Race and Education in Chiapas, Mexico: Actors and Dynamics of Education as a Tool for
the Construction of a Multicultural State

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the Construction of a Multicultural State

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ABSTRACT

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Race and Education in Chiapas, Mexico: Actors and Dynamics of Education as a Tool for the Construction of a Multicultural State

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Race continues to be a reason for social discrimination in Chiapas since the colonial period. Among many indicators, education stands out as an institutional resource to maintain the separation between indigenous communities and non-indigenous society in Chiapas and the rest of Mexico. Nevertheless, the Zapatista uprising in 1994 and their autonomy construction project is another example of indigenous resistance to national attempts of acculturation of this sector of the population. This conflict has developed a complex network of actors and dynamics participating in Chiapas, emerging from international, national and local organizations and institutions. This network needs to reform the educational system along a multicultural perspective based to some extent on the principles of Zapatista Autonomous Education. The cooperation of these different actors according to the principle of multiculturality is the first step to construct a future nation where indigenous communities are respectfully integrated.

Approved: _____________________________________________________________

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INTRODUCTION

Education is among the most important components to the execution of human development. Education, both formal and informal, has become the subject of research by many scholarly and international organizations due to its immense potential as a building block of societal betterment. It serves a vital tool for building more democratic societies by enabling the construction of individual and community autonomy. An especially empowering force in post-Colonial regions, it may prove one of the key aspects in efforts to promote greater social mobility by helping to break intergenerational cycles of poverty and systemic inequality. Throughout history, education has enabled a host of distinct societies to coalesce, or separate, individuals into groups, communities, nations, etc. It is the potent ability to affect human thought and behavior which makes education a highly valuable, and equally hazardous, instrument. The immense power of education is evidenced by the myriad instances in which it was and has been used to subjugate peoples through the restriction of access to educational systems and concurrently representing them as outsiders, somehow different, threatening, and/or second-class citizens to those granted access to an education. When the factors mentioned above are considered together, the importance of examining the role played by education in all societies becomes readily apparent. As much as it can function as a tool of discrimination, education can be used to build more egalitarian and respectful societies, based on more comprehensive perspectives which result in new and more inclusive social constructions.
In the case of Mexico, the conquest of native peoples and the subsequent emergence of New Spain resulted in a stratified social system defined by the organization of into a castes system. This classification was based on metaphysical ideas about human nature, determining the material life realization of individuals. Today, even as we celebrate the bicentennial of Mexican independence and the formal end of the colonial system, the lasting consequences of the caste system are clearly visible. The societies of the American colonies under the administration of the Spanish Crown was legally organized into two parallel groups, the República de Españoles and the República de Indios. The early introduction of African slaves to Mexican colonial societies and the mixture resulting from both forced and consenting sexual relations between people of African, indigenous, and European descent compelled colonial administrators to forge system of social castes based on the ideas of "purity of blood" which had evolved in Iberia as a product of conflict between religious groups during the prolonged struggle now known as the Reconquista.

Mexico's wars of independence, fought between 1810 and 1821, introduced the Liberal conceptions of the nation-state to the region. The newly independent Mexican state was theoretically founded on the freedom of man, thus rejecting the previously deterministic social discourse which justified social divisions based on racial phenotypes and heritage. However, the legacy of the colonial caste system continued to influence Mexican society after independence and remains a reality in present-day Mexico. Even the Mexican Revolution (1810-1820), born partially due to frustrations built-up during centuries of racial discrimination conducted by the state, was unable to successfully
dismantle the racial hierarchy created during the over three-hundred years of Spanish colonial rule. People of purely or majority indigenous and African heritage remained at a severe socio-economic disadvantage in comparison to their European or mestizo countrymen, often working in the lowest positions, living in the worst conditions, and enjoying few if any political rights. Nevertheless, various policies implemented by the post-Independence federal government to correct for systemic inequality such as Indian education, socialist education, and others were met with the resistance of substantial portions of Mexican society. A host of concerns, ranging from issues of identity to political and religious conflicts occurring in various states throughout Mexico, doomed plans for the assimilation of indigenous communities and greater mobility between the respective groups and ultimately obtain the desired outcomes.

Presently, the State of Chiapas can serve as an example of a place where the striking disparity between Mexico’s national and Chiapas’ local social reality have brought about various uprisings. The most recent of these uprisings is the Zapatista uprising, beginning in 1994. The movement brought what has traditionally been known as “the Indian Problem” to the center of political discourse and revived debate over the treatment of the descendants of Mexico’s pre-Colombian inhabitants by the modern Mexican state. This movement, defined both by socialist ideology and the struggle for social rights of indigenous peoples, demonstrates once again that the social, political, and economic challenges facing indigenous communities continue to reflect many of the barriers by which the colonial management delineated society. Based on these circumstances, the Zapatistas have demanded and continue to fight for a new system of
governance which gives autonomy to indigenous communities with the goal of enabling the construction of a political entity allows for the full development of their cultural identity. As with many social movements, the Zapatistas view education as one of the most important aspects of their efforts to achieve an autonomous society which functions independent of the federal government they see as abusive to the weakest of Mexican society. It is therefore crucial to analyze current educational trends and developments in the state of Chiapas. By doing so, it will be possible to reach a deeper understanding of the major flaws existing in the educational system and, accordingly, determine what steps can be taken to improve the scope and quality of education offered to Mexico’s indigenous communities.

In this examination, much attention will be paid to the various organizations and institutions active and impacting Chiapanecan education. As one aspect of this examination, an analysis of the characteristics of formal, institutional, and non-institutional education will be conducted. Using formal education institutions as a starting point, it will be possible to identify which actors are affecting the largest portion of the education system. State agencies such as the Secretaría de Educación Pública (SEP) fall into this category. Along with the SEP in the category of formal federal institutions, is a program known as Oportunidades, working to promote education and reducing the effects of poverty. On another level, there exist organizations such as the Intercultural University of Chiapas, which promotes Indian culture and increased access to higher levels of education by those who belong to the cultural groups traditionally the victims of both formal state and informal social discrimination. In another level, non-governmental
organizations like Innovación y Apoyo Educativo (IAE) can be found working directly in institutional schools by promoting and influencing policies undertaken by formal governmental agencies.

Mostly independent of the aforementioned organizations, non-institutional formal education is conducted by Zapatista communities. Carrying out a self-designed program, the Zapatista movement promotes a model of education emphasizing communal and cultural values which reflect those of the movement’s membership. In this way, they strive to reinforce indigenous culture while advocating for political reforms reflecting social realities and attempting to resolve persistent problems stemming from embedded racial prejudices, both in greater Mexican society and throughout Latin America. Finally, some of these agencies work concurrently at the level of formal education. Moreover, programs like Oportunidades focus on general health and nutritional issues as means to improve living conditions while other organizations, such as Edupaz, focus on bolstering the capacities of indigenous communities to promote economic and social development.

All of the aforementioned actors are affected by a multitude of international agencies and institutions which guide the direction of their efforts as they pertain to education. Primarily serving as donors or lenders, the Mexican education system is influenced by institutions like the World Bank, UNESCO and OEI, with whom the Mexican state has agreements. Further complicating the situation, governmental reforms implemented during the privatization process carried out in accordance with neoliberal policies, part of a regional trend in Latin America, have limited the government’s ability to finance state social policies. As a result, NGOs have acquired a palliative role in
alleviation of the worst effects of neoliberal austerity policies. Most of Latin America has seen non-governmental organizations (NGOs) become increasingly active in the realm of poverty mitigation and development as the state withdrew its resources from social programs. In this manner, foreign entities as distinct as the City of Barcelona, the Finnish Embassy and the Kellogg and Ford Foundations form part of the financing of non-profit private educational programs in Chiapas. This collaboration between the various institutions and organizations has resulted in a complex network which must be navigated when implementing educational reform producing improved quality and simultaneously proposing a comprehensive vision of Chiapanecan society which will empower citizens of the state to conduct individual and community development with the goal of improved quality of life for all.

In carrying out these reforms is important to consider the concept of autonomy. As the main focus of the Zapatista movement, obtaining autonomy can function as a method for strengthening the rights of rural communities, and especially for the promotion of rural and indigenous cultural values. In this way, communities are given a chance to recognize their own needs and develop action plans tailored to their unique social and cultural characteristics, in turn producing more effective outcomes while avoiding the rejection that federal programs have received due to a general mistrust of anything associated with the federal government by indigenous communities. Autonomy is, however, a double-edged sword. As a locally financed plan, autonomy could possibly harm the, typically poor, rural Chapanecan communities while benefitting the more affluent urban communities who are better situated to access financial resources and can
consequently provide higher-quality educational services; in short, serving to exacerbate at the state level the social disparities already in Chiapas society. The danger of replicating the unequal distribution of resources between rural and urban communities may today be affecting the Zapatista communities and influencing the success of their project.

One of the major projects of autonomy enacted by the Zapatista movement, their educational program is defined by a strong and sound ideological base. However, the financial and logistical limits posed by autonomy mean that the process of change takes place at a glacial pace. Even the feedback system between the members of the movement can cause stagnation and fails to evolve even at the same pace as the rest of the society in Chiapas. Therefore, it is important to create a system of autonomy that obligates the federal and state government to equally fund the various educational institutions. Cooperation and communication between proponents of the different educational agendas present in Chiapas today stands out as the best option for the improvement of educational quality throughout the state. Integrating some of the ideas central to the Zapatista education program into the state and NGO administered programs implement education becomes apparent as the best and most feasible path in the creation an education system which empowers indigenous communities and promotes development. While the Zapatista educational program has shown great promise as locally focused and culturally appropriate, the financial hurdles it faces call into question its long-term viability. Conversely, state funded programs are seen as alien to the indigenous residents of Chiapas due to their emphasis on unfamiliar value systems and general mistrust of the
federal government. Only through cooperation between the two parallel systems will Chiapas begin to deconstruct the discriminatory barriers and systemic inequality which have retarded social and economic development in this region of the Mexican nation. If achieved, the success of such an example of cooperation between the various educational actors in Chiapas could well serve as a model for similarly disadvantaged and rural zones throughout the Latin American region.

Literature Review

Several books have been used to construct the argument of this work. An array of academic articles and books has functioned as the resource to study the Mexican and Chiapanecan reality. These works will be grouped according to their argumentative lines. A group of these texts were used to understand the social dynamics of Chiapas, mainly the relationship between Zapatistas and institutional government. Another set of the literature has been used to construct the historical evolution of racial discourse by the institutions of power and the contestation of the indigenous and non-indigenous regional groups. Other works dealing with education principles formed the base to create a proposal to use Zapatista Autonomous Education as the base to construct a new social paradigm in Chiapas and Mexico. In this action, we will summarize the main arguments presented by the works that created the path of analysis followed in this work.

The idea to analyze the different dynamics of education and its relationship with race discrimination on current Chiapas emerged from Developing Zapatista Autonomy by
Niels Barmeyer. In this work, the author presents the competence emerging from different educational approaches between the Zapatista communities and the institutional education. In his work, Barmeyer analyses the process and methods used by the Zapatistas to construct their project of Autonomy. The author assesses the different actors participating in the construction of autonomy, from an international to a local viewpoint. He also looks into the different programs carried out by the Zapatistas. Among other programs, he considers education. During his experience as a volunteer educator, Barmeyer witnessed how people withdraw from the Zapatista movement to be able to allow their children to have access to regular education. The creation of the Oportunidades program, where parents received cash transfers for their children assistance to school motivated some of the members of the rebel movement to abandon their struggle in exchange for a more immediate payback for their children’s education. This case points to the need to address the demand side of education to understand family decision making to move away from their community. However, in this work this case triggered the analysis of the supply of education side. Understanding the educational offer in the state of Chiapas and in a broad sense in Mexico illustrates some of the ideas that resulted in the emergence of the rebel Zapatista movement. It also allows for the study of education and racial discrimination as an ongoing process of power domination. Eventually, this analysis has resulted in the proposal of an educative reform in Chiapas and Mexico to solve the discriminatory nature of the social paradigm.

To produce a historical analysis of racial discourse institutionally produced, with a focus on the evolution of education and the contestation in Chiapas of indigenous and
non-indigenous groups, three main works have been used. These works approach race from a constructivist perspective. They look into the power elites processes of racial discourse creation. Two main works have been used to set the base of the analysis, starting in the colonial period. First, Genealogical Fictions by María Elena Martínez studies the emergence of discourse of purity of blood in colonial Mexico. This study provides an interpretation of the colonial elite process of construction of race discourse. Coming from the peninsular conflict between different religious groups, individuals were classified according to their racial traits. Racial traits were considered to show the moral value of each individual. This was the basic ideology used to construct a racially classified society in colonial Mexico. This organization also attached indigenous population to land and the landowner through the hacienda system. In addition, indigenous people had to be educationally assisted to introduce them into the “true” faith and consequently make those communities acceptable into the social fabric. However, this classification was continued and it takes us today to a racially divided society were indigenous groups generally occupy the lower places of the social scale.

From a similar viewpoint, The Limits of Racial Domination by R. Douglas Cope introduces us to a language of contestation of dominant racial discourses. In his analysis of colonial Mexico City, this author argues that racial identity was manipulated by those who were subjected to discriminatory practices. The construction of racial identity depended on an individual’s social network and on the patronage system that featured colonial Mexican society. Belonging to a group or an economic activity could change the racial status of a person, which could change up to several times in a person’s life. This
process has been considered as one of the first examples of suppressed groups’ agency to define their social status against a dominant racial discourse in the colonial period. It also introduces us to the process of acculturation that would define the later racial discourse of the Mexican leaders.

Focusing on the historical analysis of Chiapas, The Ambivalent Revolution (2005) by Stephen Lewis has been a reference work for its analysis of education in the process of post Mexican Revolution nation construction. This work pays special attention to the politics of education that the central government in Mexico resorted to in order to spread a new national discourse. This process of construction of a new nation after the turmoil of the Mexican Revolution found some rejections in the state of Chiapas. This refusal to accept political measures impose by the federal government through education did not fit the demographic and ideological reality of this marginal state. This work proves that regional politics and a lack of national identity can work to limit social reforms emerging in the center of the nation, shaped by power elites. Here, we find a similar case of indigenous and even non-indigenous agency to contest those measures that attempted to reshape the Chiapanecan landscape, limiting the power of political reforms. This analysis is made in order to understand the Zapatista uprising as part of a historical process of rejection of central power and a continued struggle to create autonomous rule.

Apart from using this historical approach, we have also used several pieces of literature to understand the political situation in Chiapas with special focus on the Zapatista and indigenous issues. First, The Marketing of Rebellion (2005) by Clifford
Bob has a remarkable approach to current rebel movements and provides an analysis of the Zapatista uprising and its social network that provided the main viewpoint used in this work. According to this author, rebel movements have shaped their struggles in a more marketable way to achieve wider support. This approach studies the evolution of rebel identity within the Zapatista movement, evolving from a neo-Marxist approach to an issue of identity. According to this author, this evolution allowed the Zapatistas to find a wider pool of potential supporters, enabling them to construct a highly complex international, national and local network of support. This sustain was a crucial tool to help construct their project of autonomy. Even though the utilitarian analysis of the rebel movements has not been one of the main arguments of this analysis, this work is a very resourceful piece to understand the emergence and evolution of rebel movements, and concretely the Zapatista one.

Other works used to study the process of autonomy construction have come from periodical journals. There are two main articles that have been used as a base for the analysis of autonomy construction due to the special attention paid to Autonomous Education. In Resisting Neoliberal Homogenization (Latin American Perspectives, 2007) by Richard Stahler-Sholk, the Zapatista movement is analyzed in terms of its evolution to construct an project of autonomy. This article argues that the base democracy constructed by this rebel movement has allowed to legitimize and to keep a hold of the decision making project, enabling the movement to become sustainable against the forces of Neoliberalism and globalization. Base democracy is understood as a social and political community organization that reinforces and guarantees the participation of all the
members of the community in the planning and definition of projects and activities concerning the group. In addition, this article argues for the possible reinterpretation of base democracy to allow other movements in Latin America to success in the achievement of similar claims.

Another article reviewed to better understand this process of autonomy construction is ¡Ya Basta! The Zapatista struggle for autonomy revisited (Alternatives, 2008). This article presents the work of Ramor Ryan. This work is divided in two pieces. The first part analyzes the Zapatista project of autonomy and describes it like the realization of an utopia, praising the democratic construction of autonomous government and the Zapatatista’s contribution to world politics as an alternative against the forces of Neoliberalism that spread throughout the world. This work focuses on the indigenous communities’ agency to define political action in their own terms, thus taking a hold of their own destinies that is opened to the world as a political science lesson. The second part of the article provides an interview of the members of the Junta de Buen Gobierno in Morelia in a meeting with international students. In this article, the representatives of the Junta describe the functioning of the community organization and decision making. They describe the different sources of power and the emphasis on a representative democracy that opens room for every voice to participate in the political movement. They also describe how Autonomous Education and Health projects become crucial for the sustainability and continuance of their movement. These two works provide an analysis of the project of autonomy and all the elements required to legitimize and recognize the participants’ opinion for movement guidance. They also recognize the racial limitations
posed by Chiapanecan and Mexican society on indigenous people that became the cause of the rebel uprising and continue to be their main claim.

In order to better understand the implications of Zapatista education, there was a need to study primary sources issued on the internet. One of the main factors that made this movement achieve international recognition and support is their use of internet as a platform to publicize their communiqués. Even though their public activity has been reduced since 2008, there are many documents online that provide an insight into the Zapatista ideology and their educational program. Some of the documents that have been analyzed are the 6th Declaration of the Lancadona Rainforest (2005), where the Zapatistas state their goals to spread their indigenous struggle internationally by means of what is known as “La otra campaña” (the other campaign). Other documents provide a more specific look into education. As part of the “other campaign”, the Zapatista have organized different meetings where other indigenous movements and everyone who believed in this cause was invited. Most of the speeches about education produced in the “Third Meeting of Zapatista Peoples and other Peoples of the World” (2008) can be found on the internet. In the website zeztainternazional.ezln.org.mx we can find some speeches made by mothers and female education promoters. These speeches describe the Zapatista compromise to create an educational system that allows their children to grow in a healthy environment promoting their cultural values and languages and allow them to access to positions of community leadership, unlike the rest of the Chiapanecan society. More information about education has been derived from serazln-altos.org, where the Zapatistas make public the organization of their education and the values promoted in it.
They also offer the possibility of studying Spanish and indigenous languages in their communities to international supporters. These documents are an important resource because they allow the study of primary sources in which the own community members describe their educational system, their autonomous project and their compromise to the indigenous cause throughout the world.

The literary resources described above have focused mainly on the Zapatistas. However, in this work we present a much wider overview of education actors in Chiapas. First, as we have mentioned before, the Oportunidades program stands out as a governmental branch to promote education among the more economically needed communities. To analyze the benefits and limitations of the Oportunidades program there are two main documents that have provided an in-depth look. This conditional cash transfer program has been studied through its 2010 report. This document assesses the activity and the results of the program. It is therefore a very valuable instrument since it is an official document that looks into Oportunidades’ success. Even though this document is issued as an instrument to guarantee transparency and independence from political biases, it lacks a critical perspective. It focuses on Oportunidades success stories, leaving aside many of the problems that the program is unable to address.

In addition, the critique presented in Retos locales de la política social en México (Local challenges of social politics in Mexico) (2009) by Carmen Ávila Jaquez and Mariana Gabarrot Arenas is one of the lines of analysis adopted in this work. These authors looked into the functioning of the program in indigenous communities in Oaxaca. Due to the social and demographic parallelism of the two neighboring states, this article
provides some conclusions that can be valid to understand the program Oportunidades and its limits in Mexico and Chiapas. Its main argument is that Oportunidades clashes with the “usos y costumbres” system of indigenous communities. According to the authors, the impact of the program Oportunidades could be diminishing by incorporating the traditional community organization system into the regional planning of the program. These two works present both sides of the activity of the federal program Oportunidades. They point towards two different dynamics, that combined, provide a fairer analysis of the program.

Finally, in terms of education philosophy, the argument proposed here is that by cooperation between the different actors identified as promoters of education in Chiapas, an educational reform based on some of the principles of the Zapatista Autonomous Education could work a social change to construct a less discriminatory reality. In this work, we identify four authors as the proponents of related education philosophies that allow for the introduction of the Zapatista education into a broader academic education dialogue. John Dewey and Paulo Freire have been some of the most influential international authors in the Mexican context. However, in this work the argument leans more towards the proposals of Myles Horton and David Jardine. These two authors reject the existence of any kind of hierarchy in the education process. Horton argues for education as a tool for social change. Based on an egalitarian dialogue, his participation in the Highlander Folk School has been linked to important social movements in the US, for instance the civil rights movement. This approach seems to be shared by the Chiapanecan NGO Edupaz. On the other hand, the proposal of David Jardine has an
interesting perspective about the role of human beings in a natural environment. His critique of Descartes states that there is not an independent reality to be comprehended, much in line with post modernism and post structuralism. He also adds that the human being is nothing but another member of the natural environment and therefore, there needs to be a horizontal and intertwined relationship among them. This point of view is also present in Mayan cosmology, and shared to some extent by the Zapatista movement and their claim for social equality and cultural respect.

Furthermore, there are other documents referred in this work that will add to the construction of the argument previously stated. This work is an attempt to capture some of the most important dynamics of current Chiapas and, broadly, Mexico. This state provides a very intricate educational environment that represents to some extent what is happening in the rest of the nation. The participation of different actors, local, national and international, in different sectors of education appears as a complex combination providing very different approaches to the topic of education. Moreover, the parallelism between Chiapanecan society and other social dynamics in different parts of the Americas and the world makes this case even more interesting for the possibilities to identify certain factors that can help implement education for social change in post-colonial communities. The results of this work are limited to what is here identified as the supply side of education, the offer of institutional and private organizations. It highlights the importance of a bottom-up approach and the creation of a dialogical context in a horizontal perspective to construct a multicultural society where racial identity does not work as a limit for human development.
Concepts

Indigenous people: the definition of indigenous community used in this work follows the definition proposed by Giulio Girardy as a member of the Permanent Tribunal of the Peoples. According to his proposal, indigenous people are considered as a “collectivity of persons, consciously united by an original community, history, traditions, culture, religion, which is affirmed as cultural, political and economic rightful subject, highlighting first the right to self-determination.” (Ordoñez, 1995) However, there are other factors that define the concept of indigenous people in the framework proposed in this work. Considering the context of Chiapas, indigenous people refers to those individuals that participate of the cultural traditions that are associated with the considered inheritors of the pre-Columbian peoples that inhabited the land that occupies the state of Chiapas nowadays. In addition to this definition, it is essential to understand that these indigenous people have been subjected to discrimination of the institutional government, and they have traditionally conformed the agricultural labor. This discriminated situation resulted in the Zapatista uprising in 1994. Because this is a grassroots movement with a mainly indigenous composition, it is also important to consider how they define themselves. According to the 6th declaration of the Selva Lancandona, “the Zapatistas are almost all pure indigenous from Chiapas, who do not want to fight just for their own good or the good of the indigenous people in Chiapas, but for or just for the good of the Indians from Mexico, instead we fight together with all the
humble and simple people like us and who have great need and suffer from exploitation and robbery from the riches and bad governments here in Mexico and in other countries” (EZLN, 2005, 1). This definition is also considered because it adds to the complexity of race and social class that we find in Chiapas. Nevertheless, indigenous people will still refer to those who belong to a cultural tradition made up of languages belonging to the Mayan family, like Tzotil, Tseltal and Cho’ol, and of religious syncretism combining Mayan and Catholic religion, whose economic activity has traditionally been linked to agriculture. This economic criterion is not an absolute one since Chiapas is populated by indigenous people who participate in other economic sectors, like commerce, transportation or more academically qualified positions. There is not a geographical criterion either because the indigenous people that inhabit Chiapas are the result of migration movements from Guatemala and different territories in Mexico. Therefore, indigenous people is a very complex term that refer mainly to those groups of population in Chiapas who find an institutionalized system that does not integrate their culture and poses a higher complexity to the education process due to their cultural background.

Autonomy: this concept is used in this work to define a system of government that promotes indigenous people access to the community leadership positions and therefore focuses on identifying the needs of the community. This concept is derived from the Zapatistas project of autonomy, which focuses on providing everything that the community needs, independently from the federal and state government. Therefore, they are focusing on constructing a governmental, judicial and economic system together with welfare resources, mainly health and education. Nevertheless, the proposal of autonomy
presented in this work is also defined as “non-dual autonomy”. This classification is taken from Gustavo Esteva’s classification of different concepts of autonomy. Therefore, autonomy here is understood as non-dualist, “pluriuniversalist and inclusive (…), each person and each culture are centers of themselves, with their own vision of the world, but admitting the existence of other centers, and the possibility to join according to a superior factor to all those agglutinated by a common dialogue.” (Esteva, 1995, 21) Even though the Zapatista movement seems to behave in a dualist way by absolutely rejecting collaboration with the state or any other institution or organization in contact with the institutional government, their definition of identity addresses issues of class and social status as well as ideological, comprehending a wide part of the population in the Americas and around the world. This makes this definition of autonomy suit the proposal of autonomy for Chiapas that is being used in this work.

When talking about racial discrimination, this work starts from the premise that race is a social construction. This concept of social construction is based on the analysis proposed by R. Douglas Cope and Maria Elena Martínez. In this work, race is therefore conceived as a social category. Discrimination in terms of race in current Chiapas is defined by the practices carried out by the different governments and institutions that place a limit to those coming from non-ladino or mestizo background. For instance, the official use of Spanish in public education is detrimental for those whose first language is an indigenous one. This will be one of the mains racial discriminatory practices referred in this text. These definitions allow for a more accurate understanding of the critical analysis presented in this thesis.
CHAPTER 1: ANALYSIS OF DATA ON INDIGENOUS PEOPLE IN MEXICO AND CHIAPAS

This section presents a survey of statistical data illustrating the features of Mexican demographics, education, social mobility, etc. The analysis will demonstrate to the reader the harsh reality of inequality in Mexico. The majority of the information presented in this section evidences the disparity of opportunity that exists between the respective areas of the Mexican Federal District and the rural state of Chiapas. Usually rating among the highest regions in terms of social indicators in the country, Mexico D.F. can be characterized as a developed urban zone. This relative urban prosperity contrasts with the poor ratings of Chiapas in terms of social indicators. Given that Chiapas is characterized by a rural population with large indigenous communities comprising most of the rural sector. A look into education statistics compellingly reveals a parallel between the dynamism of the economy of the urban core and higher rates of schooling, financial assistance, and eventual graduation. Conversely, Chiapas usually falls near the lowest positions of the education indicators in the country. Given the characteristics of its population, this analysis affirms that the Mexican state fails to successfully integrate its rural and indigenous communities. Low rates of human development and educational success point to a lack of governmental reach into rural and indigenous communities. This is reflected in lower levels of economic development, low rates of educational attainment, lower rates of social mobility, etc. The centralization of the Mexican political discourse and focus, being addressed mainly to the ladino population, results in indigenous communities’ low standard of living. These unpleasant realities, in
conjunction with the long history of institutional racial discrimination as examined in the coming chapter, testify to the continued racist behavior of the Mexican state. The lack of integration of indigenous population into national politics has resulted from and reinforces a highly racialized and discriminatory society, which fails to provide of a sufficient portion of state resources to rural and indigenous populations for them improve their living standards while continuing to respect to their own identity as native cultures. This reality in mind, education stands out as a highly effective tool for the empowerment of indigenous populations and for triggering autonomous development. Education can serve as a viable method for the integration the indigenous communities of Mexico into a truly multicultural society and enable them to develop and implement the programs to achieve a higher standard of living.

Today’s Mexico is the third most populated country in the Americas. With a population of 113,724 million in 2011 and showing population growth of 1.8% in 2010 (Fig. 1), Mexico has continued to see a moderately high rate of population growth since 2000. In 2010, 14,172,483 million Mexicans are considered to be of indigenous heritage, the equivalent of about a 12% of the total national population. Out of the 12% of the total population who are of indigenous descent, 1,546,949 million live in Chiapas. This means that Chiapas is home to approximately 10% of the total national indigenous population.
Figure 1. Total of the Mexican population per year (represented in millions)

Source: http://www.conapo.gob.mx/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=149&Itemid=14

Figure 2. Evolution of Poverty Rates.

Source: Harry Anthony Patrinos. LASA 2008
Figure 2, above, illustrates that the problem of poverty is more acute for the indigenous population of Mexico. The figure shows both the high rates of poverty in Mexico and the disparate poverty rates based on the racial and cultural identity of the population subsets. As the figure clearly shows, approximately 90% of the indigenous population is considered to be living in poverty. It is also important to point out that there has been nearly no perceptible change in rate of poverty for indigenous people between 1992 and 2002, following some fluctuation during the 1990s. “For the vast majority of the indigenous population, however, there has been little change in their poverty status. Indigenous peoples remain as poor as they were in early 1990s” (Patrinos, 2008, 17). Even though there seems to be a modest reduction (5%) of poverty for the non-indigenous population, decreasing from 50% in 1992 to about a 45% in 2002, the effect that racial and cultural identity have on social and economic status is undeniable. According to this figure, the chances of being poor for an indigenous family are twice than of their non-indigenous peers. Even more alarming, the gap between indigenous and non-indigenous population seems to be widening.

Additionally, Figure 2 offers a thought-provoking analysis of the effects of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) on the Mexican population. The fluctuation in poverty indicated between 1994 and 2000 corresponds with the first years of NAFTA’s implementation, as the year 1994 marked the beginning of the free trade agreement between Mexico, US and Canada. This agreement was intended to revitalize the Mexican agricultural sector with the privatization of Ejidos. This reform was carried
out by an amendment of Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution, which was supposed to increase the productivity of *ejido* land motivating private investment. This measure required a set of supplementary procedures to provide poor rural communities the means to carry out that investment. However, considering that the poverty rates have remained more or less the same as they were before NAFTA, Figure 2 seems to point to the failure of NAFTA to translate into a real improvement of the living standards for the Mexican population. All free trade agreements (FTA) require the implementation of a set of specifically designed policies with the aim of maximizing the potential inflow of revenues due to amplified rates of international trade. Such measures should be designed to address the needs of national infrastructures, taxation rates, and significant social measures. Improvement of infrastructure helps to maximize the possibilities of national participation in the international marketplace. A reform of the taxation system is necessary to formalize the economy and allow the state to increase the resources available for investment in the expanded coverage and improvement of social services. These services are the key for the dispersion of any economic benefits resulting from an FTA into the broader base of the population. Education, health, unemployment, etc. are areas in which the government should focus its attack to reduce the intergenerational levels of poverty and systemic inequality. Therefore, this Figure 2 implicates two important points: Firstly, the gap between levels of poverty for indigenous and non-indigenous people in Mexico continues to be substantial, reaching nearly 90% for indigenous people both in 1992 and 2002. Secondly, the implementation of NAFTA in 1994 seems to have provoked some fluctuation in the rates of poverty. However, these
fluctuations seem to have stabilized by 2002, leaving the population with similar rates of poverty, both for the indigenous and non-indigenous sector.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Human Development Indicators</th>
<th>Mexican Republic</th>
<th>Chiapas</th>
<th>Distrito Federal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Literacy on people 15 years old or over (%)</td>
<td>90.5</td>
<td>77.1</td>
<td>97.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People going to school between 4 and 25 years old (%)</td>
<td>62.8</td>
<td>57.0</td>
<td>69.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy Index</td>
<td>0.905</td>
<td>0.771</td>
<td>0.971</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Registration Index</td>
<td>0.628</td>
<td>0.570</td>
<td>0.698</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schooling Level Index</td>
<td>0.813</td>
<td>0.704</td>
<td>0.880</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP Index per capita</td>
<td>0.721</td>
<td>0.584</td>
<td>0.864</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Development Index</td>
<td>0.791</td>
<td>0.693</td>
<td>0.871</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relative Position in the State</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: http://www.conapo.gob.mx/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=149&Itemid=14
The table above shows a comparison of indexes and percentages on Human Development issues. The data shown provides information to conduct a comparison between the levels of development existing between different Mexican regions and the nation as a whole. Table 1 clearly demonstrates the differences that exist between Mexico DF and Chiapas, which are first and last, respectively, in national human development indices. The Index of Human Development reaches 0.871 in Mexico D.F., while Chiapas rates only 0.693. This discrepancy shows the level of inequality existing between regions of the country. In 2007, Mexico had a GINI coefficient of 50.9 according to the World CIA Report 2009. This shows that the dichotomy between rural and urban development that can be generalized for the rest of the country. Chiapas, as rural state, always falls under the average line.

These Human Development indicators are particularly focused upon education. Educational attainment is an important marker for understand the level of social development of a given population group. The various markers indicate the rates of literacy, schooling, etc. The markers show what type of human development exists in the respective regions due to the fact that in accordance with the level of education attained, people generally have access to better jobs with higher incomes and are consequently more capable of improving their quality of life. As has been demonstrated, the gap existing between the two regions analyzed affirms the levels of inequality in Mexico. This can be further explained by one of the non-education indexes in the table. The GDP Index per capita ranges from 0.871 in Mexico DF to 0.693 in Chiapas. The importance
with education is that the lower rates in Chiapas mean that this tendency of inequality will continue as long as these indicators reflect such distinct socio-economic situations.

One of the main contributors to such inequality has shown in Table 1 is that education, in terms of text books, curriculum, language, etc. has been designed for urban communities. This, together with other political and historical issues, makes education less appropriate and meaningful to rural and indigenous society and therefore weaker in rural areas of Chiapas. A clear indication of this fact is that while Chiapas has 77% literate population, residents of Mexico D.F. are 97% literate. Schooling and registration indexes follow this unbalanced trend. Respectively, the Schooling Index in Mexico D.F. is 0.88 while in Chiapas it is 0.67. In the case of the Registration Index, Mexico D.F. rates at 0.698 and Chiapas at 0.57, with the national average coming in at 0.628. The final indicator to communicate the inequality which exists between these two Mexican regions is the percentage of people attending formal schooling between the ages of 4 and 25 years. While in Mexico D.F. 69.8% of the population in this cohort is studying, only 57% does so in Chiapas. This is yet another example of the greater opportunities to attend school afforded the population in Mexico D.F. and, consequently, the higher cost associated in the Chiapanecan society to opt for scholastic attendance. All these markers together prove inequitably that inequality exists in Mexico and affects many areas, from family income to educational attainment. The fact that it is affecting levels education forebodes that this tendency will continue into the foreseeable future if the status quo remains unaltered.
Table 2. Literacy rates in Mexico

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GENDER</th>
<th>AGE</th>
<th>AREA</th>
<th>Percentage of illiterate population</th>
<th>Illiteracy rate - Indigenous</th>
<th>Illiteracy Rate - Non-Indigenous</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>15 - 24</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Both Areas</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25 - 49</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Both Areas</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>50 - more</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>32</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Both Areas</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total (15+)</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Both Areas</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>15 - 24</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Both Areas</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25 - 49</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Both Areas</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>50 - more</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>48</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Both Areas</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>27</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total (15+)</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>31</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 2 analyzes the relationship present between population area, gender, age and indigenous identity and their effect on literacy rates in Mexico. This study is highly relevant to the subject of this paper because it attests to the fact that a host of characteristics can affect an individual’s access to educational opportunity. The table above shows that there is apparent equality between gender and literacy in non-
indigenous person for the age group falling between 15 and 24 years. However, this is the only sector of society where such parity can be found. The rest of the chart shows that illiteracy is highly unevenly distributed and is extremely prevalent in rural indigenous communities, especially affecting the female population of such regions. Age stands out as another important factor influencing literacy rates, with older populations, not surprisingly, having lower levels of literacy. The highest rates of illiteracy are therefore found in rural women of 50 or more years old, where the rate of illiteracy is 81 percent. In contrast, the same group in non-indigenous communities shows an illiteracy rate of only 48 percent. In the case of men, the dichotomy between rural versus urban literacy in the group ranging over 50 years old is respectively 52 percent versus 32 percent. These rates are extremely high, confirming that a huge portion of indigenous people born before 1950 were illiterate.

On a more positive note, in Table 2 it can be see that rates of illiteracy decrease for younger generations, though there continue to be disparities between population area, gender, and indigenous identity. While it has been mentioned that some equality between genders exists in the age group of 15 to 24 for non-indigenous people, there is still a sizable difference between indigenous people and their non-indigenous peers and between genders. Thus, while urban illiteracy for this age group in non-indigenous population stands at two percent for both genders, for indigenous people it jumps to 7 and 11 percent for males and females in the same group, respectively. These numbers continue to increase if we look at the rural population in the same age group. In the case of non-indigenous communities, it rates 6 percent, while for indigenous communities it
respectively reaches 12 and 22 percent for males and females. Considering that the 15 to 24 year old age cohort of the population is just being integrated in the market system, having a female indigenous rural 22 percent rate of illiteracy represents a dramatic failure of the educational system in rural areas. Considering that the Mexican Constitution of 1917 recognized the right of all citizens to free public education, it seems that there remains much work to be done in this area.

The figures presented in the above charts support the argument that the Mexican Revolution did not succeed in breaking down the barriers for social mobility based on gender, as set in place by pre-Columbian civilizations, and on race by the colonial power of imperial Spain. Moreover, rural communities have been traditionally linked with the indigenous population which corresponds to areas where illiteracy is higher. The low population density of rural communities, the lack of infrastructure, and a state that never truly penetrated such communities in terms of services are all reasons why such rates are remain at elevated levels. This study points out that social groups in rural regions are more vulnerable and have less access to education which in turn constrains their possibility to move up the socio-economic ladder to improve their living standards.

Considering that Chiapas is characterized by high levels of rural indigenous people, it can be understood that race and class have and continue to function as barriers to human development from state intervention. Being that the statistical data on indigenous education acutely points to patterns of inequality as observed between Mexico D.F. and Chiapas, a parallel pattern is visible between ladino and indigenous people in the state of Chiapas. Traditionally, these groups are respectively associated to the urban
and rural areas and therefore some, in this case the rural indigenous peoples, have less access to institutional resources in order to change this reality. An analysis of literacy, found below in Figure 3, serves to further demonstrate the correlation in illiteracy rates found between rural vs. urban and indigenous vs. ladino population.

*Figure 3.* Literacy Index for indigenous and non-indigenous population by federal entity, 2000

The above figure analyzes the literacy rate for indigenous and non-indigenous populations, classified by state. The figure illustrates that Chiapas rates as the Mexican state with the highest average illiteracy. However, it is interesting to note that this does
not imply that there is a large illiterate ladino population, since the literacy rate for the ladino population is higher than the in the state with an index of illiteracy lower than that of Chiapas as a whole. However, the discrepancy is apparent in the indigenous population, which represents 29 percent of the total for the state, and its correspondingly low literacy rate of only 60 percent. It is also important to note that this inequality follows a similar pattern in the rest of the states; Guerrero remains the most serious case with a literacy rate of little more than 50 percent of the indigenous population. These indicators show that indigenous education is a pressing issue for Mexico. Each state must make an effort to correct this imbalance, most especially those in which a large percentage of the populace is indigenous. Only by carrying out a reform in which special emphasis is placed on the indigenous population, educational institutions, and the training of well-qualified personnel can a more equitable society be achieved.

As has been shown thus far, belonging to an indigenous cultural group, along with factors such as gender and age, affects the educational opportunities of Mexican citizens. In addition, educational possibilities are directly connected to the social mobility of the individual and his or her family. Education is one of the central factors that bring about greater social mobility in any environment. In the case of Mexico, social mobility can be studied according to factors such as education and indigenous identity. These factors appear again as determinants for social mobility of the Mexican population. Most decisively, belonging to an indigenous group limits access to education. Furthermore, the low levels of scholastic attendance and generally poor quality of education, especially in the rural sectors associated with indigenous communities, reduces opportunities for
upward mobility. Thus, we can say that although not to an absolute extent, indigenous identity affects the possibilities of accessing quality education. Moreover, educational attainment greatly affects career opportunities and the chance of improving quality of life. This sad reality is the result of what has previously been recognized as a weakness of the Mexican state in its attempts to foster integration in indigenous communities and incorporate them into the national system.

In the analysis of the relationship between education and social mobility provided by Serrano and Torche (2010), social mobility is defined as "non-dependence between the initial position of an individual (or household) in the distribution of income and its final position" (p. 136). The authors recognize the value of the impact that education has over social mobility. Education provides individuals with the resources to take advantage of further business opportunities offered by the system. In this way, education provides access to jobs with higher incomes and, consequently, greater access to resources which can provide a better quality of life. Thus, a household with higher income moves on from focusing on solely on subsistence because it has already been guaranteed. Children belonging to this type of household are not obligated to participate in the production process, have more chances to engage in study, and thus continue the process of upward social mobility. In the case of poor households, the cost of engaging in education is much higher than in the previous hypothetical example. This means lower chances for children to attend school or even for parents to have access to job training courses that could develop their resources and increase the possibility of accessing a higher income, with all the positive consequences that this situation could bring.
Unlike income, which has no technical limit, education is generally a resource with a ceiling. This upper limit is usually 18 years of schooling. This affects the groups that reach higher levels of education. The educational status of parents and grandparents often produces a similar or higher level of attainment in subsequent generations. Conversely, a problem arises when the opposite tendency is observed; low levels of educational attainment also limits the achievement of higher levels of education in subsequent generations. As it has previously been noted that the highest illiteracy rates belong to the indigenous population, particularly rural women, it can be understood that these groups reappear as having the most serious obstacles to ascending the social ladder through education.

Table 3. Social Mobility according to parents’ educative achievement

Table 3 serves to demonstrate the matrix of educational social mobility in Mexico as it corresponds to parental education. The table is organized so that according to the educational attainment of parents, one can observe the different groups in which children are classified. In this way, the level of generational educational mobility becomes apparent. The table shows the trends numerically. In the case of parents without educational instruction, children often continue in that position, many gaining no education (20.1 percent). Most children move up one level on the scale, with 56.3 percent of the children of uneducated parents have received primary education. Still, only 2.6% of the second generation reaches higher education. In the case of parents who had achieved primary education, their children are distributed mainly among the same level of education (37.3 percent) or a higher level (29.5 percent). However, there exists a group that has reached a step toward higher education, although small in number (10.9 percent higher, 0.9 percent graduate). For parents who have reached secondary education cycles and secondary school, the next generation is mostly concentrated at secondary level or in a higher one. In the case of parents with only high school education, a large percentage of their children achieve higher education, at 38.5 percent. Finally, for parents with higher education (higher and postgraduate) it is demonstrated that their children are concentrated mainly at the same levels or sometimes one lower for those with postgraduate holding parents. This particular case, 81 percent of children studied to the upper level, with 59.9 percent in the case of parents with higher education.
This analysis of the relationship between educational attainment of parents and their children allows for a better understanding the dynamics of intergenerational educational mobility. In Table 3 it becomes clear that at the lower levels, parents with no education or primary education, and middle levels, secondary and high school education, the second generations, respectively, tend to concentrate in the next highest level of attainment. However, in cases of first generations with higher or postgraduate educations, their offspring usually remain in the same group or one lower for the group in which the first generation has completed postgraduate studies. This is indicative of the inherent limitations of education as a source of social mobility. As noted above, education is different than income in that there is a ceiling in the formal education system. This trend can be considered somewhat positive; it shows there is a relative degree of social mobility associated with education and, even among those who have attained the highest educational level, their children often maintained the same level in the following generation. However, if the parallel expansion of the scope of education is considered, it can be concluded that this progress does necessarily not mean social progress because it keeps maintaining the cycles of poverty and marginalization. Less educated individuals tend to produce lower levels of education of the next generation. Therefore, it can be understood that they have not broken any trends present in the first generation. This means that education as factor influencing social mobility in Mexico is quite limited, since children most often to reach the same level or a similar position in relation to their parents. Therefore, Mexico and its educational system appear to be ineffective when it comes to broadening the utility of education to create a just and equal system in which all
individuals have the freedom and ability to access education as a path to improve their job opportunities and, correspondingly, increase their standard of living and quality of life.

Figure 4. Changes on income ascribable to education change according to fathers’ schooling.

Despite the negative trend observed in Figure 4, found above, it is important to recognize that some progress has been made in increased income as a product of higher levels of education. According to Serrano Espinosa and Torche (2010) and the author’s analysis of the correlation between higher education and the increase in income as compared from an intergenerational perspective, it is observable that the economic
sectors most impacted by revenue growth are those with lower levels of education. As such, it is evidenced that there is a positive correlation between more schooling and increased earning. The increase, usually of one level in the education system, affects in an impressive manner the descendants of those who received no education or simply a primary education.

The first two groups depicted in Table 4 saw an average of 25 percent in increased income for the second generation, reaching 36.1 percent and 32.9 percent in children with no parents or whose education was primary. For parents who had completed secondary or high school, the wage increase was smaller than in the previously discussed groups. For the children of those who obtained secondary education, there is an average increase of 18.5 percent in salary. The children of those who attended high school saw their salary increase by 4.36 percent. Finally, because of the ceiling in educational attainment mentioned in the previous paragraphs, the children of those who obtained postgraduate degrees, of whom approximately 90 percent were in a lower level than their parents, tend to see reduced earnings of an average 16.8 percent. This is the only instance in which negative earnings change was shown in the data. However, the fact that 81 percent of the children whose parents had received postgraduate degrees fall into the classification with higher education indicates that the real effect on daily life may not be as deep as it appears, seeing as they stay within the relatively higher income groups at the national level. These figures indicate that intergenerational systemic inequality still exists as a pressing social reality in Mexican society and that, as indicated
in Table 2 and Figure 3, such inequality frequently follows racially and class-based patterns of replication.

Thus, indigenous and rural groups in Mexico are nearly always exposed to greater socio-economic vulnerability than their urban and non-indigenous peers. The positive effect produced by education on personal income causes it to stand out as a priority in family decision making. Providing new generations with education, even at the most basic levels, often delivers tangible benefits to the recipients of said education. It is for this reason that education it among the most important factors that influence social mobility and functions as a key instrument to the construction of equal societal opportunities. Still, the reality that evolution tends to follow a parallel structure, leaving those of the lower strata in a perpetually vulnerable position, poses limits to the positive effects of schooling. Therefore, at present, educational reform must identify such need and propose a new system that facilitates and encourages the integration and development of a multicultural and egalitarian society, promotes the progressive development of society, and allows for the deconstruction of intergenerational poverty and systemic inequality.

In this chapter we have analyzed several sources of data that show beyond a doubt that inequality and patterns of poverty are present in today’s Mexico. As we observed in the analysis of human development and literacy, the social groups having lower indices are the indigenous populations. In the state of Chiapas, these indices reach some of the most severe levels, positioning the state as having the highest rates of illiteracy along with the lowest rates of human development. These characteristics place the state of
Chiapas in a critical position. As home of one of the highest percentages of indigenous people of all Mexican states, the Chiapas has an acute need to expand access to education and to promote human development among the poorest and most rural of its citizenry. By doing so, the state will be able to induce social and economic development and become an exemplary model for other Mexican states with similar populations and economic conditions, namely Oaxaca and Guerrero.

As outlined in the analysis of social mobility included in the preceding paragraphs, education in Mexico functions as a catalyst for increased earning potential between generations. However, there exists a correlation between increases in educational attainment and greater income that ultimately reproduces the pattern of inequality and poverty existing in Mexico. This is evident in the figure representing poverty rates in Mexico. The figure shows how there also exists a parallel between poverty and indigenous identity. Hence, as education has been identified as key factor in the promotion of social mobility, it is important that education be promoted within indigenous communities. Nevertheless, as we will see in the following chapter, there have been several failed attempts by the federal government to advance education in indigenous communities. This failure was oftentimes the result of a flaw in the educational methodology, mainly that of the imposition of an education system that was not well designed to fulfill the needs of indigenous communities. This inadequacy provoked the rejection of different programs attempting to integrate indigenous communities into mainstream Mexican society. For this reason it is important to consider the development of autonomous education as proposed by the Zapatistas in Chiapas,
whose education program was born of and focuses upon indigenous communities. It is through such a system that education can be used to promote human development and social mobility while simultaneously addressing racialized patterns of poverty in rural Mexico.
In this section, a historical and historic educational analysis of the relations between racial institutional discourses and their effect at social level will be conducted, with a specific focus on the institutional use of education for the promotion of national racial discourse. From a historical perspective, race is currently defined by academics as a social construction. Traditionally, the term race has been used to identify a set of physical and cultural characteristics and in certain periods of history also moral and existential traits, at times even defining some peoples as less than human. According to the delimitations carried out in accordance with this racial approach, different social constructions have been created. A good example is the colonial society of New Spain, or modern-day Mexico. Institutional classification of racial and ethnic traits revealed a thorough system of social analysis and social institutionalization of diversity emerging in the colonial context. This use of race as an instrument for social division was carried out in a unique way by the Spanish colonial power, marking it as a very particular colonial system. This difference can additionally be seen as one of the reasons why Latin American social organization has followed a particular course, distinct from other post-colonial territories.

Praise for the figure of the *mestizo* and the "cosmic race" as the fate and future of Latin American societies has resulted in a racial discourse unparalleled in the post-colonial world. In particular, the figure of Vasconcelos in Mexico is vital to
understanding the indigenous discourse adopted by the government in the first three decades of the twentieth century, and specifically by the SEP. Thus we can see the important connection between history and historical analysis of racial discourse and educational institutions to understanding the prevalence of discriminatory racial discourses in today’s Mexico.

Firstly, the historical analysis allows us to understand the evolution of the negotiation of racial discourse throughout the history of Mexico, first as a colony and later as an independent state. Secondly, educational historical analysis allows us to better comprehend the effects of institutional policies and their impact on indigenous peoples through education. Using the classification criteria proposed by Antonio Novoa, the history of education can be grouped into four blocks: actors, practices, ideas, and finally, institutions and educational systems. In this case, the analysis focuses on the fourth group, institutions and educational systems, but is also related to theories, suggestions and ideas. This approach to the history of education has been chosen because it allows for “capturing more fully the relationship of education with social change and continuity through its focus as a place of conflict in facing various interests and social forces. It is the space (...) where the confrontation takes place between theory and practice, between what is proposed, what is legislated and what is done (...) where it is possible to analyze (...) the educational reform and innovation, origin, diffusion and adaptation and effects” (Viñao, 2002, 245). The history of education is now “open, in interdisciplinary expansion” according to the same author. This makes it possible to conduct a study of the use of racial discourse in Mexican society, and more specifically, the racial discourse in
education as a means of building society and relations between the various social sectors which comprise the national project.

Furthermore, in this chapter a constructivist analysis of race relations in contemporary Mexico, as well as the colonial and independence eras, will be employed. The educational institutional discourse on race relations and indigenous identity allows us to understand the current dynamics as part of an evolutionary process of negotiation between the ruling elites and indigenous peoples. Education is thus defined as an instrument for the creation of social systems. It forms part of the relationship between newer and older generations that allow new members integrate into existing systems. However, in the case of the human being, education can be measured also as a tool to transform an emerging system. Understanding education in these terms, we will overview the evolution and transformation of the racial discourse of discrimination in Mexico.

Historical Analysis

Starting with the colonization of the American continent in the 16th century, racial discourses have been used by dominant powers as an instrument for social control in Latin America. Notions of race were employed in Latin America by the Iberian colonizers and subsequent Creole elite to shape a social hierarchy that classified people according to artificial and subjective racial categories. Outward physical appearance and cultural heritage were recognized as markers of race throughout the region. However, the diverse racial mixtures which emerged in Latin America resulted in highly complex social stratification based on the origins and appearance of the individual. During the
colonial period, each racial and ethnic categorization in the hierarchy was accompanied by a series of rights and duties. These categories, along with the racialized language developed by the Iberian elite, survived into the post-colonial period. Discrimination promoted by colonial institutions and the lack of political enfranchisement of certain groups in the colonial period have proven powerful legacies, enduring long after independence was achieved in the 19th century. Nevertheless, post-colonial Latin America has seen the development of a variety of discourses concerning the integration of mestizo and indigenous communities and their heritages. The liberal Creole elites emerging throughout the 19th century created their own concept of nation state that, in the case of Mexico, evolved in the 20th century to eulogize the figure of the mestizo that was previously condemned by the Spanish colonial power. This new approach responded to the necessity of the state to recognize and validate the racial identity of the majority of the population.

It is, therefore, necessary to understand the historical racial dynamics of the country to comprehend the contemporary use of racial and ethnic identity in social movements, such as the Zapatista movement, affecting national politics and the lives of millions of Mexicans. Additionally, there will be an examination of the use of racial discourses by oppressed groups in the fight to achieve greater liberties and contest the status quo.
Colonial Period

Racial discourses in Mexico emerged in the 16\textsuperscript{th} century and reached the zenith of its complexity in the 17\textsuperscript{th} century. Racial discourse refers to the construction of a definition of race based on external appearance. Definitions of race were used to classify the population. Ascribing racial categories to the population automatically endowed a legal framework that defined a set of rights and duties particular to each racial group. The Spanish Crown constructed a complex categorization of the population according to cultural and phenotypical features. These divisions stemmed from the dual organization of the population between the \textit{República de los españoles} and the \textit{República de los indios}. These two categories divided the society into two: the Spaniards, who could trade with the metropolis and carry out administrative roles; and the Indians, who were attached to communal lands by means of the \textit{hacienda} and \textit{mayorazgo} system and had to pay taxes for those land rights. Slavery added a third institution based on race. Slaves provided a supplementary input of labor force after the indigenous population decreased because of exploitation, wars and diseases. The mixture of those original race groups completed the picture of what became the social composition of colonial Mexico. Put in John Gibler’s words, “the period of the conquest and the establishment of New Spain created a strict order of social classes: men born in Spain ruled, men born in the Americas of Spanish parents could engage in the social world of commerce and local governance, men born of mixed parents could serf in the lower strata of the social world, and men born of indigenous parents were enslaved or forced to be serfs” (Gibler, 2009, 6). In
addition, the fluidity of identity definitions that this complex system introduced allowed for social mobility between racial categories. This social mobility occurred because it permitted access to different economic activities.

Based on ideas of *pureza de sangre* and *calidad*, the Spaniards defined the moral value of individuals according to their external appearance. The criterion formalized in the *sistema de castas*, however, enabled the population to subscribe to different racial categories throughout their lifetime. In fact, R. D. Cope affirms that race was defined to some extent by social network. The racial category of a person´s family, friends, economic activity, etc. influenced the definition of an individual´s racial category. Therefore, these relationships allowed for modification or alteration of racial identity.

Thus, from the 16th to the 18th century, Mexico experienced a demographic transformation that resulted in the creation of the two *Republicas, el sistema de castas*, and the introduction of slavery of African people. The hegemonic ideology developed from religious conflicts in the Iberian Peninsula resulted in a very complex categorization of the population according to race, understood as external appearance and cultural heritage. The racial categorization was based on a system of values that implied that external appearance demonstrated the moral value of the person. This system resulted in the appearance of a language related to “*calidad*” (quality). This language reflected the importance of appearance in terms of racial traits, but also the use of the body as an image of the social status and, therefore, social status. The *sistema de castas* created a very complex social tissue highly dependent on external look to judge the moral “value” of a person.
In terms of education, the Catholic Church exerted a strong influence in the definition of racial discourse during the colonial period. The Church performed the role of educational institution with focus on evangelization. Indigenous communities were taught the principles of Christianity. The most important religious orders in New Spain were the Franciscans, Dominicans, and Augustinians. Other religious orders were also present, such as the Carmelites and Mercedarios. In the case of Chiapas, the Dominicans had a relevant argument about the pedagogical and evangelizer role of the Church and the practices developed. Fray Bartolomé de las Casas denounced the abuse and torture of indigenous peoples. Among other important characters of note is the figure of Bernardino de Sahagún, who learned Nahua and translated religious texts into indigenous languages in order to make the evangelization and education process more effective. Nevertheless, as it was in Europe, eventually the Jesuits arrived to New Spain to fulfill the role of educators in the “True Faith” and Western “civilization.” Whether or not they were more benevolent in terms of the abuses committed on the indigenous population, these religious missionaries carried the air of superiority of Western civilization in their bones and brought about a radical transformation of the pre-Columbian cultural, social, political and religious values with the imposition of those reigning in Europe at the time.

Even though religious education played an important role in the colonial period, in the 18th century new secular schools were already emerging. The expulsion of the Jesuits and the centralist reforms of the new Spanish dynasty, the Bourbons, changed the configuration of the educational paradigm in New Spain and opened the path for the further introduction of liberal ideas on education. “In mid-18th century, most primary
schools located in the Spanish towns and cities were run by private teachers (...). In the capital, only two religious orders had schools, the Betlehemitas and the Mercedarios, since the Jesuits were expelled in 1767” (Tanck de Estrada, 2002, 261).

The accomplishment of independence and the influence of liberal ideas changed the role of the Church in Mexican society. Confiscation of lands belonging to the Church also undermined the institution’s power and reduced their political influence on society. However, the role of the Catholic Church in Mexico continued to be highly important, as demonstrated by in the figure of Padre Miguel Hidalgo and the role he played in the fight for Mexican independence, as well as the use of the Virgin of Guadalupe as a national symbol.

Independence and Post-Independence Period (1810 – 1910)

Independence achieved between 1810 and 1821, created a new discourse on race, fruit of the various interpretations of national identity which attempted to make sense of the demographic makeup of the country. “Through the 1810 War of Independence and the Mexican Revolution of 1910-1920, the racial and sex based divisions of power were slowly cracked and recast as class divisions (although race and sex still haunted)” (Gibler, 2009, 6). The period from Independence in 1810 to the beginning of the Mexican Revolution can be divided into two eras. First, a series of governments characterized by their instability, were tasked with developing a definition for the nascent Mexican nation. Unlike other areas of the former Spanish colonies in the Americas, Mexico managed to
maintain control over most of the territory that was delimited as national territory following independence, against the regionalist claims of the rival states. This hold on the territory against localized claims for autonomy is relative considering that Mexico lost almost half of its northern territory to the US in the Mexican-American War (1846-1848). The difference is on the internal and external forces that provoked changes on the delimitations of the territory. On the other hand, between 1876 and 1911, Mexico achieved greater stability and robust economic growth. Porfirio Díaz’s government is characterized by an embrace of the principles of economic liberalism and social positivism. Thus, trade barriers were lowered and foreign investment flowed into Mexico to provide the capital that was destroyed during the multiple fights taking place in the territory in the preceding period. During the years of the Porfiriato, a new socioeconomic reality was constructed in Mexico, albeit not a positive change for all Mexicans.

The first period in the 19th century is characterized by the infighting between Conservatives and Liberals. Conservatives belonged to the old landowning elite, the army, and the church, groups that had been traditionally closely related to the Spanish Crown and who had at the beginning of the 19th century proposed the creation of a monarchy or a republican state that replicated the colonial order. To the contrary, liberals proposed a new state in which citizenship was extended to every citizen, state and the Church were separated, and capitalism became the new economic system. Although during the first half of the 19th century the conservatives maintained control of national power, by the second half of the century the liberal opposition had gained solid control of the system. However, liberalism did not set deep roots in Mexico. Positivism provided a
more comprehensive approach for the national elites to implement economic liberalism while maintaining the colonial social structure mostly unchanged. Thus, Mexico focused on producing raw materials which were then exported to the US and Europe to supply the needs of the Industrial Revolution. This pattern, followed by the rest of Latin America and other (post)colonial territories throughout the world, allowed the old landowning elite to increase their production and reap the benefits of internationalizing their production. An increase of the mining and trade sectors due to technological advances achieved by industrial development strengthened the economic power of the bourgeoisie. Finally, the Catholic Church provided the only institution that was extensive and respected throughout the whole Mexican nation. The Church suffered some reduction of their influence following the nationalization of some of their properties and lands, the types of taxes they could collect, and saw an erosion of their traditional role as the education institution of the nation. Ultimately, the influence wielded by the Church throughout the whole complex of Mexican society guaranteed the continuation of the coalition between Church and state. Moreover, liberal ideas of equality and rule of law fell from popularity during Porfirio Diaz’s regime.

Diaz’s advisors, known as the científicos, introduced him to the ideas of Frenchman Auguste Comte. The new approaches toward liberalism advocated by the científicos justified discriminatory behavior on the part of the state, who could decide what was better for society in general on the basis that they had a European and therefore “civilized” education. It was believed that by using scientific methods, they could identify what the best path forward would be for the rest of the nation. This approach
allowed them to remove indigenous populations from their lands to use them as a labor force for the industrialization and economic growth of the country. Instead of allowing people to identify the best way to manage their properties, the central government could decide to remove indigenous people from their lands with little in the way of notification and few ways to protest such action.

These reforms affected indigenous communities throughout the country, from the Yaqui people of Sonora, to indigenous communities in the recently incorporated Chiapas to work as labor force on the German coffee plantations. One of the best examples to explain the conflict existing between the local elites and the indigenous population is the Caste War (1847-1901). This conflict took place in the Yucatan peninsula, where indigenous populations were removed from their lands to develop the plantation growth of henequen. Indigenous communities, who had previously become the local elites’ militias during the multiple revolts in the national construction period, were armed and trained to fight. Having been deprived of their land rights and forced to work in the new henequen plantations, they rebelled against the local elites and managed to control four-fifths of the peninsular territory. However, with the support of U.S. troops, the local elites managed to take back control of the situation and pushed these peoples into the rainforest covered eastern region of the peninsula.

The example of the indigenous people of the Yucatan illustrates yet another instance in which the institutional central government policies abused the indigenous population for the sake of the national good, and were ultimately given little as compensation for their strife. This rejection is due to the exploitative and racist behavior
of local and national elites. An autonomy project that allowed for indigenous community
was rejected from the beginning of the independence period, even though this was a
claim made by the different states’ elites and their population. The constitution of 1824
recognized this local control of politics as the best way to identify and solve local
problems. However, it was refuted the following year. More conservative measures were
implanted after the Conservative Rebellion of 1854, where voting and political
participation was limited to elites in economic terms. Taking place following
independence, these are some instances of the failure of central government to recognize
the potential of autonomous government and the opportunity to create a society over the
old colonial barriers of racism. Nevertheless, the control exercised by old landowning
elites and the alliance created between liberal and conservatives during the long regime
of Porfirio Díaz, pushed these struggles forward, resulting in the Mexican Revolution.

In terms of education, the success of conservative politics for most of the 19th
century restrained educative reforms. This period is characterized by a process of
secularization and the implementation of Eurocentric scientific principles. Education was
conceived as an elite resource and a tool to acculturate indigenous peoples and integrate
them in the mainstream Hispanic society. As early as 1824, education was part of the
central government project. Santa Anna was the intermittent military and political leader
of Mexico between 1833 and 1855. In his first term in office, Valentín Gómez Farías
occupied the position of vice president. He, like Benito Juárez, is a good example of
liberalism and individual success. Gómez Farias “introduced sweeping changes affecting
the whole society. Following liberal tenets, he shifted the responsibility for education
from Church to the states and secularized Franciscan missions in the north” (Russel, 2010, 151). This attempt to secularize the education and also to reduce the power of the Church and the army found heavy rejection on these influent groups and these measures were eliminated the following year, when Santa Anna seized a coup d’état against his own vice president and pushed him away of the government.

In general terms, education in the 19th century evolved into a liberal, or rather, a positivist system. After independence, some projects of expansion and secularization were started. Secularization of education and the introduction of liberal ideas of the rule of reason and law were among of the ideas that the newly independent state promoted in education. With these ideas they attempted to construct a new society based on those principles. The new state introduced and implemented the scientific method in the educational system. This period saw the development of pedagogical and scientific theories that were applied to education. For instance, the analysis of scientific publications referring to education in the mid 19th century provided by Granja Castro (2002) show how the scientific discourse still identified moral quality with social behavior, an idea inherited from colonial period. However, in this case, education was transformed from a religious tool to a scientific one, with a similar goal to instruct moral behavior and social values. One of the problems identified by this author is that the internal violence lived in Mexico in this period disrupted the continuity and quality of education, apart from reducing the number of schools and teachers. To better understand the dynamics of education during this period, it is interesting here to look into the case of Benito Juárez, the first Mexican and Latin American indigenous president (1858-1864).
Born a Zapotec, he left his village at the age of twelve for the city of Oaxaca. “There he put on European clothes (...), perfected his Spanish, and eventually studied law at Oaxaca’s new public Institute of Arts and Sciences, which existed thanks to Mexico’s post-independence liberal government.” (Chasteen, 2006, 156) This case exemplifies the opportunity for social mobility that liberal education provided to the Mexican population. However, this upward mobility required a transformation of the individual from his original background to a Eurocentric concept of civilization. Later on, Juárez rejected his indigenous background. Indeed, while working on the secularization of the state, he banned collective landholding (Lerdo Law, 1856). But apart from the Church, this measure primarily affected indigenous communal lands. Thus, education became an instrument for the integration of indigenous people through a process of acculturation that ended with their rejection of their own background.

The years of the Porfiriato saw the development of the legal framework establishing the uniformity, laicism, free, and obligatory values of education. Institutions for the regulation, implementation, and development of education were created. These institutions promoted a positivist approach to education. They promoted contact with nature as the real world from which it is necessary to learn. They also promoted Spanish and integration through acculturation of the indigenous population. They attempted to create a more integrated society to diminish the possibilities of social disruption stemming from indigenous communities. It also promoted urbanization and industrialization as the means of developing a modern society, rejecting the backwardness “inherent” in rural and indigenous populations. These new approaches to
education promoted a new scientific discourse to justify the political decisions of the elites, reinforcing the traditional order and values that had survived through the wars of independence and national construction process.

Chiapas was integrated to Mexico in 1824, but it was not until 1882 when its borders were eventually defined. The implementation of the positivist reforms in Mexico was received in Chiapas with resistance. This region had a highly conservative elite that rejected the liberal reforms. The introduction of foreign capital, especially that of German investors who acquired coffee and cacao plantations, changed the social paradigm of the region. But it would not be until after the Mexican Revolution that Chiapas’ population fiercely rejected the national and state reforms.

In terms of education, Chiapas was not integrated in the national programs until the government of Porfirio Diaz. However, this integration was limited because of the marginal status of the state, which has just recently adhered to Mexico, a process that did not conclude until the last decades of the 19th century. According to Lewis (2005), Chiapas “came late to the table of Porfirian economic development, and its public education sector languished until roughly the turn of the century. Schools were rarely found outside towns and municipal centers, and few rural schools established were usually unpopular, underfunded, and ephemeral” (p. 11). Unpopularity was due to the abusive behavior of the teachers, who controlled much of the political action around the school on their favor, as well as the students. Even though the public expenditure on education at the turn of the century increased, Chiapas still rated among the lowest states in terms of education infrastructure and assistance. “In 1907, (…), the state’s per capita
expenditure on primary education placed it twenty-third among twenty-seven states; with only 13 percent of the school age population enrolled in public primary schools, it ranked last; and its 9.12-percent literacy rate ranked it ahead of only Guerrero” (Lewis, 2005, 12). This description resembles what the previous chapter described as the educative current landscape in Mexico.

Mexican Revolution and Post-Revolutionary State

The long government of Porfirio Díaz ended with a social uprising that evolved into what is known as the Mexican Revolution. The revolution started with the uprising of Francisco I. Madero in 1910. He demanded regular democratic elections and political reform. The success of the revolution, however, lie on the grassroots’ support leaded by Emiliano Zapata and Francisco “Pancho” Villa. Emiliano Zapata raised an army in Morelos to fight against the Porfirian state, demanding land reform. From the North, Villa gathered an army “of former cowboys, miners, railroad workers, and oil field roustabouts.” (Chasteen, 2006, 222) However, it was the urban middle class who could claim victory for the revolution. Venustiano Carranza lead a middle class group that gained the support of the traditional elite and the Mexican bourgeoisie, against the more reformist ideas of Villa and Zapata´s proposal. The group headed by Carranza overcame the other leaders of the revolution because they had a national program with an international perspective. The outcome could have also been influenced by the intellectual background missing in the worker and peasant supporters of Zapata and Villa.
This fact could be considered the reason why the apparently two stronger factions of the revolution retired to their respective areas of origin, forgoing the opportunity to participate in the definition of the post-revolutionary state. This is why the Mexican Revolution did not create a more drastic change of the national order, limiting the possibilities of land and labor reform.

The Constitution of 1917, the current Mexican *carta magna*, was based on middle class democratic ideals and limited the reforms that the two revolutionary groups previously mentioned, Zapata’s peasants and Villa’s industrial workers, hoped to bring about. Even though there was land reform to some extent, with Article 27 establishing the Ejido system and Article 123 regulating labor rights, the new government and the constitution did not accomplish the reforms desired by much of the Mexican population. “Within Ejidos, individuals received specified plots of land that could remain within families for generations, although not as private property” (Gonzales, 2002, 191).

However, the extent to which this reform was implemented until Cárdenas term in the office of the Mexican president was very limited. The inclusion of these reforms was more of an attempt to calm the situation and create some stability. The lack of efforts on the part of the new government to introduce grassroots and workers´ petitions became obvious when the government betrayed and killed both Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata.

Once again, it becomes clear that the reforms most important to the lowest stratus of society, suffering from racial and class discriminatory institutional behavior, were once again limited to the extent desired by the new political elite. The Mexican
Revolution ended up favoring the white and mestizo middle-class. The rural indigenous peasants and indigenous and mestizo industrial workers did not succeed in changing the patterns that had oppressed them since independence. The legalization of Ejido did not reach the extent of land reform that a broad part of society has been advocating. Ejido lands were a reinterpretation of the traditional communal indigenous lands. “From 1910 to 1930, only 3.9 percent of Mexico´s land surface was distributed to the landless, two thirds of the large holdings were untouched, and only 780,000 of Mexico´s 3.6 million peasants were in permanent possession of any land. Before 1934, most beneficiaries of land reform received little technical aid and did not have enough acreage to support a family” (Russel, 2010, 349). Therefore, we observe that there was an attempt to move toward more democratic politics but this attempt was limited by the continued holding of power in the hands of the white and mestizo urban elite.

Nevertheless, the Mexican Revolution became a symbol of national pride. Together with the religious symbol of La Virgen de Guadalupe representing the spread and deep influence of the Catholic Church, the Mexican Revolution was the first national event in which most of the members of society could claim participation. In the post-revolutionary period, this image of national pride was to be redefined by Jose Vasconcelos using the figure of the mestizo and “the cosmic race.”

Despite the national symbolism of the Mexican Revolution, this feeling of national pride did not spread throughout all of the Mexican territory. Chiapas, the southernmost Mexican state, did not absorb the nationalist value of the Mexican Revolution. Chiapas was imposed a top-down revolution by some representatives of the
central struggle. A Carrancista general, Jesús Agustín Castro implanted revolutionary reforms, breaking the conservative post-colonial order. “A firm believer in central government, Castro’s efforts in Chiapas were intended to break the power of the familia chiapaneca and liberate the masses of mestizo and indigenous peasants and workers from the priests, finqueros (plantation owners), and ranchers who had previously controlled their lives.” (Lewis, 2005, 15) This liberal plan was accompanied by a strong education program to secularize education and assimilate the indigenous population. They attempted to solve the problems of the Porfirián schools: bad infrastructure, abusive teachers, low attendance, and the interference of local government. Chiapas’ response was the rejection of the revolutionary reforms.

Chiapas witnessed a counterrevolutionary movement known as Movimiento Armado Mapachista. Between 1914 and 1920 the movement fought against the central reforms of the Carranza government. These mapaches were linked to Villas’ struggle in an anti Carrancista sentiment. Led by Liburcio Fernández Ruíz, this army represented the landowning elite in Chiapas. This fight limited the possibilities to implant reforms in the recently incorporated state. Thus, Chiapas entered the post-revolutionary era with a traditional elite fighting to retain their privileges.

In addition, the anticlerical sentiment of the national reforms found rejection of the entire social fabric of Chiapas. In the case of indigenous communities, these anticlerical reforms meant an attack on their belief system, a syncretic interpretation of the Catholic faith imposed by the Spanish colonial power and the remnants of Mayan cosmology. One of the symbols of this syncretism is the cross. For Christian imagery, the
cross is the symbol of the church. However, pre-Columbian Mayans already used the cross to represent their tree of life. The ceiba tree was symbolic of the tree of life, reason why burials tended to be done under this tree. It represented the four cardinal points, but it also represented the return of the human body to the earth, while the body descended to the underworld through the roots, the soul could go up to the sky through the branches. This syncretism is still present and visible in Chiapas, where Chamulans use the cross to mark those territories reserved for environmental conservation. This syncretic representation of the cross has also been used by ladino population in San Cristobal de las Casas as an artifact to protect the household. Both religious syncretism and rejection of political reforms imposed by the post-revolution federal government prove that Chiapas represented a distinct reality from the urban center of the country, where political decisions were made, and as such these decisions did not find acceptance in the peripheral state.

In the field of education, the post-revolutionary period can be divided into two eras. Directly following the end of the Revolution in 1921, the office of Secretary of Public Education was created. At its head was José Vasconcelos. He belonged to the indigenista intellectual elite. They were influenced by John Dewey´s educational model. The indigenista educational project “should be aimed at the service of social transformation, increased productive capacity and intellectual development of students, leading, in turn, on the path of the cosmic race” (Donoso Romo, 2010, 59). Raza cósmica is one of the most important contributions of Vasconcelos to Latin American culture. He depicted the mestizo as inheritor of the best features of the races of which it was
comprised, primarily Hispanic and indigenous American. He proposed a spread of the education system that established the right to free secular education as stated by the Constitution of 1917. This education system was supposed to work towards the integration of the indigenous population into the *mestizo* national image, providing an instrument of acculturation. Even though *indigenistas* praised the pre-Columbian heritage of Mexico, they attempted to integrate those remaining groups to develop a new national demographic reality.

Later on, Lázaro Cárdenas and his populist politics promoted what is known as socialist education. Cárdenas held office between 1934 and 1940 and founded the political party that held office until the year 2000. His interpretation of populism, unlike other Latin American leaders such as Juan Perón of Argentina, did not concentrate power in solely his person but throughout the whole party. Targeting a broad cross section of the population, the political party that was eventually named the PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party), had the support of most of the population for the rest of the 20th century. Cárdenas concentration of power on the party allowed it to regenerate with new politicians without losing legitimacy and continue in power until the year 2000. However, corruption tainted the legitimacy of the party, especially in the second half of the 20th century.

Cárdenas, to a large extent, was personally responsible for the implementation of the promised reforms of the Mexican Revolution. It was he who carried out more drastic land reform than had been attempted since the arrival of Europeans in Mexico. Between 1935 and 1940, 73.6 million acres of land were distributed. This project was
complemented by a strong educational program. The project was conceived as socialist education, a program which attempted to spread literacy to all levels of the population. The program was not defined concretely, but it had a clear secular and political doctrine. The program was intended to raise class consciousness and create awareness about land claims, as well as fidelity to the party. The federal expenditure on education increased to an amount between 15 or 30 percent of the national budget. Article 3 of the constitution was amended to include this new approach toward education. According to the amended version of the article, education would “organize teaching and activities to permit the formation in the youth of a rational and exact concept of the universe and social life.” (Russel, 2010, 372) This new approach promised to fulfill the reformist expectations of the revolution.

Despite this innovative approach to education, novel in the Mexican context, the socialist program faced many limiting factors. First, the teachers who needed to implement the program were not necessarily part of the movement. A large percentage of the instructors were conservative women, who disagreed especially with the anticlerical nature of the project. They were supposed to introduce health instruction on subjects such as vaccination and teach farming techniques, but were oftentimes unprepared to carry out such tasks. Peasants commonly had more knowledge of farming techniques and felt that their households were being violated when health instruction was carried out. When teachers did implement the anticlerical measures, for example changing holidays to celebrate lay revolutionary heroes, they were met with the resistance, and sometimes violence, of the community. This attitude was perceived as disrespectful to elders and
religious traditions. The rejection reached such a level that many teachers were violently killed as the only representative of the state in isolated regions. This violent situation was even more severe in marginal states like Chiapas. The example of socialist education shows that the top-bottom approach which characterized the program did not succeed in raising class conscience in the population because it failed to recognize the particularities and heterogeneity of the various groups which comprised Mexican society.

Second Half of the 20th Century to the Beginning of the 21st Century

Later in the 20th century the 1960s and 1970s the increase in national population demanded a new approach to education. Literacy campaigns carried out throughout the 20th century increased the number of primary students throughout the country. This increase in the number of students was not accompanied by an appropriate increase of teachers, leading the quality of education to be diluted. In addition, the number of secondary students was not increased in an equivalent manner, meaning that higher education remained a privilege for better-off social groups.

The 1960s was an age of revolution that could be described by means of the symbolic event known as the Tlatelolco massacre in the Plaza de Tres Culturas in 1968. After the success of the Cuban revolution and other sparks of revolution throughout the region in the 1950s and 1960s, the youth of Mexico took to the streets in 1968 to protest against the authoritative actions of the government against the students along with a military occupation of the most prestigious university in the country. That same year, the
first Olympic Games were about to take place in Mexico, the first time a Latin American
developing country were the hosts of the games. The combination of an authoritative
government and the international pressure for the performance of Mexico in the Olympic
Games pushed the events to violent extremes. On October 2nd, 1968, a demonstration of
university students, which was supported by many among the urban youth of the capital
region, gathered in Tlatelolco square. The military responded with violent repression of
the demonstration, resulting in an unofficial estimate of 300 dead. The urban middle class
background of many of these students proved that the Mexican government had reached a
level of authoritarianism at which class did not guarantee personal security.

These events provoked a reform in the educational system of Mexico during the
1970s. The year 1973 marked a turning point in education at different levels. According
to Guillen Barrios (2010):

(The Reform) “increased the number of teaching positions for different levels,
especially for the primary education, infrastructure was taken care and increased, it
increased subsidies to universities and higher education institutions, the School of
Bachelors and UAM (Universidad Autonoma Metropolitana) were created, the
Technical Board of Education was recognized and TECHNOLOGICAL schools
incremented, the monthly publication of Septentas was continued with renewed
enthusiasm, the biweekly magazine SEVEN was founded (…)

The federal executive decreed, among others, the Internal Regulation of the SEP,
the hierarchy, the School of Bachelors, creating an Interministerial Comission for the
social, economic, educational and cultural development of indigenous and peasant
communities and the Ruler of Decree of Technological education, as well as Federal Education Law and the Organic Law of the UAM” (p. 24)

The decade started with a government taking measures to ensure a better education. According to Guillén Barrios, there were some legislation issued and creation of organisms and institutions to improve the quality of education. These measures, like the organic law of the UAM responded to some of the claims made by students in La Plaza de las Tres Culturas. It is also interesting to observe the creation of an Interministerial Commission for the development of indigenous and peasants communities, a similar idea to what today is the program Oportunidades.

After 1975, there was also an emergence of indigenous movements to promote and reinforce indigenous culture and, specifically, indigenous languages. Organizations like the Council of Indigenous Peoples in Patzcuaro and the National Alliance of Bilingual Indigenous Professionals were formed in 1976. In 1979, a group of teachers in Oaxaca and Chiapas objected to the traditional leaders of the educational sector, and organized creating the CNTE (National Coordinating of Educational Workers). This organization rebelled against the SNTE (National Union of Education Workers). “The Mexican teachers’ union (SNTE) had always been the largest official union in Latin America and was affiliated with the PRI government” (Reinke, 2004, 487). This union had been one of the most influential actors in Mexican education. The coalition with the government, inherited from populist construction of the state and clientelism, has given it a strong position that allowed it to lobby against more democratic and innovative measures. It has promoted a conservative position that ensured the position of the
teachers who integrate the union. This organization continues today being one of the most powerful institutions in Mexican politics. Nowadays, it is this union that limits the inclusion of students graduated from UNICH into the education sector in rural indigenous communities in Chiapas. Thus, the reforms performed in the 1970’s, and even today, as the result of rebel movements against an undemocratic government were limited by the government and its allies like the SNTE.

During the 80s and 90s, the neoliberal reforms undertaken in hopes of recovery from the oil crisis and the consequent inflation faced by the country resulted in a diminished scale of social programs and expenditures which in turn affected education. The implementation of NAFTA in 1994 brought the uprising of the Zapatistas and a broad dissenter movement that ended with the political monopoly of the PRI in the year 2000. Chiapas emerged as one of the places where indigenous population carried out more nonconformist measures, like the creation of autonomous municipalities by the members of the Zapatista movement. This group introduced the discourse of indigenous identity with a new strength into Mexican politics. Some measures have been carried out by the Federal Government to answer the claims of the indigenous sector of the population, such as the program Oportunidades. In some way, this program means a continuity of the clientelistic tradition of Mexican leaders to control the lower classes and the discriminated groups, making them dependents from a government that relies on the urban upper middle class, completely disconnected from the reality indigenous peoples live. This is the reason why, in this work, we promote the idea of cooperation between
the different education organisms and the incorporation into federal and Chiapas politics of some of the measures implanted by the Zapatistas in terms of education.

Conclusion

This chapter has analyzed how racial discourses were created and how they developed and endured through a series of national reforms to create the current forms of racial discrimination prevalent in Mexico. The colonial Spanish crown organized society on the basis of racial division according to their ideas of moral and human quality dependent on racialized physical features and social behaviors. The national independence achieved in 1821 which had emerged out of the spread of liberal ideas did not deconstruct the national racial paradigm but rather transformed it through new pseudoscientific theories. Even the Mexican Revolution, beginning from grassroots riots against the unequal division of land and exploitative working conditions faced by lower class Mexicans, failed to integrate the indigenous population under the reinterpreted vision of the state. Both indigenismo and socialist education attempted to increase literacy and promoted educational programs which would integrate the heterogeneous composition of the state. However, the failure to recognize the differences inherent between these groups prevented such policies from being accepted by the whole of Mexican society. Chiapas provides a telling example of how institutional policies were rejected socially due to their inadequacy in the face of the realities of the social composition of the state. This struggle has resulted in the 1990s in the conflict between
the neo-Zapatista movement and the government. The coming chapter will serve to create
deepen understanding of the dynamics affecting the relationship between the state and the
various institutions and organizations working in the field education to create a more
egalitarian and integrative society in Chiapas.
CHAPTER 3: ASSESSMENT OF EDUCATION ACTORS AND LIMITATION ON THE FUTURE EVOLUTION OF RACIAL DISCOURSE IN CHIAPAS

In *Education and Stratification in Developing Countries*, Claudia Buchmann and Emily Hannum provide a survey of several studies undertaken on the subject of education and its influence on social dynamics in “developing” countries. Their work (outlined below in Figure 5) results in the classification of the different studies dependent on what part of the education process the actors participating in the studies focus upon. Their analysis is based on the conception of educational attainment as a supply and demand relationship. Demand is considered to come from family, determined to some extent by the potential economic outcomes from positive educational outcomes. Supply is considered to be generated from community and school, effected mostly by macro structural forces such as national levels of development, state policies, and global forces.
In this chapter, macro structural forces will be analyzed as a determining instrument on the performance of the other factors included in the study, in Mexico and specifically in Chiapas. By means of an analysis of racial limitations on education in the state of Chiapas which stem from blatantly racist behavior on the part of federal and state educational institutions, an argument illustrating the need for education reform promoting more integrative behavior and transformation of the social fabric of Chiapas can be justified. In addition to the identification of a racist behavior on the part of official institutions, the recently implemented efforts of governments to eliminate such behavior
will be studied, along with the work of other organizations to empower indigenous communities through education. This will be exemplified by the Oportunidades program and other institutions such as the Intercultural University of Chiapas (UNICH). An examination will be conducted of the global forces represented by international institutions like the UN and OEI and their program to extend literacy and increase the quality of education in their respective geographic regions of influence. Other institutions that cooperate to increase the quality of education and provide the resources to address the specific needs of communities in the state of Chiapas will also form part of the analysis. Here, we will consider non-formal education due to its significance to extending literacy to the non-school-age population and increase the qualification of marginalized groups to increase social and human development. This analysis will be based on the role played by two institutions, Edupaz and IAE (Innovación y Apoyo Educativo A.C.).

Finally, we will consider the case of Zapatista Autonomous Education. First emerging as a rebel movement, the group has placed education as one of its main foci for the creation of sustainable autonomy which protects the inhabitants of rural communities from a racially discriminatory and exploitative state. They have also immersed themselves in a complex international and national network of supporters who have aided in the creation of their education program. However, one of the principles of their autonomous project is to create a self-sufficient system that reintegrates the student graduates of secondary education into the community to carry on roles that help meet their needs. This complex system of education emerging in Chiapas responds to the necessity to undertake reforms of the national institutional education system which addresses the needs of indigenous
communities so that educational, and consequently economic, outcomes eventually overcome the racially discriminatory barriers and foster greater the economic and social development in the region.

Table 4. Representative educative actors in Chiapas according to their field of work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Formal Education</th>
<th>Institutional</th>
<th>Secretary of Public Education, Oportunidades, INED, UNICH</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non Institutional</td>
<td>Zapatista Autonomous Education</td>
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</tr>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Informal Education</th>
<th>Institutional</th>
<th>Oportunidades (Health &amp; Nutrition Workshops)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non Institutional</td>
<td>Edupaz, INED, Zapatistas</td>
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Source: Luis Rejano Flores, 2011

The indigenous discourse in Mexico has evolved much throughout the 20\textsuperscript{th} century toward the formation of a more racially inclusive society. As we saw in the previous chapter, there was an evolution from \textit{indigenismo} to a more socialist perspective in which indigenous people were integrated as part of class struggle. However, by the end of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century with the fall of the Soviet Union and the subsequent crisis in post-Soviet client states like Cuba, the socialist discourse was deligitimized in the eyes of
many former adherents. In 1994, the Zapatista uprising in Chiapas reframed the indigenous discourse in a new worldview, leaving the socialist approach behind in favor of a discourse in agreement with ethnically-based social movements with parallels in other Latin American countries such as Ecuador, Bolivia, Peru, Colombia, etc. This change of discourse has affected political life in Mexico and has also changed the Chiapanecan social landscape by causing the formation of a center of international tourism and intercultural dialogue that has benefited the major part of society, with the possible exception of the Zapatista rebels themselves.

The government reacted violently at first in efforts to repress the Zapatista uprising. However, this strategy had to be changed following international pressure against the abuse committed to indigenous communities. This international support for the Zapatista movement came mainly from foreign volunteers who visited the rebel communities and returned to their home countries to publicize the situation in Chiapas. One of the most violent cases was the Acteal massacre in 1997, where 45 people were murdered. However, public support for the Zapatista movement has in turn given strength to other indigenous movements. The government has implemented social measures to meet some of the demands of the rebel movement. Among these measures is the conditional cash transfer program Oportunidades (formerly Progresa), which promotes schooling and healthcare for impoverished communities, and the creation of the Intercultural University of Chiapas (UNICH) which has a required 60 percent indigenous student enrollment and promotes culture along with sustainable development of indigenous communities. However, in the case of Oportunidades, the program lacks an
approach to improve the quality of education. For UNICH, there needs to be a longer-term assessment of the effects of their work to fully evaluate the later success of student graduates in incorporating into the labor market and its effects on the social reality in Chiapas, especially the empowerment of indigenous culture and the development of economic programs to improve the standard of living for indigenous communities. Other authors have presented a harsher critique of the movement: “the administrations of President Vicente Fox and Chiapas Governor Pablo Salazar promoted an ostentatious brand of neoindigenismo that included co-opting prominent indigenous professionals into new bureaucratic structures, sponsoring community-development-cum-counterinsurgency, unilaterally creating new municipalities in indigenous areas, launching “intercultural universities”, and rhetorically celebrating multicultural “inclusion” without letting indigenous people define their own identities (Hernández, Paz, and Sierra, 2004).” (Stahler-Sholk, 2007, 53) This critiques points to the flaws of the “new” racial discourse in Chiapas and Mexico, but it is important to understand the possibilities for development that the recent policies offer to indigenous population to construct a more accurate assessment of the social dynamics in Chiapas and Mexico.

International Institutions and Education

*The UN and the Millennium Development Goals*

The UN, in its attempt to reduce poverty in the world set Universal Education as the second of the eight Millennium Development Goals. According to the UN, by 2015
there should be universal access to primary education. We have already seen that this increase in access to education results in a continuation of social structures, limiting possibilities for social mobility. Even more, by 2008, only 89% of children in developing regions had access to education. This makes the possibility of reaching the goal by 2015 improbable. Despite this failure, it is important to continue working toward improved access and quality of education. As stated in the MDG2009 Report, “an increase in the share of mothers with a primary or secondary education is associated with a reduction in the child mortality rate, and that educated parents have better nourished children. Parental literacy also plays a role in whether children attend school” (UNMDGP, 2009, 15). This statement illustrates the recognition of education by the international community as a determinant factor for social mobility. This fact has lead international institutions including the UN to recognize educational access as one of the most essential rights across different cultures and societies around the world due to its real potential for betterment.

In 2000, the United Nations created in a general assembly with the presence of all member countries of the UN the “Millennium Development Goals” for the world until 2015. These goals aim “to free a major portion of humanity from the shackles of poverty, hunger, illiteracy and disease (…) empowerment of women, environmental sustainability and global partnership for development” (UNMDG, 2009, 3). The goal proposed by the UN concerning education is that every boy or girl have access to primary education by 2015. In Latin America, 94% of children did so in 2000. However, when looking at 2007 results, the rate raised to only 95% of children in primary school. This means that in
seven years, only 1% more children went to primary school. The continuity of this pattern of growth means that this goal will not be achieved by 2015. As we saw in the first chapters, data shows a more critical situation in Chiapas and Mexico. Particularly, we saw that the lowest rates of human development were concentrated in indigenous population and consequently, in those states with a higher percentage of those groups.

The Oportunidades program, funded partially by the World Bank, belongs to this approach to stamp out illiteracy and expand access to education in impoverished societies. As we will see further on, this approach has a main defect. Increasing educational access without improving the quality and reforming the system that has been the root of inequality will never change the current paradigm. As we have previously seen, the literacy campaigns carried out by the Mexican government throughout the 20th century have only developed a parallel structure of inequality. Therefore, international institutions like the UN and the World Bank will not achieve any improvement in the living standards of impoverished societies as long as they do not address the basis of inequality in those societies.

The OEI and the Educatice Goals for 2021

In the case of the OEI (Organization of Ibero-American States), education was defined as a tool for social inclusion. Being home to the highest rates of inequality in the world, Latin America needs to focus its efforts on breaking the patterns which serve to replicate such disparities intergenerationally. As it is stated in the Educatice Goals for
2021, “an education that responds satisfactory social demands cannot be postponed: get more students to study, longer, with a range of renowned quality, equitable and inclusive in involving the great majority of institutions and social sectors” (OEI, 2010, 16). There is therefore a conviction that education is the key strategy to advance social cohesion and inclusion. This approach seems to portray education as an instrument capable of breaking the traps of poverty and inequality in the region. However, the programs promoted do not seem to create change and empower indigenous peoples and other groups that are the subject of racial discrimination, such as people of African heritage, in Latin America. A strong emphasis on evaluation of the goals limits the possibilities of positive action by the programs. A document produced by the OEI setting goals for 2021 establishes a set of objectives, but they are presented under a quantitative measure, with low capacity for the application of any conclusions derived from the analysis. Therefore, though the approach seems to identify more specifically than the UN the concrete problems of the region, it falls into the same trap of lacking in pertinent action, in this case due to a quantitative approach limited to inequality and education.

The international community is therefore committed to use education to eradicate poverty and inequality and create better standards of living among impoverished societies. This international trend is reflected by the Mexican program Oportunidades. Through education, the program seeks to empower the most vulnerable social sectors, with a special focus on rural communities and women as actors for promoting increased family investment in education, health, and nutrition. It is therefore important to analyze the dynamics of this program, its successes, and its limits to identify what is currently
being done and how it can be improved to achieve the ultimate goal of ending poverty and inequality in Mexico.

Federal Institutions

The Secretary of Public Education

The SEP (Secretary of Public Education) has been the official federal organism of the federal government in charge of providing resources and developing politics to implement education in Mexico. Created in 1921, the SEP has evolved along the 20th century with the rest of politics and the realities of the Mexican population. As we have seen in the previous chapter, the SEP started with an indigenista ideology promoted by its director Jose Vasconcelos. Later on, Lázaro Cardenas’ government introduced the project of socialist education that, despite having an interesting reformist proposal to expand literacy and school access to the total of the population, failed to achieve its main goal finding a strong resistance from more conservative and traditional sectors of society. At the end of the 20th century, Mexico entered into the Neoliberal system promoted by the US. This system requires strong cuts on government social measures, affecting to education directly. However, the beginning of the 21st century has proved to introduce some changes in this system. The Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) imposed by the World Bank and the IMF on developing countries as a requisite to access financial support from these institutions has affected especially to the most vulnerable sectors of
the world population. In the case of Mexico, this program implemented to solve the economic crisis of 1985 that led the Mexican government to declare insolvent has had especial harsh effects on indigenous rural population. Ejido reforms established by the government in the 1990s and the signing of NAFTA resulted in the Zapatista uprising, as a rebellious movement against those measures. The Oportunidades program can also been considered as a palliative program to reduce the effect of the agricultural policies promoted by the federal state.

Following a neo-liberalist approach, the Mexican government, through the SEP, has created several institutions to help promote education in the more marginal sectors of the population to palliate the negative effects of the privatization and land tenure reform. Indigenous Education, CONAPE, Escuela Abierta, Aula multigrado, among others, are some of the organisms that address the need of the indigenous and rural population. These organisms promote projects like Escuela Multigrado and Escuela Abierta that promote a more appropriated functioning of schools where children from different levels share the room and instructor and the promotion of the school as a community center, respectively. One of these programs is Oportunidades. This program follows a similar approach than other programs implemented in other Latin American countries like Brazil and Nicaragua. Despite this complex network of official organisms working for the development of indigenous communities and indigenous culture, Mexican social reality seems to continue disfavoring those belonging to indigenous groups.

Despite the multiplicity of organisms that have been created to alleviate the limits of education and strengthen the education system in order to allow a general development
of the population, there is a continuation of the same weaknesses in the educational system.

“The great geographic dispersion of many communities and rural municipalities, which continue to be isolated, and the growing global demand of educative services – set out among the accelerated growth of urban population – make out partially this complex situation and the marked backwardness through which education goes currently, to which we add other external problems, among which the high rate of indigenous and monolingual population stand out which in 1980 amounted to 492, 700 inhabitants five years old or over, from which 42.9 per cent does not speak Spanish” (Villafuerte Solís, Dl., 1999, 129).

This description of the problems of education in Chiapas shows the continuity of historical problems related with historical and geographical features. The creation of the many organisms by the SEP to address rural and indigenous education by means of a multiplicity of programs shows does not seem to solve those problems over time. The problems for implementation allow for the same infrastructural and linguistic problems to continue. These problems point towards a culturally unfit planning of education. This way, as many programs as the SEP proposes, the lack of implementation and, in many cases, inadequacy, undermine the potential advances that those ideas could bring.
As we have seen before, the international commitment to promote education as an instrument for social inclusion and human development has been executed in Mexico by creating, developing and implementing the program Progresa/Oportunidades. Progresa was first created in 1997 and evolved into Oportunidades in 2002. Both have a similar proposal. The programs have a three way approach to reduce the high levels of poverty in Mexico. Education, Health and Nutrition are the three lines of action. Cash transfers are the base of both programs in exchange for participation to increase health conditions and the investment opportunities on education of poor families. Starting with a 300,000 in 1997, Oportunidades covered 5.8 million families in 2010. In addition, the program has branched out from rural to urban areas and from focusing on children and women to including the elderly and urban sectors too. This seems to be a successful approach to some of the oldest problems in Mexico and Latin America, namely poverty and inequality.

The Oportunidades program, as well as Progresa previously, bases its success in several pillars. One is addressing education and health as two important factors that can effectively improve poor families’ living conditions. Health and nutrition are considered to produce a future benefit in the participating individuals. Education allows the participants to have access to better paid jobs and therefore enables them to leave the poverty trap. Furthermore, other basic factors that have made Oportunidades such a successful program are the focus on transparency and avoidance of political use of the
program. Evaluation from external institutions has been basic to achieve these goals. These main points are what made Oportunidades such a successful program.

Nevertheless, there are also limitations that are important to consider. On one hand, Oportunidades only focuses on poverty instead than on development. The program is not complemented by the creation of job opportunities and it does not measure academic quality. Thus, it allows for the recreation of social structures and differences. On the other hand, it does not address issues of indigenous identity, like the use of indigenous languages or “usos y costumbres” as the traditional community government system. Disregarding indigenous identity in the education programs makes Oportunidades another assimilation federal program, as those carried out since the beginning of the 20th century. This means the program needs to be reevaluated so it creates development in a sustainable and respectful way.

With the intention of developing the opportunities for poor people, the Mexican government created the program Progresa in 1997. In 2002, the change of government carried some changes in the program, renaming it Oportunidades, but continuing with the same approach to the alleviation of poverty. The program states its goal as “coordinating agency actions to help overcome poverty by developing the basic skills of persons and access to better opportunities for economic and social development” (Oportunidades website, 2011). According to their annual assessment, “by 2030, Mexicans see Mexico as a country of equal opportunities for all, where the Mexicans exercise their full rights and poverty has been eradicated” (Oportunidades website, 2011). To achieve this goal, the program creates a system of cash transfers given to mothers that comply with the
requisite of children assistance to school and medical checkups. It also addresses the nutritional needs of more vulnerable population, namely pregnant women, babies under 6 months and kids until the age of 6 with a nutritional support plan. This plan has helped to increase the rates of enrolment, as seen previously, in the whole nation. By reducing the costs of children assistance to school, the program increases the rates of school enrolment. Focusing on the results on health and nutrition, “by 2007, anemia has been reduced in a 35.8% respect to 1999 61% prevalence of anemia; (...) and babies under 2 years old get ill less than those who do not participate of the nutritional program (35.5% against 39.9%), noticed in several symptoms (cough, fever and diarrhea).”

(Oportunidades Report, 2010, 25)

The more interesting proposal of this program is a multidimensional conception of poverty and the identification of poverty as an intergenerational problem. Oportunidades considers poverty as the result of lack of access to education and health infrastructure resulting in a reduction of the chances for the population to improve their living standards. At the same time, this lack of access to infrastructure is much more evident in rural areas as we saw in the data analysis in chapter 1, and more incisive for females and indigenous population. That is the reason why the program proposes a triple approach to combat poverty.

- Education: the program gives transfers in cash or subsidies to buy school materials directly to the mother who has a child enrolled in school from 3rd year of primary school to the 3rd year of secondary school. This transfers increase in value by school year, being even higher for female students.
• Health: the program attempts to improve the participants’ health by promoting disease prevention and capacitating them about nutrition, hygiene, and sexual health. Family members are submitted to medical checkups.

• Nutrition: families received monetary transfers to buy food, nutritional supplements for kids, pregnant and breastfeeding women, checking for weight and height of children to prevent anemia.

This approach to poverty is successful because it approaches the basic needs to overcome extreme poverty. At the same time, this reduction of the cost of access to education and health services allows the families to invest their incomes in different areas that allow them to improve their living standards. “Beneficiaries of the program increased the family expenses on education and children clothes; they invested in household equipment; they acquired animals for farm work; they attempted some household renewals and spent less money in alcohol and tobacco consumption” (Jaquez and Arenas, 2009, 69). This is what really shows the success of the program. By providing the population of the basic infrastructure, the program allows participants to use their incomes to improve their living standards. Thus, the generational poverty cycle can be interrupted and poverty can be reduced.

There are other important basic facts that have made this program socially welcomed and increased the number of participants. Apart from the benefits previously stated, the program has gained credibility by focusing on transparency and independence. According to article 10 of the Decree of Creation of Oportunidades, the program is
coordinated by a “council consisting of the Secretaries of Social Development who will preside; Finance and Public Credit; Public Education; and Health and the National Coordinator (of the program) who will serve as Technical Secretary.” (Diario Oficial, 2002, 13) In addition of this inter institutional coordination, the program has attempted to reduce the participation of intermediaries to reduce costs and avoid corruption and clientelism.

On the other hand, the program has adopted external evaluation of the program as a measure to guarantee the success of the program and the transparency. “Oportunidades has been evaluated at length by experts from several external institutions, like the International Food Politics Research Institute (IFPRI), the National Institute of Public Health (INSP), the Center of Social Anthropology Research and Higher Studies (CIESAS), the School of Mexico (Colmex), the Center for Economic Research and Teaching (CIDE), the Ibero American University (UIA), the School of Sonora, the National History and Anthropology School (Chihuahua), Berkeley University of California, the University College London and Pennsylvania University” (Oportunidades Report, 2010, 24). This apolitical and transparent basis of the program has resulted in higher trust and support from the population and international institutions.

Even though Oportunidades is widely recognized as a successful program, there are also voices that point out the need to reevaluate and develop the program. One of the main issues is the fact that Oportunidades only addresses ending with poverty as a goal, but it does not promote further development. Second, it does not address the quality of education. This fact is especially important when considering indigenous population, who
do not have the option to develop their indigenous language. There are also problems of exclusion depending on the promotion of the program and recruitment of participants. Finally, there are also disregard for other indigenous identity characteristics, which may create a conflict between the internal indigenous community dynamics and the implementation of Oportunidades. The coordination of the program needs to address these issues to improve the quality of the program and guarantee its sustainability.

To begin with, Oportunidades attempt to break the intergenerational poverty cycle. For that purpose, the program provides the population of the basic infrastructure to guarantee their access to health and education. However, this seems not to be enough. As we have seen, inequality seems to reproduce itself every generation. One of the reasons is the lack of opportunities to achieve better paid jobs. Nor Oportunidades neither any other governmental organism guarantee the offer of better paid jobs through a reform of the labor market. Those who graduate from high school usually have access to better employments, but as we saw previously, the rate for secondary education enrolment for the total of the population is 69.1% and those who do not attend high school will still be bounded to low income job opportunities. Thus, they cannot break the poverty cycle because the labor market does not offer them the possibility to improve their living standards. This also results in high rates of migration from rural to urban areas, south-north and to the United States. This fact leads to the need to create new job opportunities and renew the labor market in Mexico to allow the population to have better opportunities.
Second, the program does not address the quality of the education. “The
(economic) support does not require obtaining good grades, just assistance.” (Jaquez y
Mariana, 2009, 68). The program requires a higher expense on education by the federal
government. Teacher skills need to be improved to conduce to a better performance.
“Most teachers and administrators had few incentives for professional development, and
most had no expectation of improving their conditions through promotion or
demonstration of their capacities as educators” (Bebbington and McCourt, 2007, 90). On
the other hand, the lack of materials, especially in rural areas limits the productivity of
the education. Even more, this facts contrast with the quality of education in urban
private schools, which promote the continuation of inequality. Therefore, quality of
education needs to be addressed as an important basis for the development of
Oportunidades.

Another important trouble emerging of the implementation of Oportunidades
relates to conflicts with indigenous culture and identity. “Mexico has 5,282,347 people
who speaks one of the 92 languages or dialect varieties used by the 56 different ethnic
groups” (OEI, Sistemas Educativos Nacionales) Even more, article 38 of the Mexican
Constitution establishes the obligation to adapt the education to the linguistic
requirements of the population. Nevertheless, in Chiapas, “although most of community
instructors are native of the region where they are assigned, more than the half (58.4%)
indicates to possess few or no knowledge whatsoever about their students’ ethnic or
cultural group; 25.9% points out to have enough knowledge and only 15.7% says to have
a lot of knowledge” (Gómez Zermeño, 2010, 14). This information describes the
potential immersion in the community of educators of the National Council for Educational Development (CONAFE) working for the Modality of Educational Attention to the Indigenous Population (MAEPI) in the region of San Cristóbal de las Casas. It highlights the problem of having instructors who do not usually belong to indigenous community and so they cannot promote the cultural values or use the indigenous language of the community. Even if some efforts are carried out by CONAPE and MAEPI, they do not seem to be very successful. “…most community instructors are not prompt to contrast without judging their own beliefs and attitudes with the students; they are unaware of cultural heritage and the historical context of the student and do not understand that issues like poverty, racism and stereotypes can impact the students´ self-esteem and self-perception. They do not use teaching-learning techniques or educative experiences to enrich their intercultural comprehension and improve their educative quality” (Gómez Zermeño, 2010, 25).

The arguments presented lead to the conclusion that there is a need to redefine Oportunidades and public education in Mexico. Because of the clash between “usos y costumbres” and the skills acquired by the population with Oportunidades, indigenous people do not acquire the skills that allow them to promote within their own communities. Consequently, new generations who participate with oportunidades and achieve a secondary or higher education become disconnected from their community. This deep disconnection carries an old message of acculturation of indigenous communities. Thus, Oportunidades fails to recognize indigenous identity and can be considered an assimilationist program.
Finally, there is also need to improve the recruitment methodology. Oportunidades uses a socioeconomic and demographic survey to screen the potential participants of the program in rural areas. In urban areas, it is the individual who needs to reach the program to be eligible to participate. One of the most important issues is the density of the program. “The focalization of Oportunidades, even if it is better than other focalized programs and more effective to transfer money to the poorest, still contains errors of exclusion and inclusion that could be perceived in the high quantity of rural families that lived in localities where Oportunidades was operative but they were not receiving the support of the program” (Hevia de la Jara, 2009, 63). This has also created inequality and conflicts in those communities. This conflict emerging from the implementation of the program is a failure that needs to be solved because it can undermine the final success of the program.

As we can see, the success of Oportunidades cannot be fairly judged if we do not consider the limitations. The lack of infrastructure and materials, at the same time as the qualification of educators can diminish the profit of the program. Especially, when addressing indigenous communities, the state needs to provide skilled people that respects and promote indigenous culture. In addition, the state needs to work to improve the options offered in the labor market to increase the opportunities of those who participate to be able to reach a higher economic income and consequently increase their living standards. The program needs to be cautious of the possible backlash of the participation.
Another important regional institutional effort to create equal access to all the levels of education and the empowerment and promotion of indigenous culture and communities can be identified in the creation of the UNICH. This institution has been created as a way to provide better access to indigenous people to higher education. This institution promotes indigenous culture empowerment and offers higher education on areas that affect directly indigenous communities and trains individuals that coming from these communities can work as catalyst of development. Its goal is to “offer higher education options that are relevant to the development needs of indigenous peoples and contribute to achieve the objectives and goals of coverage and equal access to quality education and the generation of innovative educational projects that arise in the program national education” (Decreto de Creación, 2004, 3). Because of this approach, we can affirm that UNICH stands out as one of the only institutions to provide education that empowers individuals with indigenous heritage.

This university provides four main degrees that, interconnected, provide students of the resources to implement a change in indigenous communities that extends to the rest of the Mexican nation. These degrees are Alternative Tourism, Sustainable Development, Language and Culture and Intercultural Communication. These degrees offer different approaches to the same issue, which could be considered indigenous culture and
community development and empowerment. They have different approaches, combining respect for the environment and the cultural heritage of the communities while promoting economic and social development in four different sectors: economic, environmental, cultural and communicational. As we have said before, this institution and the education system they provide identifies the need to break the racial barriers imposed by the state on indigenous population. However, this institution parallels those discriminatory ones and because there is not a further change in the society coming from other sectors, its utility can be constrained.

Despite this positive approach, this institution requires development of the action lines to increase the effect of their work on the Chiapanecan context. Graduate students have not been very successful when inserting in their labor market. Due to an international economic crisis, competition has increased for those trying to find a first job. Also, the international donor network that finances most of the development programs has also seen their resources reduced. But the problem seems to lay in more profound Mexican social dynamics. First, the status of the university, different from the “normal” ones provides the students of a more limited degree. This can be exemplified by the case of the Teachers Union. By an agreement with the state government, only students from the “normal” (meaning normative) university, can work as teachers in institutional schools. Therefore, this limits the integration of those indigenous people with a higher education to provide indigenous community of a higher quality and better fit instructor. This fact points to a deeper problem. By creating an independent institution, UNICH differentiates its students from the regular education, creating a double kind of
graduate students, having access to different positions, and therefore continuing the
double kind of citizenship that the Mexican state has promoted since its formation.
Launching indigenous students with a differentiated degree in a system that has not been
created to integrate them positions them in a disadvantageous place in the labor market.
Consequently, induced by the negative effects of the economic crisis and the systematic
problems to integrate high education indigenous individuals from an independent
institution, UNICH will be unable to break the patterns of racial discrimination existing
in Chiapas and Mexico.

If we consider the Zapatista system and their method of integration of graduated
students into their labor network, we could find a way to integrate indigenous high
education students from UNICH into communities to work on development. If there was
an agreement between the university and communities or directly between the student
and the community itself, students will have a guaranteed entrance into labor market.
This will provide them of the opportunity to push development in indigenous
communities and create a positive circle of empowerment that could break through racial
systemic limitations. This could make a difference in the function of UNICH in society.
They could also benefit from signing exchange agreement with other national and
international institutions to promote a dialogue that enriches the institution and their
students and the field of indigenous social movement. Thus, Chiapas can become the
source of change that indigenous people throughout Latin America are asking for.
Local Perspectives: NGOS and Zapatista Autonomous Education

When analyzing the role of NGOs as promoters of education and educational reform in Chiapas, we will focus on two of them. First, the role played by IAE (innovation and educative support) will be analyzed. This is an institution, based in San Cristobal de las Casas, working to increase the quality of education. Secondly, the role of Edupaz, based on Comitán de Domínguez, will also be surveyed. This organization uses education to provide different communities with training on different areas in order to promote a more peaceful environment in Chiapas and to trigger community development. These two organizations complement the performance of the previously analyzed actors. The existence of these organizations is a private respond to the lack of public service or the low quality and inadequacy of the same. The study of these organizations is essential to understand what actors and how are they participating in the promotion of education in Chiapas. Finally, we will observe to which extent these actors promote a more equal society, promoting the integration of indigenous people and their culture in the whole of the Chiapanecan society.

The analysis of nongovernmental organizations introduces us to another sector of the participants in the implementation of education in Chiapas. In this case, we will start with the study of the organization IAE. This institution has three lines of action: increasing the quality of education, promoting indigenous bilingual education and the professionalization of the institutional teachers. Through different projects that cooperate with different groups and organizations, IAE functions as the creator of a complex
network that fosters an education of higher quality that empowers indigenous communities by improving the performance of educators in Chiapas. This organization has one of the most interesting proposals to the educational environment in Chiapas. Nevertheless, as a private actor, its capacity to create a social change is limited in terms of capital. For this reason, they promote political action to implement institutionally the more successful projects. Although they do not define specifically the creation of a more comprehensive society in Chiapas as their main goal, since it does not recognizes racial differences delineate the limits of poverty, the proximity of their projects to this goal contributes to the achievement of a social reform through education in this region.

IAE

IAE defines the organization as an institution based in Chiapas that coordinates three initiatives to work with different projects on education innovation with an especial cross cultural focus to improve the quality of education in Mexico and, mainly, in Chiapas. This organization operates as coordinator of educational programs and a facilitator of funds for different projects, becoming a link between international, national and local organizations to promote an increase of quality of institutional education. They receive funds from Public and Indigenous Peoples State Secretaries, as well as Federal institutions like the Indigenous Education Director and international foundations like the US Ford and Kellog foundations or the Japanese and Finnish Embassies. These funds are distributed between the organization’s own projects and projects presented by teachers
and other organizations. For IAE, innovation in education is one of the most important ways to achieve this goal. Consequently, one of the three lines of action is educative innovation. According to this line of action known as INED, the organization is specialized in the “articulation of educational policy and practice through innovative training and support to various educational groups, especially teachers” (IAE, 2010, 2). For them, educative innovation raises from the recognition of the particularities of the demands made by the very own actors, and the main characteristic is that it promotes an improvement of practices that serve a certain group with a set of specific features.

According to Estrada (2009), educative innovation is defined as an “action moving to solve educative problems that have been clearly identified by educative communities, to which it is necessary to answer by means of creative ideas that generate new proposals representing a meaningful change in a given socio-educative reality” (192). This constructivist approach to education is based in the ideas of Freire, who conceptualizes education as a process resulting from the interaction between student and educators, whose goal is the breakup of the oppressing institutions through the identification of their discourse of legitimization. This conception of education is complemented by a participatory approach, in which educators become part of the process of innovation. In addition to a process of evaluation and theorization of the results of their work, the organization guarantees the implementation of innovative measures that identify the needs of the institutional education, providing the resources to implement those measures.
The INED approach focusing on innovation for education is complemented by FOENDIB and the Center for Education and Human Integration. The FONDEIB promotes an “education that recognizes, respects and favors cultural, ethnic and linguistic diversity in Mexico” (IAE, 2010, 2). This line of action provide resources for other organizations projects of bilingual education, like the creation of bilingual and trilingual class materials on indigenous languages, at the same time as they work on their own projects. This branch of the institution receives funds from international institutions like the Barcelona City Hall or the IADB (Inter-American Development Bank). On the other hand, the Center for Education and Human Integration works on creating a professional identity for educators with an emphasis on strengthening professional identity that results on a revalorization of the role of the educator. This approach attempts to professionalize the work of educators, introducing those to innovative methodologies promoting dialogical procedures, creating a professional network that enforces the links and dialogue between the educators. This approach searches an increase of quality of education through training and professionalization of education workers that results in a better education for the children in Chiapas communities. Thus, the use of education to train teachers implements a change on quality of institutional education. These programs are based on a multicultural approach that considers education as a life ongoing process. Thus, the work with educators becomes a form to promote a qualitative bilingual education

This institution stands out for the important role they play as redistributors of funds coming from national and international institutions into Chiapanecans organization.
They also spread their constructivist approach to education to other organizations and by working with institutional education, they promote a reform of the educational panorama in that Mexican State. Their work rises from the need to improve education in Mexico, especially the education addressed to indigenous community. Among other points, they collaborate with the government in an attempt to achieve a political reform. This methodology is based on Paulo Freire’s ideas about education for social change. As we will see in the next chapter, one of the main flaws of this methodology is the creation of an educational hierarchy, where the leaders get to the communities to create a dialogue to identify community needs and create programs that address those. This methodology could be considered as reshaping the social hierarchy, placing IAE at the top of the educational scale. However, their job seems to resemble more the practices of the Highlander Folk School in which Myles Horton.

According to the opinion of users of this institution when assessing the quality of the work done with educators, one of them described the training process in the following terms: “knowledge was constructed, or is constructed in a process among all the colleagues that participate in the training course” (Estrada, 2009, 196). Yet, the focus of the three lines of action to address the work developed by instructors seems to create a hierarchy where the educator is raised to the control of agency. This approach shows some limits to the social change that the state of Chiapas requires.

Nevertheless, the work of this institution finds its limitation on its private inherent feature. As long as these courses and projects are not spread to the whole of the education community by the state and federal governments, a complete reform of the educational
landscape cannot be achieved. In addition, when regarding their role to deconstruct the limitations that constrain indigenous communities into poverty, there are two outcomes that could be considered. First, the institution addresses indigenous culture and languages as one of the main issues to be solved to create a qualitative system of education. Therefore, this work could benefit the process of social change to empower indigenous peoples to create autonomy and integrate themselves in the social fabric of Ladinoss and mestizos that characterizes Chiapanecan demography too. On the other hand, it seems to implement the programs of educative innovation following a hierarchical pattern that identifies educators as the catalyst of change, without integrating parents or community leaders in this process. This approach can limit a more broad effect of their programs. Choosing educators as the main receivers of their programs can be due to the limits of capital of a private organization to address the multiple problems of Chiapas and Mexican education. Therefore, this conclusion places the public education service as the necessary actor to implement an education reform that results on social change. Finally, considering its role as a coordinator of different actors, one of the main institution identifies in this work, namely the Zapatistas, does not collaborate with IAE. This lack of collaboration is due to the Zapatistas’ rejection to work with those organizations working with the state. This lack of cooperation also points to a different perspective in terms of the direction of agency. While the Zapatistas based their programs on community decision making, the projects promoted by IAE do not always follow this direction. Therefore, it seems like IAE should readdress their perspective about agency and the
direction of education reform as well as the identification of racial issues as one of the main steps to achieve a more inclusive society in Chiapas.

*Edupaz*

The other Chiapanecan NGO considered in this work is Edupaz. This organization was born in 1997 with the mission of constructing a more peaceful environment after the Zapatista uprising, which resulted in a militarization of the state and the conflict between different communities. This organization uses education as a means to train communities to develop autonomy in their economic production, health and cultural heritages. From their point of view, indigenous identity is not a static one but it needs to evolve to enable process of women empowerment, community development and sexuality issues. It is defined as an apolitical organization, respecting political and religious differences. Their work focuses on the border with Guatemala communities. This organization recognizes their focus groups between women, poor farmers, indigenous people and urban marginalized people. They promote an agro ecological project that looks for integration and human development to solve the social ruptures in Chiapas.

This organization works with three main projects or ideas that are implemented through smaller community groups. These lines of action are: Solidarity Economy, Holistic Health and Agro Ecology and Sustainable Alternative Technologies. The Solidarity Economy project tends to support sustainable cattle raising. By means of microcredits, they construct a sense of community and trust that was lost during the
violent events that took place as the aftermath of the Zapatista uprising. They also empower the more vulnerable sectors of Chiapanecan society, that in their words, compose the majority of the population. In the case of Holistic Health, they promote alternative medicine, psychological sessions and human development among other issues. They attempt to reduce the psychological effects of the traumatic experiences of the integrants of marginalized population as well as the promotion of human development and health to allow these sectors of the population to carry on a more dignified life.

Finally, Sustainable Alternative Technologies provides the beneficiaries of the projects of training on ecology and productive technologies that emphasize sustainable relationship with the environment and open new opportunities for economic activities.

This organization has a different methodology to the one observed on IAE. In this case, education is conceived as a training tool to construct peace and sustainable human and economic development. This experience is similar to the approach used by Myles Horton and Highlander Folk School. This similarity comes from the use of the organization to educate individuals and communities to perform different activities that strengthen community cooperation. This approach tries to construct a more peaceful environment where individuals can have a healthier habitat. But at the same time it helps to develop economic activities and health services that allow for a better living of those communities they work with. In terms of limitations, this institution is limited in geographic terms and, consequently, in the population reached. Once again, we find a similar problematic than the one we have seen in the previous NGO. Human and economic capital reduces the extent to which these organizations can implement their
programs. In this case, their projects depend on a very restricted number of participants that makes it dependent on voluntary work. Also, they depend on funding from external donors, which in times of economic crisis has provoked some reduction of the resources. Also, even though they have an interesting approach to education, their work may also have a reduced effect for social change. However, their identification of racial and class characteristics as the markers of poverty and inequity can be part of a broader needed project to implement this change in Chiapas and Mexico.

As we have seen NGOs play an important role in the expansion of education in Chiapas and in the construction of a more cohesive society in terms of race and class. Their works, with very different approaches, identify the main problems of education in Chiapas. IAE works to provide a social service that the state and federal government should be carrying on. They collaborate with different institutions to introduce programs that increase the quality of education, placing indigenous identity as one of the main lines of action. Thus, they help create a better educational system that could result in the construction of a new social fabric where racial issues do not limit the potential of communities and their integrants. In the case of Edupaz, they provide a service of training to construct a sense of community that enables a more peaceful coexistence in the state, as well as sustainable economic and human development that creates a more productive and beneficial relationship between the communities and nature. This approach compensates previous negative effects of discriminatory behavior by the state and official institutions like education. The lack of access to education and the limited possibilities to have access to capital enabling more economic activities during previous decades have
resulted in a marginalized and economically vulnerable society. In this case, education becomes a tool to improve the living standards of those who did not have access to education through their youth. Nevertheless, the potential effect of these institutions is limited due to the private quality of the organizations. This is why, like IAE, we argue the state and federal government should use these experiences to create and implement programs that could identify the needs of the communities and, by empowerment of the most vulnerable sectors of society, deconstruct the racial barriers that are limiting the possibilities of indigenous communities.

_{Zapatista Autonomous Education_}

As it has already been introduced, Chiapas offers one of the most interesting educational landscapes in Latin America. This environment is enriched by the existence of the Zapatista Autonomous Education. This education program has been developed by the very same members of the communities. It is designed to address the deficiencies of the institutional education system. They have constructed their own curriculum so the next generations grow with a non-discriminatory image of their own culture and they are prepared to develop the roles that are needed in their communities. Autonomous Education becomes the crucial element for the sustainability of the Zapatista movement. The study of their project allows understanding what has been identified by indigenous communities in Chiapas as the main requirements education must meet. However, their closed system of self-supply cannot be considered other than temporary. No community
will be able to survive in isolation. In this institutionalization period of the Zapatista movement, the forced inclusion of graduated students in the community is a requirement for the development and subsistence of their program in this early stage. But future generations will have to be allowed to integrate with other non-Zapatista communities. Even more, the Zapatista communities and the education program will have to collaborate with institutional education organizations when the government proves a more democratic behavior. Thus, Chiapas will finally create a complete and comprehensive education system that allows for indigenous empowerment and breaks the barriers of what for centuries have been denied to indigenous communities.

Introduction to the Zapatista Movement

The Zapatista movement has drawn the attention of a globalized world. A multitude of articles, books, and documentaries have been produced in an attempt to understand and spread the ideas supported by the group. How did a cluster of indigenous peoples in the rainforests of southeast Mexico capture the interest of academics, politicians, NGOs, social movements, and others around the world? In the mid-1990s post-Cold War context of spreading neoliberal policies worldwide with little in the way of opposition and the increasing levels of inequality and exploitation that it created, the Zapatistas emerged as a successful movement that advocated human rights and dignity to the Mexican federal government while fighting against the US influence in the nation through the implementation of NAFTA.

The Zapatistas, therefore, personified and exemplified what many people were trying to communicate in both north and south hemispheres. Globalization benefits the
international markets between massive corporations while it threatens local culture and marginalized minorities who are not represented by governments. This is the spark that lighted the Zapatista struggle. Employed as cheap laborers and exploited without labor protections, the indigenous groups in Mexico have been pushing for a system of land reform that would provide them the means to live a dignified life in which they could have access to health care, education, economic security, and governmental representation. Globalization has rearranged the world order and, therefore, the claims of indigenous people need to be phrased in a different way. Now, we have a group of indigenous people that fights for their rights, claiming their right to be recognized by the national government and simultaneously being identified for their distinctness. After being excluded for centuries, the indigenous peoples now ask for the right for autonomy, so they can decide how to be organized, to make use of their land, and to educate their children so they can live according to their concept of community. These goals form their autonomous project. However, they do not claim independence from the Mexican state but a reform of the corrupted and discriminatory practices of what they call “the Bad Government”. But, now they have lost hope that a central government will be able to recognize what fits their needs and wishes. The Zapatista movement shares an ideology that has emerged throughout the world and has support in many settings. Its voice has been echoed by anti-globalization movements in the “developed” north, but it has also resonated in other indigenous movement in South America. This broad support, supplemented by a strong campaign on the internet has spread the ideas of the Zapatismo, making it a symbol of anti neo-liberal struggles.
The Zapatistas offer us a case study of ethnic conflict that contains instances of violence, but also an attempt of peaceful resolution. After being ignored for centuries, the Mayan groups in Chiapas no longer trust the Mexican government. They claim autonomy and to achieve it, they began making use of violence. However, this violent strategy was abandoned and since the very beginning, they have also made clear that they want to be part of the Mexican nation, though they want the Mexican government to recognize their cultural differences and give them the rights to lead their way out of poverty.

Indeed, this situation is repeated in most of Latin American countries, and many examples of indigenous movements could be pointed out, such as in the cases of the indigenous movement in Brazil in the 1980s, the riots in Ecuador in 2000, etc. However, the Zapatista movement has achieved a more global response and support and has been identified as a “new political movement”. Their community base decision making, lead by indigenous people including women, is strikingly different to what we are used to seeing. Their success in creating autonomous communities and raising funds for development outside of the Mexican government is unusual too. The fact that all this is happening in the country neighboring the US makes it even more noteworthy. The Zapatistas are important case of study because they offer an example grassroots movement to develop their own autonomy project, placing education and community empowerment as two of the main goals.

To create their autonomy project, the Zapatistas have had the support of the global community, national indigenous groups and local organization, and even the Catholic Church. They have received funds and training to implement development projects. They
have created autonomous schools and medical centers. However, they live in the context of low-intensity war, threatening to tear the social fabric that supports the success of the movement. On the other hand, the government has developed programs that have been able to introduce international money flows into Chiapas. Finally, the act of creating an autonomous community that depends on external actors for subsistence is just a reframe of the traditional situation of indigenous people that they were trying to fight. By creating an independent community, they are not integrated into the state so their claims cannot be heard and answered. By bringing the indigenous question into national politics they have been able to publicize their cause. This is the first step toward what would be their ultimate success, which is to have their right recognized by the implementation of national land reform, recognition by the state of indigenous rights and their opportunity to create autonomous communities. Only then will they be able to achieve the recognition of their rights and the integration and dignity they ask for.

As we have seen, there is a long and complex historical background to the Zapatista movement. However, it was January 1st, 1994 that has been considered the birth date for this movement. On that date, the EZLN (Zapatista Army of National Liberation) occupied a series of cities in the state of Chiapas: San Cristobal de Las Casas, Ocosingo, Chanal, Altamirano and Las Margaritas. With different levels of violence, the EZLN took advantage of the New Year’s festivities to stand up against the government by taking over the official government buildings in those cities. From those standpoints, they could send ardent communiqués broadcasting to a national and international audience their critique to the neoliberal policies and their claims for indigenous rights, avoiding a
governmental manipulation of their message. This first strategic success was repudiated by the general national opinion because of its use of violence. However, it reached some support on the terms against the implementation of NAFTA and the globalization of the economy. The government launched a counter attack and criticized the Zapatistas for destroying the national stability required by the international companies to make investments in Mexico. For different reasons but with the same goal, both the EZLN and the government laid down arms, one because they wanted to reach national support, the other because they needed national stability to benefit from the implementation of NAFTA. However, it was only the EZLN who maintained this withdrawal and moved to a more peaceful position. The government continued attacking the communities trying to erase the movement, finding that whole communities had moved to the rainforest avoiding in some way the federal army punishment. This abusive use of force by the government was denounced internationally by the Zapatistas supporters, provoking claims for stability in Mexico from very different sides, encompassing very different positions according to contradictory reasons as those of international NGOs or Chase Bank representatives. This led to the establishing of a dialogue between the government and the Zapatistas from which resulted the San Andres Accords in April 1995. After president Gortari’s successor, Ernesto Zedillo tried to finish violently with the EZLN leadership.

The San Andres Accords granted “the country’s indigenous people the right to “free determination”, including autonomous political, social, and economic organization” (Bob, 2005, 126). This meant a huge success for the Zapatistas and the EZLN. In a year
of fighting, they had achieved their main goal, the recognition of indigenous rights. Nevertheless, even though the government representative signed these accords, the presidency did not ratify them, leading to the rupture of the dialogue between the Zapatistas and the government. The Zapatistas retreated back to the rainforest and continued with their organization of autonomous communities, finding support from international organizations and advocacy groups. Other attempts have been made to find some agreement between the Zapatistas and the government, but the latter fails to ratify the Indigenous Rights and the rest of the requests, such as land reform, made by the Zapatistas. Even more, the Zapatistas have been suffering what has been called “low-intensity war”, learned by the Mexican officials at the US School of the Americas, at the same time that the US provided army supplies to be able to carry on an effective fight at the jungle. This situation positions the Zapatistas as the victims once again, even if they rose on arms once, they left their violent actions soon. However, they had been violently repressed by the government. This represents the continuity of the traditional ethnic conflict that started with the colonization of the Americas, treating indigenous people lives as a dispensable good. This issue has given a lot of support for the Zapatistas, throughout America and in other places of the world where this situation has been suffered and denounced.

Zapatista Ideology

At this point it is important to identify the key elements of the Zapatista ideology to understand what makes different this movement from other indigenous movements and uprisings throughout Latin America and the world. It is also necessary to understand why
it received so much attention from the international community and the academic world. One of the most important features in the creation of the Zapatista movement is the combination of an indigenous movement framed with the help of mestizo post-marxist or post-Maoist intellectuals. This combination is very interesting because it has given a local root to the more international perspective brought by leaders such as subcomandante Marcos. According to Dr. Lascar on an interview by J. P. Huimirilla for the University of Los Lagos (Chile), there are five main points that identify and differentiate this movement from other Marxist and revolutionary ones.

Those points are:

1. No claims for state control but for land and autonomy at a local level.

2. Respect for original American identities and cultures.

3. Listening, understanding and finally implementing in the revolutionary fight the past experiences on indigenous fights.

4. Developing an authentic democratic revolutionary structure where every voice and vote from communities and community members is respected.

5. Keeping an Army, the EZLN, under discipline, armed and trained by supplying it by the community. Soldiers belong to the community so, even if the army is a vertically hierarchical institution, they can participate in the community decision making, which is the origin of the army decisions.

In addition to these five principles, the Zapatistas communiqués are characterized for addressing a wide range of groups. In words of subcomandante Marcos, Zapatismo
addresses the problems of all minority groups exploited, forgotten and oppressed by neoliberal governments and corporations; namely, indigenous peoples, ethnic minorities, immigrants, homosexuals, women and young people. Thus, the pool for potential Zapatista supporters is immensely wide. This, therefore, is one of the reasons why Zapatismo became such a widespread and renowned movement. However, this ideology and the addressees have been reframed and reinterpreted since the first speeches, going from a more class-struggle perspective to an identity issues indigenous movement one, allowing to attract different sources of support and funding that allowed them to execute development and autonomous programs in their communities.

**Zapatista Social Network**

The Zapatista social network has been highly analyzed. It has been one of the tools used for its success, being able to put more pressure on the Federal Government through international actors according to the “boomerang effect theory” (Keck and Sikkink, 1998). This means that what a local group such as Zapatismo cannot do due to abusive behaviors of the state, can be changed by raising public awareness on the international arena so the more powerful international actors put pressure on the government to implement those changes and end up with the abusive behavior. The success of this strategy can be considered in relative terms in the case of Zapatista, but the success of awareness rising has led to the creation of a very complex social network.

Analyzing this social network shows that “there are several overlapping strands (...) encompassing advocacy, social justice/development, and solidarity NGOs” (Bob, 2005, 171). According to Clifford Bob, there are three levels in the network that can be
subdivided into other different groups. At the local level, Zapatistas surprisingly found the support of the Catholic Church, who traditionally in Latin America sides the government. In this case, the diocese of San Cristobal was leaded through Liberation Theology ideas. This fraction of the Catholic Church in Latin America means a turnover to the left of Catholicism trying to answer “who constituted the nation and who were the rightful owners of the continent’s national identity” (Meade, 2010, 277) siding with indigenous and proletariat groups. In the national and regional level, Zapatistas found the support of indigenous groups as well as peasants’ organizations. Both of them shared the need for land reform and requested recognition and support from the government. In the international arena, some human rights organizations such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International offered support by issuing reports on the political and social situation in Chiapas, especially addressing the government and paramilitary groups’ abuses on the indigenous population. A second group within the international actors is the “development, social justice and peace NGOs (who) have started long-term development and conflict-resolution program” (Bob, 2005, 172). Here is important the collaboration between international and national NGOs, who at the beginning were doing inefficient work but, later integrated their effort through organizations such as CONPAZ (Coordination of Non-Governmental Organizations for Peace). Finally, a third part of the international actors addressing the Zapatista conflict are the solidarity organizations, where intellectuals and leftist internationally renowned activist are included. They fulfill a similar function than the one carried out by the previous groups. The creation of such a wide and strong social network became an invaluable tool for the Zapatistas to avoid
further military and paramilitary attack and to have access to the resources, economic and training, to implement some developing programs that have improved their living quality and given them some autonomy from the government, being thus closer to achieve their primary goals.

As it has been analyzed, to address such a wide pool of international actors, the Zapatistas needed to reshape their ideology and their speech towards a more inclusive one. Here is where the role of the charismatic subcomandante Marcos comes into effect. By using his rhetoric, he touches all the keys that raise support for the movement, as we have seen, at all the possible levels. Coming from a student protest background and being close to the 1968 riots, he and the other intellectuals leaders of the movement knew about the importance of raising international awareness and support to legitimize and make their survival more possible. Finally, it is also important to point out the role of the national and international press that spread their word, as well as internet, platform for its internationalization of communiqués that launched their struggle to a wider public than it has ever been seen before. This is how the Zapatistas became a worldwide movement against globalization and neoliberal policies and their counter effects: namely, the exploitation, isolation and repression of minority groups. All this is framed through an ethnic identity struggle leading them to such popularity that they had to reject a contract with the fashion company Benetton to use their image on clothes. By marketing their revolution, they were marketing themselves and it soon became necessary to make clear the distinction.
Nevertheless, the analysis of the movement’s features and its strategies to raise support offer us the possibility to understand why this movement became so important and well-known in international politics and academics. Their reframing of their ideology to find more support to realize their project of community based democracy transformed them on the new example for rebellion to achieve autonomy and recognition. This is why it can be considered as a successful movement.

**Autonomy and Education**

Zapatista Autonomy is defined as a community-based model. Legitimacy of their project, both political and educative, comes from full community participation. It is a non-secessionist movement that claims a reform of Mexican politics towards a more democratic nation. Their avowal is for ethnic citizenship. The movement “claims rights to Mexican citizenship and indigenous social identity, consistent with broader hemispheric resurgence of indigenous movement.” (Stahler-Sholk, 2007, 54) Their broader project of autonomy has four lines of action.

One of them is creating a political framework that allows them to create a legislative and political organization to rule their communities. They also have created or implanted a traditional judicial system. Another field used to construct sustainable autonomy, as well as education, is economic development. Education could be integrated with other projects dealing with health and gender equality among others as social welfare initiatives.

To understand the legitimacy of their education project we need to understand the political organization of the Zapatista communities. Popular legitimacy is achieve
through a base democracy and communal governance understood in terms of “usos y costumbres”. By base democracy we understand a democracy that is born from the integrants of the community and that allows each of them to participate freely and responsibly to take decisions that will determine the life of the community. Referring to “usos y costumbres”, it combines issues of Maya identity with ejidal and catholic organizational experiences. The local organization is divided in four permanent layers and a temporary commission. The four permanent institutional organs are Comisariado, Consejo de Autoridades, Agencia and Responsable de la organización. Comisariado takes care of day-to-day administration, while Consejo de autoridades deals with Ejidal issues. Agencia is the organ in charge of judicial processes. Finally, Responsable de la organización is a representative of the EZLN (Zapatista National Liberation Army) and it is the only non-democratically elected representative. However, his role is not involved in decision making processes but on surveillance. Nevertheless, the non-democratic election of the army representative can be considered contradictory with their base democracy project. Moreover, there are also some temporary specifics committees named Comités Específicos created to deal with specific programs, negotiating with NGOs, etc. Education funding tended to be integrated in the tasks of these Comités Específicos.

This local organization is integrated in a regional organization that comprehends Zapatista communities in Chiapas. There are five regional centers called Caracoles where the Juntas de Buen Gobierno meet. The Juntas are integrated by two or three delegates of each community. They are appointed for three years but meet only for 15 days to avoid clientelism, which has been one of the main reasons why social movements in Mexico
have been undermined by the government. As described by one of the representatives of the Junta, “there is one council per municipality and there are seven municipalities in the Junta de Buen Gobierno. There are six members on each council. Five of these are in the municipal government and one site in the JBG. Each municipal council works also with various commissions for things like water, health, education and so on.” (Ryan, 2008,125)

The Educación Autónoma program is a very interesting initiative because it emerges from grassroots initiative. It empowers indigenous language and culture by making them part of the backbone of the education system. “Their objective was to promote and develop a participatory and inclusive educational system in line with the needs and demands expressed by the communities themselves.” (Barmeyer, 164) As it has been mentioned before, education is identified by the Zapatista movement as a key element for the consolidation of process of developing autonomy and communal self-administration. It also respects the aforementioned traditions and it is planned in a sustainable way. However, the disconnection and rejection to participate with any government organization or any organization that collaborates with the government pose some challenges on the education program. One of them is basically the limited resources and the relative dependency from international cooperators. There is also a competition between the Zapatista communities and communities that have access to the Oportunidades program. The importance given to education as part of the raising of children may push parents to choose leaving the Zapatista movement to provide their
children of an officially recognized education that allows them to have access to better opportunities in the labor market and improve their standards of living.

As we can see, such a complex organization reflects a community commitment for autonomy that requires state recognition. Autonomy understood on these terms becomes the best mean for indigenous communities. At the same time, the recognition and cooperation between indigenous communities and other social sectors could trigger an improvement of national and democratic behavior, avoiding clientilistic relationships. In the case of education, there are some important facts that should be modified when the process of autonomy has reached higher stability and sustainability. At that point, the Zapatista education program will have to be open for cooperation with the government to provide a system that empowers indigenous communities. But cooperation will also avoid secessionism, increase the quality of education and permit social mobility. It would also be an important step for a definitive integration of indigenous people in the national social reality, respecting cultural values and heritage rather than assimilating the indigenous population.

The Zapatista educational program has two levels, primary and secondary education. Each community counts with a primary school. Each caracol counts with a secondary school. Students go to this school from different smaller communities. The students provide the food for the school. They bring beans and tortillas. Teachers are provided of food, thus they are freed from working their own milpa (agricultural system that combines the cultivation of corn and other products, in this case, for subsistence). Graduated students from secondary school can choose to work in one of the three main
sectors in Zapatista community. They can work as teachers in primary or secondary schools. They can also work in agro-ecological production. The third option is working in the health services provided to each community. Moreover, the Zapatistas also offer language education to non-community members in Spanish and Tsotsil.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided us of general overview of the main actors composing the educational framework in Chiapas. Going from an international to a more local approach, all these programs identify education as one of the main resources to create some kind of social change. In the case of institutional organizations related to state government, we can see how the limits of their work are usually in their incapacity or lack of will to address the issue of indigenous racial discrimination and the reconstruction of a more cohesive and multicultural society. Those programs independent from state government, like the NGOs and the Zapatista movement, do identify indigenous identity issues as a need to address to construct a new Chiapanecan and Mexican society. However, these organizations are limited in the implementations of their reforms geographically or because of lack of human and economic capital.

This characterization of the education paradigm in Chiapas points to the need of a reform of the education system in Chiapas. A new education system should be created following the already existing practices of organizations like IAE and Edupaz, as well as the Autonomous Education Zapatista program. These organizations share a relative
bottom-up approach to the implementation of education programs. They recognize the need to create a new racial discourse that allows for the creation of a new social paradigm that respects en equal terms indigenous and non-indigenous culture, at the same time as they promote an ecologically sustainable economic development. This approach appears as the most appropriated path to perform an educational program that promotes social change and the creation of a new social paradigm based on respect and coexistence between different cultural groups. In the next chapter, we will see how different education philosophies coincide in certain points, pointing to the use of Zapatista Autonomous Education program as the most adequate means to carry on said reform.
CHAPTER 4: EDUCATION PHILOSOPHIES

The previous chapters have proven the extent to which Mexican governmental institutions have implemented policies that continue the racist and discriminatory divisions in Mexican society. The analysis of the context of education in Chiapas demonstrates that there is a need to implement an educational reform which changes the social paradigm, allowing for the empowerment and inclusion of the indigenous population. This reform should incorporate some of the principles of Zapatista Autonomy Education. It should also take advantage of the international and national commitments to promote education in the region. The goal of such reform is to deconstruct the racist and class-discriminatory practices of Chiapanecan and Mexican society and allow integration of indigenous people as first class citizens while respecting the cultural heritage, values, and autonomous political practices.

This chapter aims to orient the project of Zapatista Education within some of the most influential education proposals of the 20th century. The influence of works by authors such as John Dewey and Paulo Freire in the 19th century and other works, produced in the Mexican educational environment, will be used to justify the analysis. Other relevant authors such as Myles Horton and David Jardine will be included in the examination were commonalities can be found between their proposals and the Zapatista project. Finally, the Autonomous Education program will be analyzed according to the parameters laid out in the theories about education mentioned above. This analysis will create new insight into the Zapatista education program, which will in turn justify the
implementation of such a system to reform the educational landscape in Chiapas, and by extension throughout Mexico.

Firstly, the proposals for education promoted by John Dewey will be examined. Dewey was highly influential in the indigenista movement of the early 20th century and in the post-revolutionary era. Jose Vasconcelos, as representative of the government and the SEP in terms of education in this period and one of the most important authors of the indigenista movement, was clearly influenced by some of Dewey’s ideas. In particular, the concept of a state which provides its population with education as a means for constructing a defined national development program fit well in the milieu of the post-revolutionary period. However, there were other issues in which they differed, notably the development of a hierarchy of civilizations, with impelled Vasconcelos to promote his idea of the cosmic race. However, at other important junctures, Dewey’s theories will be valuable to the analysis as they relate to some characteristics of the Zapatista Autonomy Education project.

According to John Dewey, education is conceived as a process of evolution. It is a natural feature of the human being. Children are considered to have the “capacity and potentiality” to define themselves through education. This conception of childhood as a non-incomplete stage, avoiding the use of adulthood as a reference point, allows us to understand the education process and to reject methodologies in which the imposition of the education material is based on completing the skills of the child so that he or she becomes an adult. The education process does not only take place during childhood but is a continuous activity which provides people with different skills and comprehensions of
their environment in many different aspects. This process is typically associated with a set of emotions that relate to education. However, such feelings have traditionally been removed from education to encourage more efficient achievement. Dewey states that instead of removing such emotions, they should be used to increase the power of the education process.

Concerning the role of the school, Dewey conceives the school as an institution that creates space for the development of the natural process of education. This way, he separates the school itself and education. The school is nothing more than an institutionalized procedure for the implementation of education. It is, therefore, not the only place where education takes place. Education is a process that also takes place at home, individually, and in groups which continues ceaselessly; any experience can provide life lessons. In spite of this conception of school, there is a positive role for the institution in Dewey’s theory. Society must address education as the process of providing future generations with skills to participate in the construction of a new reality. Thus, the school becomes a social instrument that is used to influence on the future development of a given society by providing younger generations of certain tools and principles that will delimit their construction of society. In this case, Dewey writes of using education to promote democracy by forming conscious citizens who can carry out the requirements of a democratic society.

Apart from this conception of education as a social construction, Dewey also proposed several ideas that can be considered obsolete today. One of his ideas which now seem outdated is his conception of civilization. In his understanding, civilization is
measured by the ability of its components to manipulate the environment in their favor. A successful adaptation of the environment to fit the needs of man shows a high level of civilization. This criterion allows for a classification of civilizations, a concept that is currently rejected in most academic circles. This idea is one of the most important points when considering the influence of Dewey on Indigenistas and, specifically, on José Vasconcelos. The manipulation of the environment and its reflection of civilization had to be readdressed by Vasconcelos because it positioned the Mexican nation in a lower position in relation to other, more industrialized, nations. However, Vasconcelos developed the idea of mestizaje as the future of the nation. For Vasconcelos, racial mixture implied racial evolution and the potential for the combination of heritages from great past civilizations which would lead to a yet more important civilization. This was the argument used by Vasconcelos in order to justify a national program of cultural and racial mestizaje. In addition, this principle also justified the acculturation of indigenous communities. This organization of civilizations into hierarchy was refuted by post-modernist and post-structuralism theories.

Another important author to be considered here is Paulo Freire. He has been one of the most influential authors in the second half of the 20th century, both in Latin America and in many other corners of the world. His approach was revolutionary because it introduced a new instrumentality of education to empower the oppressed classes. This approach was based on the new role of the instructor as the key instrument for social empowerment, meaning that the instructor should integrate himself in equal terms in the
group he works with. His proposal is aimed at changing the hierarchical structure through social revolution.

Freire writes from an “avant la lettre” post-colonial perspective. His educational program pursues the reaffirmation of the colonized people. This reaffirmation requires the overcoming of the powerful elite through a process of empowerment in which education takes a leading role. He criticizes the traditional education imposed by the colonial elites in which the student is treated as an empty box which has to be filled with a certain type of knowledge. This methodology limits critical thinking and allows for the elites to control and manipulate the broad base of the population. From his point of view, education is understood as a more complex process. Freire states that education is the result of a dialogue in which everyone is involved. Human beings are incomplete because they can always learn more. According to Freire (1970), it is human condition to always try to “be more”, denying thus determinist theories:

“Students, as they are increasingly posed with problems relating to themselves in the world and with the world, will feel increasingly challenged and obliged to respond to that challenge. Because they apprehend the challenge as interrelated to other problems within a total context, not as a theoretical question, the resulting comprehension tends to be increasingly critical and thus constantly less alienated. Their response to the challenge evokes new challenges, followed by new understandings; and gradually the students come to regard themselves as committed” (p. 63).

His theories of education are based in the conception of the world implying both action and meaning that results in praxis. This is how education becomes an important
instrument to create a revolution. If education promotes both parts implied in word, action and reflection, the oppressed could achieve overcoming the discriminatory situation they suffer and achieve a restructuration of the society. This education has to be based on a dialogue tainted of humility, love and faith in human beings. This is the way to avoid the cultural invasion that otherwise will mean the work of the learner-instructor. This education is planned and exercised by cultural circles.

This concept of the cultural circle is one of the most controversial proposals by Freire. Even though he proposes strengthening the critical thinking of the oppressed groups to prompt a revolution that finish with the exploitative hierarchy of Latin America, the way he proposes to implement education through cultural circles has been criticized as a hegemonic group. Creating a cultural group that organizes the education revolution can be a way to reconstruct a hierarchical society following new criteria. On the other hand, even if he proposes a strengthening of the links between man, community and the environment, he places mankind as the ruler of the nature. This conception of mankind as the steward of nature is nothing but another way to establish a hierarchy. This critique coincides with other critiques that have been posed on Marxism. Since Freire is considered to make a Marxist or Neo Marxist analysis of society, this critique points out to the criticism of the broader movement.

Another author that has contributed to a new conception of education is Myles Horton. Working in the US with discriminated societies like black people in the southern states, he participated in the creation in what is known as the Highlander Folk School. Focusing on adult education, he proposes an education based on an egalitarian dialogue
between heterogeneous groups to empower socially vulnerable people. He worked with miners, black people, farmers, etc. In a similar line than Freire, he proposed an education that would provoke social change. This education looks for the empowerment of socially vulnerable groups, with high rates of illiteracy that limits their capacity to participate in political action. Empowerment is achieved by a new perception of experience as something valuable and worthy, at the same level as the traditionally institutionalized education. Thus, the role of the Highlander Folk School is to identify the needs of a community by dialoguing with the members of the community. Identifying their needs allows for using education to provide those instruments, which could be literacy, community building, etc. Therefore, education for social change focuses on dialogue as the methodology to construct an educative community in which all the participants intervene to increment the possibilities of those that has been restricted by a discriminatory system. Conscience building through dialogue, finding other people suffering the same situation strengthens the ability of a community to fight for their needs. The success of this system can be exemplified by the US civil right movements. The participation of Rosa Parks in the Highlander Folk School moved her to refuse accepting the racist practices existing in the American society of the 1950s. Therefore, the Highlander Folk school system can be considered a very successful approach to education for social change.

This approach has an instrumentalist perspective of education. It becomes the tool to implement social change, but it can only be successful if education is implemented through a dialogic process that raises questions in community integrants and empowers
them. By stimulating their agency, they realize that they can make a difference in their own reality. Education requires a bottom-up approach to achieve the goal of social change. However, like in the case of Freire, it relies in the existence of leaders and this can be a misleading concept. Even though individuals in society tend to acquire different roles, naming a more active individual as leader can be misunderstood as promoting different status within the members of a group. Accepting that there are individuals with tendency to have a more leading role needs those leaders to understand that their command depends on a broad base of support to be successful when asking for reforms. This issue of leadership is one of the facts that are raising more criticism on the Zapatista movement in Chiapas. Even though it is based on a participatory community democracy, doubts are raised to the extent to which Zapatistas will eventually implement a change in their society.

In another point, David Jardine’s proposal about education seems to fit with the Mayan perception of the role of the human being in nature. Conceiving mankind as just another integrant of nature requires a change in paradigm. This conception of the human being as another integrant of the natural world demands respect for every other being with whom they share the environment. But this approach can also be applied to different cultural groups who share the same environment. Coming from a more traditional analysis of education, Jardine stands out for his innovative proposal of communion between nature, the human being and the different cultural groups inhabiting the same territory.
Jardine criticizes the traditional Descartes conception of reality. He rejects the idea of a reality independent from us where truth can be found, placing him within the precepts of post modernism and post structuralism. Descartes’ search for an independent and clearly definite and objective truth leads to a conception of education that subjects the student to the teacher, focusing on an “objective” measurement of skills as something quantifiable. This conception is one of the limitations of programs like the Educative Goals 2021 proposed by the OEI. On the other hand, phenomenology sees the world as full of ambiguity; we cannot find an absolute independent true. Instead, there is interconnectivity between different discourses that needs to be understood. Therefore, we need to focus on creating a dialogue between teacher and student, parents and sons/daughters, new and old, etc. This is the only way to achieve development. Phenomenology places the human being in connection with an ambiguously defined world.

Jardine’s proposal stands out for his critique of educational systems focused on accountability of children progression. As the previously analyzed authors, he thinks that students need to be respected by their potential and education is the method to push that potential. Dialogue is consequently a stronger tool to stimulate learning. In addition, the relative position of the human being as an internal part of nature, and the independence of the classroom (community, society) from what an individual can impose into its points to a more comprehensive relationship in class, based on the connections between the different beings.
This survey of some of the more influential and innovative proposals on education places the Zapatista Autonomous Education project as a very valuable approach. First, the Zapatistas place education as one of the main lines of action for the construction of autonomy. This is because they conceive education as having the same role that Dewey conceived at the beginning of the 20th century. For them, education is also a process that enables the future generations to continue their struggle sustainable. That is why it is a need of the community to provide their children of the knowledge they require to have a future in which they can subsist without depending on the “bad government”. There is also an emphasis on the role of the family as a key part of the process of education. On the other hand, they have a similar conception of the importance of a dialogical approach to education than Freire and Horton. Moreover, they also rely on capacitating a set of education promoters that carry out the role of instructor in the different autonomous municipalities. Their education project is born out of the necessity to provide the community of the educational requirements, so it is a bottom-up project in which all members are invited to participate in the process of education. According to Horton, these are some of the elements that guarantee the success and sustainability of their project. Finally, the Mayan cosmology visualize the human being as part of a more complex environment, in which men and women to respect the rest of the entities, living beings or not, for the sustainability of life. This point agrees with the idea proposed by Jardine about the ambiguity of the environment and the non-superior role of the human being in it. The Zapatista education also rejects the use of what is considered objective
assessment of knowledge. For this reason, they do not use grades to measure school promotion.

The Zapatista Autonomous Education movement stands out like one of the most interesting proposals nowadays. Its inherent grassroots base and its birth out of necessity against a government that had never provided indigenous people with an appropriate and empowering education system legitimize its existence. But more than its legitimacy, the education project is valuable because it is conceived a means to empower the indigenous community in Chiapas. It emphasizes their cultural values against an acculturation program promoted by the state. They focus on the study of their languages, their culture and their history. But they also provide their children of the skills to carry out leadership positions in their communities, as well as carrying out the traditional economic activities that sustain life in the community. In the case of agriculture, they defend an ecological approach that allows sustainability of the environment. In addition, because of the importance of international support from the international community, they also offer language education to international people who want to participate, collaborate and learn from the Zapatista movement.

Thus, the community provides their children of an education method that regenerates the will to struggle for the rights of the community and thus they work on the deconstruction of the racial barriers that have divided Chiapanecan society. Their educational program also emphasizes values like love, respect and solidarity. These values attempt to reduce the hostility that emerges between Zapatista and non-Zapatista communities. By educating their children in a broader state, national and international
sphere, the children in the Zapatista communities grow a sense of belonging to a bigger community, which allows for their movement to spread and to finally achieve cohesion in the Mexican state. However, dissent voices doubt of the possibility of Zapatista children to be able to reincorporate in the state labor market or higher education. It could be used by the state to repress the rebel movement. But more important than that, the movement is currently reincorporating the graduated students from their secondary school into the community, which is positive, but they do not have a different option. This scheme could undermine the continuity of their system, but at the same time would force them to open their community to new influences from outside. It could also be an enriching project that UNICH could integrate the students graduating from Zapatista schools, allowing them to reach higher education and introducing their principles into academia.

As it can be seen, the Zapatista Autonomous Education attracts attention among other educational theories because of the combination of principles and the fact that it is a grassroots program. It combines elements shared with Dewey, who had influenced the democratic project of the US and even the SEP in Mexico. But they also introduce ideas that have also been proposed by Freire and Horton, two authors who emphasized the need to use education to achieve a social change. It also agrees with a postmodern author such as Jardine in their conception of the role of the human being as an equal integrant of nature. This idea, together with the message of respect implied in the Zapatista education could finally allow for a change of paradigm in Chiapas society. It could be considered the seed for a more respectful society in which a vertical hierarchy of cultures is deconstructed to create new paradigm in which all, ladino, indigenous and mestizo and
even the international community will accept the other as one of the members of a complex community.

This analysis proves the value of Zapatista education. This system adds complexity to the educational landscape in Chiapas. However, it should be considered as an opportunity to achieve a more egalitarian and inclusive society. The current institutions in Chiapas, especially those who work for development and empowerment of indigenous communities like different NGOs, UNICH or even Oportunidades should collaborate together with the Zapatistas to create a system that overcome the racial barrier that marks the Chiapanecan society.
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

The previous has illustrated the need to rethink existing education system in Chiapas and promote educational reforms in the state and throughout Mexico. Such a review and reform must first respond to the criticisms waged by certain sectors of the society in question. The Zapatista uprising stands as yet another example of the social complaints made by marginalized groups in Mexican society who face daily hindrances as a result of systemic inequality. Chiapanecan society, and in particular the indigenous people which represents a large portion of the total state population, is calling for a new system that is culturally and linguistically attuned to their specific traits as a group. In addition, a reformed education system must fulfill two main objectives: First being a breakdown of racial and class barriers that define and perpetuate the current system. If this is achieved, education is then free to become an instrument for greater social mobility. Secondly, such reform must be designed in a manner that ensures education will become an instrument of social cohesion. Traditionally, education in Mexico has promoted the integration and assimilation of the indigenous population into a greater mainstream Mexican society. This move favored the abandonment of their cultural identity that has been marginalized and depicted as rebellious since the colonial era. This history of cultural imperialism on the part of the federal government necessitates that any education reform that is to be meaningful must redefine the concept of culture and value indigenous peoples as part of a truly multicultural state. It is necessary to reestablish the
worth the indigenous culture and the build respect for role played by such communities as part of the Mexican nation.

These two needs, for destruction of racialized discrimination and formation of greater social cohesion, will be best brought about under a system of autonomy for the Chiapanecan community. Autonomy as defined here is the key component allowing people and communities to take control of educational policies affecting the local population and in turn increasing political participation at local, state and national levels. This amplified participation on the part of local populations will ensure finally that the political structures of the state are capable of integrating such groups while still respecting their differences, a feat as yet to be accomplished in post-colonial Mexico. Additionally, such a novel approach is well-equipped to encourage the preservation and further development of culture practices among indigenous groups and communities.

Based on the preceding analysis of education outlined in this paper, it becomes important to define the concept of educational quality. Presently, the majority of studies focusing on education in Latin America have identified the poor quality of education as the central dilemma when working to alleviate poverty and lessen inequality. According to many such studies, the goal of more egalitarian societies can be attained though increasing literacy levels, financial assistance for education, and generally improving the quality of public education. However, the use of imperfect and sometimes biased methods when evaluating education often result in the reporting of better outcomes for urban, and mainly *mestizo*, populations. This is because these sectors of the population are among the few with access to educational resources to promote success as measured
by the barometers of literacy, numeracy, etc. However, in the contextual framework utilized here, education is understood from a differing perspective, on which evaluates success according to its ability to fulfill the demands expressed by indigenous groups. From their perspective and based on their perceived needs, a quality education is one that breaks the barriers to social integration faced by indigenous sectors and designed with the assistance of, but not control by, state institutions. Education, therefore, becomes an instrument to promote integration into a redefined multicultural society. In order to achieve this goal, a model which dignifies and betters the perception of indigenous cultures and populations must be developed. Such revaluation and redirection will affect both the indigenous groups in question, by increasing their self-esteem and economic opportunities, and in the greater population as it works to foment mutual respect, inter-group dialogue, multi-ethnic solidarity, and the general cohesion of the Mexican nation.

The earlier examination of the evolution of colonial institutions, and the later Mexican state, traced the origin of the contemporary situation which continues to represent the reality of many people living in Chiapas and other areas of large indigenous population. During the colonial era, the Spanish Crown created a system classifying people by race or ethnicity, which was associated with the “quality” of the individual. The creation of the independent state of Mexico and the introduction of new liberal and positivist ideas in many ways reinforces these earlier divisions, albeit with slightly different justifications. Under positivist and liberal regimes, the scientific discourse of modernity was used to support racial discrimination. Even the Mexican revolution, which sprang from indigenous and labor movements, was incapable of breaking down these
barriers as they were adapted in the early twentieth century to the division and association of class and race. Following the Mexican Revolution, various attempts to extend education to the entire population were made. However, the ideological background of the attempts made ultimately resulted in the accelerated acculturation and assimilation of indigenous peoples by the mestizo Mexican majority. This stemmed for the most part from the fact that such education projects were based on ideas conceived by the Mexican cultural elites, who were overwhelmingly the descendants of the old economic and political elite. In the late twentieth century, the Zapatista movement was born in Chiapas and raised a voice against the Mexican government's neoliberal policies. The Zapatista’s voices called for reform of the political class and proposed a plan of autonomy which would allow for the economic and cultural development of indigenous communities in Chiapas. The later success of this movement has been crucial to the redefinition of the social reality of the state of Chiapas and throughout the Mexican nation.

Currently, education is viewed by many as a mechanism by which to develop indigenous communities representing the poorest sectors of society. This perspective promotes the creation of international projects and regional education reform with the aim of creating systems which facilitate the integration of these peoples into the larger society. Nevertheless, the projects promoted by the UN and the OEI have demonstrated little real value for implementing an education system that truly deconstructs the racial barriers traditionally limiting the economic, political, and social advancement of such communities. This is in large part because these projects are based on principles which measure schooling success in quantitative terms, limiting the ability to motivate human
development and change the detrimental social paradigm described above. This internationalist outlook is reflected in the policies of the Mexican federal government. Oportunidades, which is based on conditional cash transfers dependent on the levels of attendance of children from poorer families and also on family participation in health and nutrition programs, does not promote genuine cultural development of education. Class attendance alone, while a step in the right direction, is simply not enough to change the embedded discrimination to which indigenous communities are subjected on a daily basis.

In the state of Chiapas, as well as through federal policies carried out by the central government, there are other actors trying to bring about cultural development that allows for empowerment of the indigenous population. Among these actors we find the UNICH, who manage a university-level program promoting indigenous participation and offering an education promoting sustainable development and preservation of indigenous culture. However, the efforts of UNICH are limited due to the inability of students to integrate into the labor market following participation in the program. Differentiation between their students and graduates of normal schools, along with a disconnect between the educational institutions and indigenous communities, ultimately reduces the impact that UNICH might have to redefine the racial limits of social mobility. In addition, other organizations such as Edupaz and INED are involved in training, economic development, and human development of the poorest communities in the state of Chiapas. In the case of INED, their approach to improving methods of education, promoting participation in projects to enhance appreciation of indigenous cultures, and improving the quality of
institutional education favor the development of a more egalitarian society. However, these organizations are limited in their capacity to advance change by financial limits imposed by national policies and development funding due to dependence on donor activities in the private sector. These limitations can be similarly compared to the role played by NGOs at international level.

Finally, the Zapatista autonomous educational system offers a valuable contribution to the scholastic landscape of Chiapas. Significantly, it is a movement born of indigenous peoples. Because the Zapatistas see formal state education as a tool for acculturation of people marginalized by the Mexican government, the Zapatista educational ideology proposes an educational system which is tailored to meet the specific needs of indigenous people of the state. Their education system combines some of the most innovative scholastic methodologies of the twentieth century. Matching both early-century authors such as John Dewey, who promoted education as a tool for strengthening the democratic basis of a country, along with later writers such as Freire and Horton. These later authors view education as a weapon for social change, founded on dialogue with socially disadvantaged people. Finally, the Zapatista system also has features in common with the proposal of David Jardine. His concept of education without quantitative assessment of student progress and the conception of man as a member of the community who must respect nature and all the elements of which it is comprised is highly similar to the proposed educational ideologies advocated by the Zapatistas. All of these factors taken together, it seems clear that the Zapatista system of autonomous education should be considered a great step toward and model for reform of the greater
system of education in Chiapas. Collaboration between the various institutions described in this paper currently facilitates and will increasingly forge the creation of a more socially inclusive project for education that fosters the empowerment of indigenous peoples. It is by this scholastic path that a change of social paradigm can be achieved, ultimately giving way to the emergence of a multicultural community based on respect and equality between different groups. If successful, such a model will have important implications not only in Chiapas, but in all of Mexico and throughout Latin America.
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