellions Within the Rebellion

The APPO's mobilization and protest was not directed exclusively at the government of Oaxaca; it was aimed at all forms of illegitimate social power and domination. It is thus possible to observe a series of rebellions within the rebellion. Three examples in particular stand out.[50]

[46] On this point and the transformations in the Oaxacan political system, see Recondo (2007).

[47] Recondo (2007) and Owali (2004).

[48] See Bautista Martínez (2010).

[49] Rogelio Hernández Rodríguez (2004), "El resurgimiento de los poderes locales," in *Estudios Sociológicos*, vol. 22, no. 66, Sept.-Dec., pp. 773-781.

[50] On the youth rebellion and its protest against adult authority and social hierarchies, see Estrada Saavedra (2016a).

The Women Teachers' Rebellion

The women of Section 22 have perhaps perceived more clearly than any other group the contradictions between the MDTEO's demands for democratization of the union and the political system and the inequality between men and women within the union. This inequality does not, of course, originate in Section 22, but the union unquestioningly reproduces and even benefits from it.[51]

Male domination in the union leads to the belief that women lack the ability to participate actively and independently in the life of the union, that their contributions to internal debate lack substance and will not be taken into account, and that their role in the MDTEO is to prepare food, clean up, and take care of the men during the "days of struggle." These opinions are reinforced by the visible asymmetry in union positions held by men and women, and by the men's refusal to accept the authority of women who do achieve important positions of responsibility. In demanding sexual equality and questioning the reigning patriarchy, women teachers sought to democratize the union.[52]

The Women's Rebellion

The women's rebellion against men's domination of the APPO and in everyday life may be the most significant of these uprisings. As the conflict continued and grew more acute, daily routines slowly but inevitably were interrupted. The majority of APPO members were part of a permanent mobilization: they thus found themselves obliged to experiment with alternative ways of combining the resolution of everyday problems with political participation in the multiple activities required for the construction of popular power in the Oaxaca Commune.

In general, the possibility of women's political, social, and union participation, and their access to public spaces constructed collectively in the protest—assemblies, encampments, barricades, marches, the operation of communications media—was conditioned on first resolving the issues of domestic tasks and childcare. Despite this relatively unprecedented scenario of continuous mobilization, activities, time, and space continued to be organized according to traditional concepts of gender. In other words, women continued to assume that domestic tasks were their "normal" and "exclusive" responsibility.

But it was precisely the shared intensity of daily life in the spaces of protest that created the conditions for women to start questioning aloud why the struggle was defined by an exclusively union and political agenda. Why, if they were demanding freedom and justice for the people of Oaxaca, and talking about equality for "the people," did they not recognize the active role of women in the social struggle? Why did men overwhelmingly occupy the majority of positions of leadership and authority in unions, in popular mass organizations, and on the barricades? Where were the questions of gender? How could they construct an alternative social order if gender relations did not also change? Married and single women, young and old, housewives, secretaries, union women, students, professionals, workers, vendors, and government workers began to air these and other questions. All of them fully identified with the demands of the APPO, but they resented that their situation and interests based on gender were not recognized or taken into account.

In some cases, the very dynamic of everyday cooperation in the tasks of protest made women aware of personal abilities previously unrecognized even by themselves, such as speaking and arguing their

[51] Concepción Silvia Núñez Miranda (1990), *Maestras oaxaqueñas: movimiento magisterial, vida cotidiana y democracia 1980-1989*. Undergraduate Thesis in Sociology. México: UNAM, Facultad de Ciencias Políticas y Sociales.

[52] Estrada Saavedra (2016a).

views in public and organizing collective tasks. Other women with more experience in union activity, as well as those sympathetic to feminism, understood that the APPO's struggle opened an opportunity to demand recognition and their rights as women. All of them began to conceive of themselves, then, no longer as girlfriends, wives, mothers, or partners of men, but as individuals with wishes, projects, and interests of their own, sometimes even conflicting with those of the men.

Thus it was that on August 1st, at a meeting organized by the women encamped in the city offices of the Secretary of Finance, women APPO members unexpectedly decided to organize a march to the offices of CORTV, one that would later be remembered as "the march of the pots and pans." The rejection of their request for a live interview led them to take over the studios and operate the station for 21 days. A few weeks later these events led to the formation of the August 1st Coordinating Committee of Oaxacan Women (Coordinadora de Mujeres Oaxaqueña 1° de Agosto, COMO). The expectation of the COMO founders was to have their own voice within the APPO and influence over its decision making processes. In this way, they would create the possibility of including gender issues in the APPO's demands and discussing the problems of violence and inequality between men and women in the APPO and other popular organizations, trade unions, collectives, NGOs, and in everyday life. In other words, the women organized to respond to male domination in Oaxacan society.

Although men encouraged and celebrated the active participation of women in the political and social struggle of the APPO, women's growing autonomy began to make them uncomfortable: it threatened men's privileges and dominant position in relationships with their partners, in the home, and in the disputes over the meaning and purposes of the protest. For this reason, they tried to put limits on women's independence (Estrada Saavedra, 2016a).

The Teachers' Rebellion

The events that would unleash the failed repression of June 14, 2006 were also used by the teachers to show their discontent with their own union in recent years. The teacher rank and file objected to the corruption, the patrimonialism, the clientelism, the privileges, and the authoritarianism of the representatives and leaders who had diverted Section 22 from its democratic origins, independent of the MDTEO.

It is true, on the one hand, that the teachers followed the directives of the Sectional Executive Committee (Comité Ejecutivo Seccional, CES) and to a large extent respected the agreements of their permanent assembly: they took on the tasks assigned to them by the union's highest authorities. On the other hand, it is also true that an important segment of the same rank and file aimed their participation to go beyond the interests and strategies of their union to make the expectations of the APPO's popular struggle their own. The struggles and differences in union politics and ideologies between the leadership of Section 22 and the APPO caused confusion and annoyance among the rank and file; it appeared that rather than confront the government as a common enemy, it was all about excluding or at least neutralizing their counterparts. The most serious consequence of these intra-teacher conflicts was the split by a group of teachers to form Section 109—a division supported by the Oaxacan government and the national leadership of the SNTE.

The prolongation of the conflict prevented the beginning of the school year in Oaxaca, and the striking teachers had not been paid since the middle of May. This situation began to cause worry and create differences among the teachers. In debt, and lacking the money to pay for everyday household needs, many teachers wanted to go back to classes, but the question was how to do so without "be-

traying" the APPO and "the people," who had joined the union struggle after the repression. They were well aware that going back to classes would mean the beginning of the end of the APPO. Toward the end of October, the Secretary General of Section 22 announced an agreement with the federal government—an agreement made without consulting the union's state assembly—that classes would begin on the first Monday in November. Many teachers, worried about their family finances, heard the announcement with relief, while many more felt angry and frustrated because they had not succeeded in removing the governor from office, and the effort, pain, and death of Oaxacans had been in vain.

In this situation, the distinction between Section 22 and the MDTEO once again had important consequences for the union. The teacher rank and file opted for a strategy that partially and for a very short time reconciled the interests of Section 22 and the APPO. They accepted an end to the strike and a return to classes, but they continued protesting as "the people" on the barricades, in occupied buildings, and in marches. In this way, they rebelled against their representatives. The partial demobilization of the teachers was an eloquent sign to the federal government that the union leadership was a untrustworthy spokesperson for its rank and file, lacking the ability to control them.[53]

The Political Significance of the Oaxaca Commune

For almost six months, the APPO threw into disarray the reproduction of the hegemony of the Oaxacan system of domination. It did so in a radical sense: not only were the activities of the political, legislative, and legal system called into question and essentially suspended, but so were the everyday relationships in the lives of the actors who mobilized to institute the alternative social order known as the Oaxaca Commune.

The APPO questioned this domination to the extent that it made possible the expression of diverse social practices that, in spite of their lack of connection and frequent internal contradictions, shared the goal of a differently ordered society, one that moved beyond authoritarianism, patrimonialism, injustice, inequality, exclusion, racism, and patriarchy. The radical nature of the APPO protest can be better understood if we consider that it called into question the cultural incorporation of the hegemony of this system of domination in the everyday practices of the popular actors themselves. For this reason, it was a challenge not only to the institutional actors of the political system, but also to the teachers' union, popular organizations, and men in their relationships with women.

The "taking over of the city" was the collective device that allowed this effort at establishing something new, since it translated into a practical absence of all public authority and the exercise of its domination. This is the sociological meaning of "ungovernability": the inability of the dominant actors to control the population and demand obedience to its authority. The APPO's growing "territorial appropriation" owed much to the activation by the capital city's residents of indigenous traditions of cooperation that already existed among the urban population: what is today called "communality" and in other parts of the country is known simply as *tequio*, the traditional term for unremunerated labor as a contribution to the community. It also resulted from the mobilizing efforts of youth collectives and the cadres of trade union and popular organizations that carried out strategies of popular self-defense. In this way, the collectively occupied "social space" was perceived as the territory of the APPO resistance.

In the face of the monopolization by political parties and institutions through professionalization and the exclusion of the citizenry from public spaces, the experience of the Oaxaca Commune allowed

[53] Estrada Saavedra (2016a).

the massive eruption, at least for a time, of a plurality of actors who questioned the very idea of political representation, not only in the forms, institutions, and actors of representative democracy, but also in social movements, trade unions, and popular organizations. The members of the APPO, and above all, the *barricaderos* and "independents" who described themselves as "the people," rejected all delegation of power with the intention of presenting themselves, speaking for themselves, and taking part in collective affairs without directors, leaders, or intermediary representatives.

The collective activity of APPO members was oriented toward "autonomy." It was not just about supervising and controlling political power, but going further, on a path of action, to try out autonomous forms of organization like the functioning of the assemblies in the Oaxaca Zócalo and in the barrios in rebellion; the formation of policing bodies like the Oaxacan Teachers' Police (Policía Magisterial Oaxaqueña, POMO) and the Honorable Corps of Topiles); the barricades as a strategy of self-defense; the exercise of "popular justice"; the debates about actions to be taken; the installation of a system of communications media (made up of Radio Plantón, Radio Universidad, TV-APPO, the collection of occupied radio stations and the use of cell phones and the internet); and the operation of a system of collective goods (such as food, water, and transportation).[54]

Discussion of the Literature

The bibliography of the APPO is heterogeneous. First, there are good journalistic accounts of the events of the summer and fall of 2006.[55] Then, there are testimonials of participants in the conflict.[56] There are also a series of documentaries with rich imagery of the events and interviews with the protagonists. Some of these were produced in the midst of the conflict and even by participants in the protest.[57] Also important are the works dedicated to studying the so-called "visual resistance,"

[54] Estrada Saavedra (2016a).

[55] Cuauhtémoc Blas López, Juan Martínez, Víctor Leonel, and Juan Manuel López Alegría (coords.), (2006) *Oaxaca 2006. Autoritarismo, mitos y daños. (Crítica al gobierno y magisterio)*. Oaxaca: Editorial Siembra; Víctor Raúl Martínez Vásquez (2007), *Autoritarismo, movimiento popular y crisis política: Oaxaca 2006*. México: UABJO, Instituto de Investigaciones Sociológicas, Centro de Apoyo al Movimiento Popular Oaxaqueño, A.C., EDUCA, Consorcio para el Diálogo Parlamentario y la Equidad; Diego Enrique Osorno (2007), *Oaxaca sitiada. La primera insurrección del siglo XXI*. México: Grijalbo; and John Gibler (2013), *México rebelde. Crónicas de poder e insurrección*. México: Debolsillo.

[56] Carlos Beas Torres (ed.) (2007), *La batalla por Oaxaca*. Oaxaca: Ediciones Yope Power; Nancy Davis (2007), *The People Decide. Oaxaca's Popular Assembly*. New York: Narco News Books; Gustavo Esteva et al. (coords.) (2008); Diana Denham and C.A.S.A Collective (2008), *Teaching Rebellion. Stories from the Grassroots Mobilization in Oaxaca*. Oakland: P.M. Press; Sergio De Castro Sánchez (2009), *Oaxaca: más allá de la insurrección. Crónica de un movimiento de movimientos*. Oaxaca: Ediciones ¡Basta!; and Citlalli Méndez, Nicole Kast, Kiado Cruz, and Yesika Cruz, (eds.) (2009), *Oaxaca 2006: lo vimos, lo vivimos. Narraciones en movimiento*. Oaxaca: Oaxaca Libre, Universidad de la Tierra, Swarthmore College, Medios de Información Alternativos y Revolucionemos Oaxaca.

[57] Jill Freidberg (2007), *Un poquito de tanta verdad*. Seattle: Corrugated Films Production with the collaboration of Mal de Ojo TV [DVD]; Consorcio Parlamentario para el Diálogo Parlamentario y la Equidad Oaxaca A.C. and Mal de Ojo TV (2007), *La rebelión de las oaxaqueñas. La contribución de las mujeres al movimiento popular, Oaxaca, México* [DVD]; Videohackers and Indymedia (2007), *Brad: una noche más en las barricadas* [DVD]; Héctor Ballesteros (2007), *Puntos B, cartografías de una ciudad en crisis: Oaxaca 2006*, interactivo con 39 barricadas. Arquitectura. [DVD]; Armando Garduño and Amelia Salcido, (2008) *El Muro*. México: UAM-X. [DVD]; Yihn Law (2008), *Sígueme contando. Sonidos de la lucha oaxaqueña*. Oaxaca/Cd. De México: Producción CESOL/luzKemada; and Silvia Bolos and Marco Estrada Saavedra (2013a), *Recuperando la palabra. La Asamblea Popular de los Pueblos de Oaxaca* [DVD], in Bolos and Estrada Saavedra (2013ª). The interactive DVD accompanying Estrada Saavedra (2016a) includes videos, documentariess, radio broadcasts, and music composed during and after the conflict of 2006.

that is, the production of urban political art during and after 2006.[58] Finally, there are the studies of social scientists. These have focused mainly on the trade union and political conflicts and the social movement that developed in the Valles Centrales of Oaxaca. Surprisingly, there are few monographs dedicated to the APPO, despite the extraordinary character of the conflict, the richness and innovation of the organization's repertory of protest, the heterogeneity of its members, the forms of repression used to contain the protest, and the reverberations of the conflict beyond Oaxaca and into the future. Future research should examine how the conflicts were lived and expressed in other parts of the state. We also know very little about the religious dimensions and the participation of religious actors, as well as the economic factors that contributed to the mood of social protest across broad sectors in the state. Finally, it would be useful to know the long-term effects of the conflict of 2006 on the mobilization and organization of Oaxacan collective actors, and on the institutional transformations of the local political system following the first change in the state's ruling party (2010-2016), after almost eighty years of domination by the PRI.

Further Reading

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