

TOWARD LA OTRA COMUNIDAD: ZAPATISMO AND GRASSROOTS
COMMUNITY FORMATION IN HUMBOLDT COUNTY, CA

By

Victor C. Espinosa

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Committee Membership

J. Mark Baker, Ph.D., Committee Chair

Marlon Sherman, Ph.D., Committee Member

Joseph Giovannetti, Ph.D., Committee Member

J. Mark Baker, Ph.D., Graduate Coordinator

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis interrogates grassroots community formation in Humboldt County, California by examining overlapping political, cultural, and knowledge practices pursued by a local activist community. Specifically, I examine three inter-related collective projects: Acción Zapatista de Humboldt, Peoples' Action for Rights and Community, and Día de los Muertos, as well as their related affinity projects. I expose how these projects pursued the political and cultural practice of *Zapatismo* as a grassroots strategy to subvert the criminalization of Humboldt's migrant and poor constituents, to produce situated knowledge about its collective struggles through popular education, and to convene intercultural dialog through ritual celebration. I use an activist ethnographic research technique involving participation in community spaces, examining community memory through archives and interviews, and *coyuntura* analysis of the relations of social forces in the community's recent history. The claiming of *Zapatismo* informed the production of a community identity rooted in indigenous, anti-neoliberal social struggles that move beyond the confines of formal community organizations and the non-profit industrial complex. This research enters into academic dialog surrounding the contested concept of "grassroots community," understanding it as a collective identity formed through practiced autonomous spaces of democratic, intercultural encounter.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--|-----|
| ABSTRACT..... | ii |
| Acknowledgements..... | iii |
| TABLE OF CONTENTS..... | iv |
| LIST OF FIGURES | vi |
| INTRODUCTION | 1 |
| A Note on Key Terms | 7 |
| LITERATURE REVIEW | 10 |
| Chicano Communities..... | 11 |
| Beyond Multiculturalism..... | 13 |
| Migration and Militarization | 15 |
| The Non-profit Industrial Complex..... | 18 |
| Zapatismo, Resistance, and Autonomous Community Formation..... | 19 |
| Community as Practiced Space | 24 |
| Community Formation as Social Movement Practice | 26 |
| METHODOLOGY | 31 |
| Activist Research..... | 31 |
| Method | 34 |
| ETHNOGRAPHY OF COMMUNITY FORMATION | 37 |
| Sun Valley and the War on the Poor..... | 38 |

| | |
|--|----|
| Humboldt Zapatistas: Resisting Locally, Engaging Polyculturally | 47 |
| Mitote..... | 52 |
| Tertulia..... | 56 |
| Coyuntura | 58 |
| Death and Community Regeneration | 64 |
| Teatro Rasquache | 67 |
| Danza Azteca..... | 69 |
| Claiming the Word | 75 |
| Community Assembly..... | 75 |
| The Politics of Hosting..... | 77 |
| CONCLUSION..... | 79 |
| Community as Overlapping Spaces of Knowledge, Culture, and Politics..... | 79 |
| “Las Zapatistas no Estan Solas!” | 81 |
| Full Circle..... | 82 |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY..... | 88 |

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Social Forces and Community Space in Humboldt County 2004-2009..... 62

Figure 2: Aztec Atekokoli..... 76

Figure 3: Zapatista Caracol..... 77

INTRODUCTION

On May 1st 2006, in what would later be called “The ‘Si se Puede’ Insurrections,” millions of multi-ethnic communities, including ethnic Mexicans, marched in cities across the United States to protest the Sensenbrenner Bill (HR 4437), which immigration reform advocacy groups argued would criminalize undocumented migrants if signed into law.¹ Locally, the nation-wide immigrants’ rights mobilizations of 2006 marked a critical moment for an emergent activist community pursuing a “politics of Zapatismo” in the cities of Arcata and Eureka, located in Humboldt County, Northern California.²

Acción Zapatista de Humboldt (AZ), a local solidarity collective inspired by the Zapatista rebellion in Chiapas, Mexico, and comprised of local area activists and university students of color, organized a direct action that would intervene in the local immigration reform demonstration taking place at the Humboldt Court House in the City of Eureka. In the early morning of “*la gran marcha* (the great march)” AZ convened at Humboldt State University in Arcata before marching south along a Highway 101 safety corridor towards the neighboring city of Eureka. Police helicopters hovered above while a multi-agency law enforcement response stood in the marchers’ path as they entered the highway. When attempts to dissuade the protestors from entering the highway failed,

¹ George Caffentzis, “The ‘Si se Puede’ Insurrection: A Class Analysis,” *Mute Magazine* (June, 2006). Accessed online, January, 2014, at <http://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/si-se-puede-insurreccion-class-analysis>.

² Zapatismo is the political and cultural practices associated with the Zapatista rebellion in Chiapas Mexico and includes an indigenous Mayan autonomy and resisting the Mexican political class, neoliberalism, and militarization. The Zapatista movement includes the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN), and autonomous Zapatista communities, bases of support, and international solidarity communities. See Manuel Callahan, “Why not Share a Dream?: Zapatismo as Political and Cultural Practice,” *Humboldt Journal of Social Relations* Vol. 29 (2005): 6-36.

officers from the Humboldt County Sheriff, California Highway Patrol, and Arcata Police Department tried to identify individual “leaders,” whom they could arrest. Later, at a second “road block,” police attempted to bargain with the protestors to give up three comrades for arrest in exchange for allowing the march to continue. The police, however, underestimated AZ’s discipline, direct action training, and political solidarity. As police tried to pull individuals away from the group, AZ marched forward, locking arms and chanting, “You take one, you take us all!” Despite this solidarity, police managed to make three arrests. Pushing their way through the police barricade, marchers continued along the highway, eventually arriving at the Humboldt County Courthouse in Eureka, where the main immigrants’ rights protests had converged. At the Eureka courthouse, the Zapatista contingent occupied the office of District Attorney Paul Gallegos to insist upon the release of those arrested along Highway 101.³

At first look, AZ’s direct action on behalf of migrant worker struggles appears typical of traditional solidarity activism that might fall within the broad issue of immigration reform. Less apparent - and what I hope to illuminate in this thesis - is how AZ’s political organizing went “*beyond solidarity*,” and single-issue campaigns, in part by convening politicized community celebrations through which learning and intercultural dialog could emerge.⁴ AZ’s efforts, in their words, “to intensify their local struggles against neo-liberalism; and to discover commonalities and differences within

³ The arrestees were released and charges against them were eventually dropped. An account of this protest is found in Victoria Gutierrez and Dina Rodriguez’ editorial note, “Letter from the Eds,” in *The Matrix*, Spring 2006, Humboldt State University Women’s Resource Center.

⁴ Manuel Callahan, “Why Not Share a Dream? Zapatismo as Political and Cultural Practice,” *Humboldt Journal of Social Relations* 29, no. 1 (2005): 6–37.

and between communities through sustained democratic spaces for dialogue and coordinated action,” relied on ethnic Mexican cultural practices and celebrations that created spaces for dialog as well as produced information that connected local and international community struggles.⁵ AZ refused to incorporate itself as a formal organization, adhering instead to the Zapatistas’ *La Otra Campaña*, or, “The Other Campaign” – a national campaign taking place as a result of the 2006 Mexican presidential election which sought to convene opposition from “below and to the left.”⁶ That is to say that the Other Campaign refused to submit to the shallow facade of debate offered within the spectacle of electoral politics, instead convening national and international communities in radically democratic encounters in order to imagine new political, social, and cultural possibilities. Thus, I have included the phrase, *La Otra Comunidad* (The Other Community), within the title of this thesis in reference to the Humboldt community’s adherence to the Zapatista’s “Other Campaign,” to convey a sense of international Zapatista solidarity, and imagining of *La Otra en El Otro Lado* (The Other Campaign on the other Side) through the layers of celebration specific to that project.

⁵ Acción Zapatista de Humboldt, untitled statement about AZ, accessed online, January 2014, at <http://www.squiggryrubio.net/azstatement-en.html>.

⁶ “Below and to the left” is a phrase used by the Zapatistas to refer to “the heart” from which they speak as well as the anti-capitalist tendencies and rejection of the political class. See Subcommandante Marcos and the Zapatistas, *The Other Campaign/La Otra Campaña* bilingual edition (San Francisco: City Lights, 2006).

In one example of a politicized Mexican cultural celebration in Humboldt County, AZ periodically convened *mitotes*.⁷ In what might be described as politicized ritual celebration, *mitotes* transformed privatized spaces such as apartments, homes, or meeting halls into common spaces in order to convene local and international community networks in ritual celebration and community dialog. *Mitote* dialogs typically related themes of autonomy and Zapatismo to local area resistance and collective organizing efforts against, for example, police violence. These facilitated encounters gestured toward community assembly. They produced and shared knowledge, culture, and political analysis among the diverse ethnic Mexican community as well as other activist constituents. The production of *mitotes*, as I will argue, proved to be a critical and deliberate effort at community formation that might offer practical lessons in community activism.

Our understanding of who and what constitutes “the community” is complicated, however, by the diversity of ethnic and cultural identities encountered therein. To whom, then, are we referring when we speak of “the Mexican community?” What is “Zapatismo,” and how has it informed grassroots culture and activism in Humboldt County? How did community spaces in Humboldt County engage and intersect with national and international social movements – in particular with the Zapatista movement? How does it relate to the local community and what does it mean for the practice of grassroots community and social activism?

⁷ I dedicate a section of chapter 3 to the practice of *mitote* in Humboldt County. See also, Manuel Callahan, “In Defense of Conviviality and the Collective Subject,” *Polis Vol. 33* (2012). Available online at http://cril.mitotedigital.org/sites/default/files/content/callahan_in_defense_conviviality.pdf.

This thesis takes up the above questions by investigating ethnic Mexican political activism and community formation in Humboldt County. I will examine community spatial practices including, *mitotes*, *coyunturas*, and *Día de los Muertos*, and revisit solidarity actions with undocumented and poor peoples' constituencies, showing how Zapatismo informed an analysis of, and intervention into, criminalization of community. I argue that Zapatismo as a political and cultural practice was a community formation strategy in Humboldt County that informed events and actions in the activist community while producing a collective identity as an indigenous, Mexican cultural community.

My research questions account for diversity within an ethnic Mexican community. "Flexible subjectivities," or, the tactical construction of subaltern identity based on a collective situation, are expressed through the deployment of culture and acts of solidarity. The production of culture in a local context, the influence of a *Chicano* perspective, and an intercultural engagement with other ethnicities including White, Black, and Native American communities contributed to the unique process of grassroots community formation in Humboldt in such a way as to challenge mainstream multicultural narratives in favor of *polyculturalism* and radical difference, which I will illustrate within the body of my thesis.

My interest in the topic is partly motivated by a desire to clarify how community is conceptualized beyond dominant (yet inadequate) narratives of "empowerment," "multiculturalism," and "social change," as well as to identify the relationship between community, and social movement practices. Rather than reducing community to ethnic or

geographic boundaries, I examine the ways that community is understood as practiced spaces of encounter that rely on the use of shared cultural tools. I also look at how these intersections of community formation and social activism possess the power to produce and analyze information about collective identity, social struggle, and strategic action.

An ethnographic chapter follows inter-related spaces of community formation and collective action. First, I look at activist interventions into the Sun Valley Floral Farm in Arcata, CA. I revisit a recent history of resistance to toxic chemicals and to Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) at Sun Valley. The next section focuses on Acción Zapatista's activism in Humboldt County and demonstrates a reliance on Indigenous Mexican cultural politics as part of its articulation of resistance and autonomy. Humboldt's *Zapatismo* also illustrates a commitment to democratic assembly. Finally, I look at the celebration of *Día de los Muertos*, demonstrating the production of strategic knowledge and collective subjectivities through the use traditional cultural practices. My narrative of community formation illustrates the ways in which grassroots community practices of knowledge, culture, and politics overlap amidst the production of an ethnic Mexican, activist community, and reveals the interconnectedness of local struggles to each other through a strategic use of community assembly and a "politics of encounter." A politics of encounter can refer to the organizing of spaces wherein diverse communities can convene, plan, share, and create new collective habits.⁸

⁸ El Kilombo and Michael Hardt, "Organizing Encounters and Generating Events," *In the Middle of a Whirlwind*, accessed March 15, 2014, <http://inthemiddleofthewhirlwind.wordpress.com/organizing-encounters-and-generating-events/>.

I approach this thesis as an activist research project. My hope is to reflect a community memory of activism and cultural production, and that it serves as a written complement to the arguments, analyses, and strategies embodied through Zapatista community formation practices in Humboldt. Additionally, my goal in looking at ethnic Mexican community formation on the North Coast is to advance the community's intercultural encounter in the form of an academic dialog that will deepen our understanding of community formation and suggest some key strategies for political action geared toward the formation of self-determined communities. Finally, I offer this work for Chicanos seeking to politicize and cultivate an indigenous Mexican identity and consciousness.

A Note on Key Terms

The term *Chicano/a*, sometimes written as *Xicano/a*, or *Chican@*, generally refers to Mexican-Americans in the United States, and implies a political rejection of an Eurocentric identity, and solidarity with the social, cultural, and political movement that embraces indigenous Mesoamerican roots and resists anti-Mexican racism. *Chicano* was originally a pejorative label applied to lower-class Mexican-American youth, and was later embraced by those youth who rebelled against both traditional Mexican culture who viewed them as *pochos*, or *cholos*, and against Anglo-American social domination. While the emergence of Chicanos – those who sit ethnically and culturally between the two worlds of the U.S. and Mexico – can be traced at least as far back as the U.S. invasion of

Mexico in the 1840's, the political connotations of contemporary *Chicanismo* formed in earnest with the emergence of the Chicano movement in the 1960's and alongside civil rights and anti-war movements of that era.¹² At times I use the term *Chicano* in order to identify community spaces that emerge from this politicized identity and its attendant cultural practices. Because not all ethnic Mexicans identify with *Chicanismo*, I also use the terms *ethnic Mexican* or *Mexicano* to include Chicanos, Mexican Americans, and Mexican migrants. I also recognize that the activist community cannot be reduced to a singular ethnic Mexican identity. In fact, one of my key theoretical questions of community formation will help explain how cultural practices re-claim subaltern and indigenous ethnic identities without enclosing them in rigidly defined ethnic or geographic boundaries. Thus, while these terms are not exactly inter-changeable, they are related and imply some subtle cultural differences.

There are several related terms that are used to identify the system within, against, or below which the community struggles. In general I use, *neoliberalism*, or *neoliberal capitalism* as shorthand because it includes the current dominant social, political, economic, and cultural system, and also because it is consistent with the political language of Zapatismo that I investigate.

I define community formation as practiced spaces that produce collective subjectivities. Within these spatial practices there are overlapping components of

¹² Rodolfo Acuña, *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos*, 3rd ed. (New York: Harper Collins, 1988), 338. *Pocho* is a term used by Mexicans to designate an Americanized Mexican, or one who speaks broken Spanish. Some say the literal translation is "spoiled fruit." *Cholo* is used similarly, and is associated with Pachuco-style and street culture. Some say *Cholo* can be translated literally as "pig."

knowledge, culture, and politics that inform and are informed by the collectives acting within community space. Community formation processes draw from the knowledge practices of its cultural traditions to produce information that identifies and shares the social, cultural, and political realities that converge to produce collective identity. My thesis will show how community is a contested territory that can be reclaimed through creative expressions of political action. In the next chapter, I examine literature that develops this concept of community formation in further detail, looking closely at: Chicano indigenous identity and its conflicted engagement with *mestizaje*; political struggles against militarized policing, and; Zapatismo and new social movement strategies that comprise a politics of encounter.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A theoretical framework of community formation in ethnic Mexican communities must go beyond conceptions of self-contained cultural community or geographies. Furthermore, strategies of social and cultural transformation should go beyond the dominant frameworks of liberal multiculturalism and the non-profit "social change" industry known as the non-profit industrial complex. Community formation strategies, the literature suggests, are part of new social movement practices that take grassroots community as a key site of struggle.

This literature review covers three general areas of interest. The first deals with the complexity of ethnic Mexican and Chicano community identity. Second, I examine migrant struggles in order to highlight interlocking systems of oppression related to race, class, and nation, as well as the possibilities for cultural transformation that migrant communities might offer. Finally, I conceptualize autonomy, including the politics of *Zapatismo*, as both a community formation and a social movement strategy. The production of community autonomy, read as *conviviality*, links community formation to social movement practices centered around convening spaces of encounter that intervene into both the practical problems of militarization and the inadequate solutions proposed by multiculturalism and the non-profit industrial complex. This review therefore sets up a theoretical framework through which community as a category of analysis can be understood by the cultural and political practices that articulate its collective subjectivity.

Chicano Communities

As a starting point, I consider the influence of a Chicano perspective on political and cultural activism. Laura Pulido offers a useful entry point to discuss the subaltern identity formation produced within Chicano struggles.¹³ Pulido's work highlights the use of subaltern identities "as a source of strength and pride," pointing out that identities are constructed through a process of "situational ethnicity" or, the ways that, "at any particular moment, people may choose to emphasize or de-emphasize an ethnic identification"¹⁴ Similarly, Chela Sandoval's work on "tactical subjectivity" demonstrates deployment of flexible identity through a mechanism of "differential movement" that, "depends on the practitioner's ability to read the current situation of power and self-consciously choosing and adopting the ideological stand best suited to push against its configurations."¹⁵ Differential movement relies on *radical mestizaje*, which refers to both mixed indigenous and European culture, and Chicano scholarship's embracing *mestizaje* as cultural practice that, according to Rafael Perez-Torres, "helps

¹³Laura Pulido, *Environmentalism and Economic Justice: Two Chicano Struggles in the Southwest* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1996), 49; "Subalternity," according to Stanley Aronowitz, "is a euphemism for the excluded, the 'other,' the despised, the wretched of the earth...the subaltern has been identified with the poor peasant classes, including the urban reserve army of labor." See Aronowitz', "Subaltern in Paradise," (no date), accessed online, February 2014, at <http://www.stanleyaronowitz.org/articles/subaltern.pdf>.

¹⁴ Pulido, *Environmentalism*, 48.

¹⁵ Chela Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 60.

embody the idea of multiple subjectivities,” and, “opens a world of possibilities in terms of forging new relational identities.”¹⁶

Although a Chicano perspective and its attendant political and cultural formations inform community identity and culture, there are several reasons why reducing community to a Chicano label would be inadequate. For one, “Chicano” is too limited a definition, considering the inter- and intra-ethnic diversity within the Mexican community. Take for example, Lynn Stephen’s comparison of Chicanos’ production of indigenous identity to that of indigenous Mixtec and Zapotec migrants in California and Oregon. Stephen points out that, “popular cultural manifestations of Chicanismo that draw on symbols of Aztec indigenous culture come from a profoundly different understanding and experience of ‘being indigenous’ than that of many Mixtec and Zapotec migrants.”¹⁷

Mestizaje as a manifestation of Chicano identity is further problematized when viewed in light of Mexico’s historical use of *mestizaje* against its own Indigenous peoples. In this context, *mestizaje* was used by the Mexican state as a strategy of “de-indianization” in pursuit of modernity. Those who argue against *mestizaje* point out that it subsumes a plurality of distinct ethnic groups into a single “mestizo” race, in part by relegating Mexican Indian civilization to museums and national mythology. Guillermo Bonfil Batalla argues that indigenous Mexican civilization, what he calls, “profound

¹⁶ Rafael Perez-Torres, *Mestizaje: Critical Uses of Race in Chicano Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 3.

¹⁷ Lynn Stephen, *Transborder Lives: Indigenous Oaxacans in Mexico, California, Oregon* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 225.

Mexico,” is a living civilization that is ever-present beneath “imaginary Mexico’s” projects of modernity.¹⁸ “Profound Mexico” clashes with and resists, sometimes in subtle ways, Mexico’s de-indianization. Thus, while *mestizaje* in a Chicano context allows for the deployment of flexible subjectivity and includes indigenous identity, a profound Mexico suggests a deeper connection to being indigenous. Furthermore, it reminds us that alongside the sometimes overtly political, at times performative aspect of *Chicanismo*, is a subtle but profound indigenous Mexican civilization that has found its way beyond the U.S. and Mexico boundary.

Beyond Multiculturalism

Culture is neither a fixed relic of the past nor discrete from other cultures. Rather, it is constantly re-shaped and exchanged within the context of the social and political realities and multiplicity of cultures present. Linking community formation to culture in the context of “deterritorialization,” Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson challenge the notion of unitary, self-contained cultural groups and geographies.¹⁹ Border communities, seasonal migrants, and the mobility of culture, the authors note, all complicate an anthropological tendency to define cultural geographies as enclosed by national or cultural boundaries. The hyper-speed of postmodern capitalism, cultural transformation, migration, and postcolonial exile, Gupta and Ferguson argue, render geographic

¹⁸ Guillermo Bonfil Batalla, *México Profundo: Reclaiming a Civilization*, trans. Philip Adams Dennis (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996).

¹⁹ Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson, “Beyond ‘Culture’: Space, Identity, and the Politics of Difference,” *Cultural Anthropology* 7, no. 1 (February 1992), 6–23.

community boundaries inadequate. While they problematize the notion of “articulation,” or the idea that cultures were autonomous prior to capitalist and colonial interference, I still rely on this analytical tool later in this section in order to conceptualize autonomous community formation. Nevertheless, Gupta and Ferguson make an important point about the concept of culture as a process that transforms over time and space. Furthermore, they enter into the debate surrounding multiculturalism, reminding us to critically assess multiculturalism as an, “attempt to subsume this plurality of cultures within a framework of national identity.”²⁰

Although well-intentioned, the dominant framework of multiculturalism dispenses with histories of political struggle while opting for cultural tourism, the sanctification and whitewashing of individual “leaders,” who are deemed palatable to the power structure, and the promotion of “cultural sensitivity” in the place of anti-oppression politics. The coupling of essentialist notions of “cultural authenticity,” with a refusal to address racism, is indicative of the challenges of engaging cultural difference without falling into the disempowering trappings of cultural tourism. Insofar as neoliberal capitalism relies on the cooperation (or coercion) of people of diverse ethnicities who comprise its labor pool, mainstream multiculturalism has served as a capitalist strategy for managing cultural difference without posing any substantial challenge to systems of oppression. Vijay Prashad, for example, asserts that,

[i]nstead of anti-racism, we are now fed with a diet of cultural pluralism and ethnic diversity. The history of oppression and the fact of exploitation are shunted

²⁰ Ibid., 7.

aside in favor of a celebration of difference and the experience of individuals who can narrate their ethnicity for the consumption of others.²¹

As an antidote to liberal multiculturalism, Prashad offers a concept of *polyculturalism* that does not shy away from politicizing culture, insists on political solidarity with anti-racist struggles, and dispenses with anxieties of cultural purity by recognizing that cultures have a history of transformation over time.

Migration and Militarization

Migration presents itself as a key site of struggle that makes visible the policing of working class communities. Mexican immigration to the United States in the later 20th century is often explained as a result of economic policies associated with neoliberal globalization, such as the privatization of communal lands, the mobilization of capital, maquiladoras along free trade zones such as Juarez and Tijuana, and structural adjustment policies.²² Concurrent with Mexican migration is militarized border enforcement, which, according to Timothy Dunn, “refers to the use of military rhetoric and ideology, as well as military tactics, strategy, technology, equipment and forces.”²³ Militarized border enforcement has contributed to human rights violations along the U.S.-Mexico border while funneling migrants into the for-profit prison system.²⁴

²¹ Vijay Prashad, *Everybody was Kung Fu Fighting: Afro-Asian Connections and the Myth of Cultural Purity*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001), 63.

²² David Bacon, *Illegal People: How Globalization Creates Migration and Criminalizes Immigrants* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2008).

²³ Timothy J. Dunn, *The Militarization of the U.S.-Mexico Border, 1978-1992: Low Intensity Conflict Comes Home* (Austin: CMAS/UT Austin, 1996), 3.

²⁴ National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights *Over-Raided, Under Siege: U.S. Immigration Laws and Enforcement Destroy the Rights of Immigrants* (NNIRR, 2008). This report “documents over 100

Criminalization, or the construction of undocumented communities as criminal, suspiciously promises lucrative contracts for the prison industrial complex, at the expense of human rights of migrants.²⁵

Militarization and border enforcement ideologies are supported by discursive constructions of “illegal immigrants” in the American consciousness.²⁶ Betsy Hartman’s study of securitization of immigration rightly argues that the framing of unauthorized migration as issues of national security discursively constructs unauthorized migrants as threats to both national security and to the socio-cultural fabric of Anglo-America by relying on racist stereotypes that present imagery of an invasion of U.S. soil by “illegals,” “narco-terrorists,” or criminals seeking to take advantage of American welfare.²⁷ Joseph Nevins’ work examining the construction of “illegal aliens” supports this theory, adding, “we cannot divorce growing emphasis on ‘illegal aliens’ from the long history in the United States of largely race-based anti-immigrant sentiment rooted in fear”²⁸

Notwithstanding racist discourse, human rights crises, and exploitation, however, Angela Mitropoulos cautions sympathizers on the left against viewing migration as a condition of permanent economic victimhood. Instead, Mitropoulos argues that migration

stories of human rights violations from across the country between 2006 and 2007. They range from immigration raids and migrant deaths at the U.S. - Mexico border to mounting detentions and deportations.”; The Mexican periodical *La Jornada* [David Brooks, “Los migrantes, el tercer grupo más numeroso en cárceles estadounidenses,” (June 26, 2008)] cited a Syracuse University Study finding that migrants constituted the 3rd largest group of prisoners in the United States.

²⁵ Bacon, *Illegal People*; On criminalization, see Rachel Herzing, “What is the Prison Industrial Complex?,” accessed online, February 2014, at *Critical Resistance*, http://www.publiceye.org/defendingjustice/overview/herzing_pic.html.

²⁶ Joseph Nevins, *Operation Gatekeeper: The Rise of the “Illegal Alien” and the Making of the U.S. - Mexico Boundary*, (New York: Routledge, 1996).

²⁷ Betsy Hartmann, Banu Subramaniam, and Charles Zerner, eds., Introduction to *Making Threats: Biofears and Environmental Anxieties* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2005), 12.

²⁸ Nevins, *Operation Gatekeeper*, 79.

is a working class mobilization against the forces of economic integration.²⁹ Moreover the racialized narratives of economic victimhood that Mitropoulos warns against obscures how a *culture of migration* must be taken seriously as a critical strategy of social change. This point is illustrated by viewing social change taking place in informal, unauthorized “escape routes,” a space occupied in part by undocumented migrants.³⁰ Using migration as a key example, Papadopoulos, Stephenson, and Tsianos use undocumented migration as an example of social change as informal, networked spaces that occur beyond the purview of state policies that seek to control social change. Such changes, the authors argue, often go unrecognized in social movement literature due to the tendency to focus on “events.” The authors therefore “look for social change in seemingly insignificant occurrences of life,” including, “sustaining the capacity to work in insecure and highly precarious conditions by developing informal social networks on which one can rely; or living as an illegal immigrant below the radar of surveillance.”³¹ From this point of view, the clandestine and informal networks necessitated by an undocumented experience offers insight for social movements and communities of color who have historically been subjected to government counterintelligence tactics and excessive policing.

²⁹ Angela Mitropoulos, “Autonomy, Recognition, Movement” in Stephen Shukaitis and David Graeber, eds., *Constituent Imagination: Militant Investigations, Collective Theorization* (Oakland: AK Press, 2007):127-136.

³⁰ Dimitris Papadopoulos, Niamh Stephenson, and Vassilis Tsianos, *Escape Routes: Control and Subversion in the 21st Century* (London and Ann Arbor, MI: Pluto Press, 2008).

³¹ *Ibid.*, xii.

The Non-profit Industrial Complex

Informal and unincorporated spaces contrast with the prevailing monopoly over community and social change held by the Non-Profit Industrial Complex (NPIC). Dylan Rodriguez defines the non-profit industrial complex as “a set of symbiotic relationships that link political and financial technologies of state and owning class control with surveillance over public political ideology, including and especially emergent progressive and leftists social movements.”³² INCITE’s critical perspectives caution against non-profits’ tendency to

monitor and control social movements; manage and control dissent in order to make the world safe for capitalism; redirect activist energies into career-based modes of organizing instead of mass-based organizing capable of actually transforming society; allow corporations to mask their exploitative and colonial work practices through ‘philanthropic work’; [and] encourage social movements to model themselves after capitalist structures rather than to challenge them.³³

The non-profit structure’s silence of dissent, cooperation with the prison industrial complex, and reproduction of hierarchal governing bodies make way for its monopolizing grip over what is considered legitimate social change practices.³⁴ I don’t wish to minimize the importance of policy and community work accomplished by local and national organizations on behalf of working class and Mexican communities, or to

³² Dylan Rodriguez, as Quoted in INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence, *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond the Non-Profit Industrial Complex* (Cambridge, Mass.: South End Press, 2007), 8.

³³ INCITE!, *The Revolution Will Note Be Funded*, 3.

³⁴ Gustavo Esteva, “Regenerating People’s Space,” *Alternatives* 12 (January 1987), 125–52. Esteva notes that “[i]n the process of earning our living on the one hand, and ‘giving’ our services on the other hand, we were practicing a form of hidden paternalism. We also perceived that our institutional design was blocking initiatives and hindering creative impulses. We were probably just imitating the managerial scheme we were used to.”

dismiss the role that formal organizations play in advancing progressive social change. However, it is important to honor political action and cultural renewal emerging at the grassroots, and to recognize the NPIC's problematic investment in systems of oppression. Furthermore, I hope to add to a critical interrogation of the NPIC's monopoly over community and social change by insisting that the entirety of community is less inclined to containment and bureaucratic control of the NPIC.

Informal collective action often informs the more professionalized models of community organizing, which in turn misappropriate the radical imaginary of the grassroots. Unfortunately, professionalized social change models are structurally obligated to the values of market fundamentalism, meritocracy, and boutique multiculturalism. The NPIC is, some would say, "where social movements go to die." While the community has not been able to fully escape a conflicted engagement with institutional frameworks, critical spaces of community formation should gesture toward grassroots community beyond pre-determined models or narratives of community development.

Zapatismo, Resistance, and Autonomous Community Formation

In the Zapatistas' 6th *Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle*, the Zapatistas identify themselves as an indigenous Mayan resistance based in Chiapas, Mexico, who organized clandestinely and rose up in arms on January 1, 1994.³⁵ *The 6th Declaration* outlines the

³⁵ Subcommandante Marcos and the Zapatistas, "The Sixth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle," reprinted in *The other Campaign/La Otra Campaña* bilingual edition (San Francisco: City Lights, 2006), 97.

Zapatista struggle against neoliberal capitalism and Mexico's political class, as well as identifies their plan of action for convening international dialog with civil society in a collective struggle for dignity, autonomy, hope, and democracy.

Manuel Callahan and Jordan Camp have argued that the Zapatistas reveal their political and cultural practice of Zapatismo through their communiqués, declarations, and *encuentros* – international encounters with civil society.³⁶ Callahan describes the politics of Zapatismo as “a politics of space, a politics of encounter, a politics of refusal, a politics of listening,” adding that Zapatismo can be interpreted through the Zapatistas’ use of key statements, including:

Ya Basta! Enough; *mandar obedeciendo*, lead by obeying; *caminamos preguntando* we walk asking; *nunca jamas un mundo sin nosotros*, never again a world without us; *todo para todos y nada para nosotros*, everything for everyone nothing for ourselves; *un mundo donde quepan muchos mundos*, a world where many worlds fit.³⁷

El Kilombo’s interview with Subcomandante Marcos, the Zapatistas’ official spokesperson, articulates the Zapatistas’ practice of convening assembly, rebellion, and creating alternatives.³⁸ Some argue that the Zapatistas’ most critical intervention has been to capture a radical imaginary of civil society and reinvigorate a global left at the close of the 20th century.³⁹

³⁶ Jordan Camp, *Zapatismo and Autonomous Social Movements: Reading the Communiqués Politically*, (Thesis, Humboldt State University, 2005); Manuel Callahan, “Why Not Share a Dream? Zapatismo as Political and Cultural Practice,” *Humboldt Journal of Social Relations* (2005).

³⁷ Callahan, “Why Not Share a Dream?” (2005), 11.

³⁸ El Kilombo Intergalactico, *Beyond Resistance: Everything, An Interview With Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos* (Durham: Paper Boat Press, 2007).

³⁹ Alex Kasnabash, “Insurgent Imaginations,” *Ephemera* 7 no.4 (2007), 505-525.

While Zapatismo is certainly not the only cultural politics to theorize community autonomy as social movement practice, scholars and movement activists look to the Zapatistas to understand autonomy, anti-capitalist strategy, and activism in late capitalism.⁴⁰ In order to further develop Zapatista cultural politics, I will take a closer look at autonomy, community, and activism as analytical categories. The point is not to impose a single model or identity on a particular community in struggle, but to appropriate, cultivate, share, and utilize cultural tools and traditional knowledge systems in service of community autonomy, particularly for ethnic Mexican communities reclaiming their indigenous cultural and political heritage. I will broaden the insurgent indigenous imagery embodied by Zapatismo by looking at social movement and community literature in order to make some key claims about community formation and social movement praxis available to communities beyond Chiapas. For this I turn to three key categories of analysis: autonomy, community, and social movements, and seek out the ways that these categories mutually inform each other as processes of community formation.

The Zapatistas' introduction of insurgent imaginaries and their production of community autonomy and negation of the state has been a starting point for conceptualizing autonomy. A secondary entry into an autonomous framework insists on a class perspective, meaning that capitalism is necessarily antagonistic toward

⁴⁰ See for example, John Holloway, *Change the World without Taking Power: The Meaning of Revolution Today* (London: Pluto, 2002); Gustavo Esteva and Madhu Suri Prakash, *Grassroots Postmodernism: Remaking the Soil of Cultures* (New York: Zed Books, 1998); and Manuel Callahan, "Why Not Share a Dream?"

community.⁴¹ Harry Cleaver's "inversion of the class perspective" reminds us of the fundamental class antagonism between the working class and the capitalist class, suggesting that Marxism is not merely an analytical tool. For Cleaver, Marx's *Capital* should be applied as a practical strategy toward working class autonomy, or, self-managed community beyond capitalist social relations. Cleaver turns to Ivan Illich's concept of *conviviality* as one such possibility for, "the analysis and rejection of both the commodification of needs and the professionalization of their satisfaction."⁴²

Conviviality as a concept refers to subsistence communities' reliance on cultural tools to manage their social and material needs. Illich situates subsistence communities' use of convivial tools against industrialized life. Gustavo Esteva and Madhu Prakash have taken up the work of Illich in order to argue for de-professionalized, grassroots communities. In their *Grassroots Postmodernism*, Esteva and Prakash concern themselves with the struggles of the "social majorities" to construct and maintain community beyond the "global project" of neoliberalism and its logic of economic rationality. Esteva and Prakash consider these communities postmodern, insofar as they reject the universal narratives of modernity, i.e., individualism, development, education, human rights, and the "American dream," in favor of local ways of incorporating the old

⁴¹ Harry Cleaver. "The Inversion of Class Perspective in Marxian Theory: From Valorization to Self-Valorization," in *Open Marxism, Vol. 2, Theory and Practice*, ed. Werner Bonefeld, Richard Gunn, and Kosmas Psychopedis (London: Pluto Press, 1992); See also , Marcia Sá Cavalcante and Jean Luc Nancy, eds., *Being with the Without* (Stockholm: Axl Books, 2013) pp. 17, wherein Nancy states, "there is no good capitalism, for many reasons, but also because capitalism represents the whole extent of the <<non-co>>, the non sensibility of togetherness, and the replacement of togetherness, of the <<co>>, by Marx' <<general equivalence>>, money."

⁴² Cleaver, "The Inversion of the Class Perspective," 119.

into the new.⁴³ Esteva and Prakash's communities challenge us to organize a grassroots civil society that is autonomous, democratic, and comprised of "the people" organizing "independent of the state and its formal or corporative structures."⁴⁴ Esteva and Prakash identify *civil society* in relation to community, as, "that sphere of social life which organizes itself autonomously, as opposed to the sphere that is established and/or controlled by the state."⁴⁵

Recently, Manuel Callahan has used conviviality as a category of analysis to examine movement practice by looking at the possibilities of a collective subject by examining conviviality in relation to the San Jose Occupy Wall Street (OWS) movement. The rise of OWS and practice of peoples' assemblies reinvigorated and underscored the return to conviviality, yet not without its contradictions. For Callahan, hegemonic narratives, white supremacy, collaboration with state, and undemocratic decision processes that excluded the traditional convivial tools of ethnic Mexican communities underscored the political imperative to revisit conviviality. Within the Occupy movement, Callahan observed the emergence of traditional Mexican indigenous practice of *asamblea* (assembly).⁴⁶

⁴³ To clarify, "education" is contrasted with learning. While the former signifies an imposition of Western values, the latter reclaims learning as a transmission of community cultural wisdom. For additional critiques of education by Esteva from an indigenous perspective, see Esteva's Chapter, "Beyond Mexico" in *New World of Indigenous Resistance*, ed. Lois Meyer and Benjamín Maldonado Alvarado (San Francisco: City Lights, 2010). The entire volume is worth the read.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 13.

⁴⁵ Esteva and Prakash, *Grassroots Postmodernism*, 12.

⁴⁶ Manuel Callahan, "In Defense of Conviviality and the Collective Subject," *Polis Revista Latinoamericana* 33 (2012). Accessed online, February 2012, at http://csh.xoc.uam.mx/produccioneconomica/Coloquio_nuevoparadigma/archivosNuevoParadigma/Callahan%20_Conviviality.pdf.

Community as Practiced Space

The word *convivial* is closely related to the Spanish, *convivir*, which translates literally as “to live with.” This translation helps to imagine community by its collective practices, rather than by national, local, or ethnic boundaries. Here I am referencing Vijay Devadas and Jane Mummery’s review of Agamben’s *The Coming Community*, wherein the authors caution against the violence of exclusion at stake amidst the forging of national identities. According to the authors, Agamben articulates a definition of community that moves, “away from one invested in the notion of identity and belonging (being-in) to an idea of community that ceaselessly works to produce more democratic, open and fluid relationships with others to foster a sense of ‘being-with.’”⁴⁷ While identity-based solidarity certainly plays an important role in the Chicano community, it is the cultural and political practices themselves that cultivate a particular community identity, or, what Callahan calls, “collective subject.”⁴⁸ This point underscores Laura Pulido’s claim that subaltern identities are produced collectively.

I also turned to continental philosophy to enhance a conception of community as practiced spaces that need not be defined by the rigidity of national or local boundaries, nor by particular identities. Jean-Luc Nancy’s use of “the without” points to the interstitial spaces, between the formal organizational structures, through which affective community solidarity is cultivated. In *Being With the Without*, which documents a series

⁴⁷ Vijay Devadas and Jane Mummery, “Community Without Community,” *borderlands e-journal* 6, no.1 (2007).

⁴⁸ Callahan, “In Defense of Conviviality.”

of conversations held by Jean-Luc Nancy and cohort editor Marcia Sá Cavalcante, along with Nancy point us to Marx's observation of the emergence of brotherhood through informal spaces, such as coffee and cigarette breaks that took place occur in the interstices between the formal proceedings of organized party or factory councils.⁴⁹

Furthermore, through Nancy's seminar with a visiting research cohort, he insists on the fundamental importance and primacy of togetherness, what he refers to as the "co-" that is a common prefix to both community and communism. On the one hand, the "being-with" community promoted by Devadas and Mummery seems at odds with "the without" theorized by Nancy and cohort. However, being with the without, as the title suggests, are complementary metaphysical properties of community and act as a dialectic, wherein "the without"- emptiness, negation, space, and silence – are necessary for the production of togetherness. Hence the unification of the two in the title, *Being With the Without*.

I should point out that "the without" is not an entirely Eurocentric concept. Returning to the topic of Zapatismo, we see that the "politics of space," the "politics of listening," and strategic silence⁵⁰, all constitute the negative space of "the without" needed for dialog and community formation to take place. Furthermore, within the community ritual of *Día de los Muertos* (which I observe in later chapters), the inextricable linkages of life and death are apparent, wherein death is part of a dialectic through which community is in fact regenerated. Juanita Garciagodoy's study of the

⁴⁹ Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, second Manuscript (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1959) referenced in Sá Cavalcante and Nancy, eds., *Being With the Without*, 30.

⁵⁰ On the Zapatistas' use of strategic silence, see Paul Chatterton, "The Zapatista Caracoles and Good Governments: The Long Walk to Autonomy," *State of Nature* (Spring 2007). Accessed online February, 2014, at <http://www.stateofnature.org/?p=6119>.

cultural poetics of *Días de los Muertos*, or Days of the Dead, in which the living render honor, make offerings, feast, remember, and celebrate with their dead is one space wherein this dialectic can be observed in an indigenous Mexican tradition.⁵¹ This spiritual space that relies on sacred time, communion with the dead, and the rebirth of community through the celebration of death and the dead is occurs within a social, cultural and political context. “Días de Muertos,” says Garciagodoy, “shows its celebrants defending what are meaningful to them, what they have produced, what they enjoy against the ecumenism of transnational capitalism with its homogenizing and thinning culture and values.”⁵²

Community Formation as Social Movement Practice

Community formation processes should also be considered as social movement practices that go beyond the cycles of protest common to traditional solidarity work, as well as beyond the objectives of reforming the less tolerable aspects of the system, toward questioning the logic of the system as a whole. These “newest social movements,” according to Richard F. Day, “involve a shift towards non-branded strategies and tactics,” and display an “affinity for ... non-universalizing, non-hierarchical, non-coercive relationships based and mutual and shared ethical commitments.”⁵³ Community formation processes also reflect a post issue activism. Post issue activism, according to

⁵¹ Juanita Garciagodoy, *Digging the Days of the Dead: A Reading of Mexico's Días de Muertos* (Niwot: University Press of Colorado, 1998).

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Richard J. F Day, *Gramsci Is Dead: Anarchist Currents in the Newest Social Movements* (London; Ann Arbor, MI; Toronto: Pluto Press ; Between the Lines, 2005), 9.

Patrick Reinsborough, goes beyond single-issue politics and “Band-Aid” solutions that depend on reaffirming the legitimacy of the system, and instead seeks to build systemic and holistic change by connecting a multiplicity of issues that reveal, “the pathological nature of the system.”⁵⁴ Situating community within post-issue activist social movements helps to politicize community power. As an activist practice, post-issue activism allows for critical everyday conversations that disrupt the fundamental assumptions of capital, thereby avoiding marginalization among activism.

Included in the intersection of community formation and social movement practice is the opening of “convergence spaces,” which, according to Paul Routledge, serve, “as a facilitating space for communication, information-sharing, solidarity, coordination, and resource mobilization.” Routledge claims that convergences allow networks comprised of a multiplicity of other networks, communities, families, and social movements to be held together, “through a connective flow of narratives, or stories that people tell.” Stories express, “who ‘we’ are, why a ‘we’ have come together, what ‘we’ stand for,” and are, “lived as theatre, ceremony, spontaneity or ritual as the demonstration of the will of those who are capable of and desirable of resistance.”⁵⁵

Whereas Reinsborough’s convergence spaces might specifically refer to mass mobilizations however, the sharing of information, imagination, and experiences can

⁵⁴ Patrick Reinsborough, “Decolonizing the Revolutionary Imagination: Values Crisis, the Politics of Reality and why there’s Going to be a Common Sense Revolution in this Generation,” (2003) accessed online December 2013, at Smart Meme, <http://smartmeme.drupalgardens.com/sites/smartmeme.drupalgardens.com/files/sM.DeColonizingImagination.pdf>.

⁵⁵ Paul Routledge, “Grassrooting the Imaginary: Acting with the Convergence,” *Ephemera* 5 no. 4 (2005), 615-628.

occur outside of such protest spaces by facilitating what El Kilombo calls “spaces of encounter,” or, “the meeting and exchanging of struggles, getting to know people, projects, and organizations with which we might otherwise never connect.”⁵⁶ The community rituals, gatherings, celebrations, and knowledge productions that I will observe should be thought of as spaces of encounter.

Convivial spaces and cultural tools are always present beneath the surface, revealing itself as part of Bonfil Batalla’s *Mexico Profundo*. Communities must be able to recognize those cultural tools used to manage their autonomy, and make collective decisions to facilitate their emergence as community institutions. The point however, is neither to remain permanently marginalized, nor to institutionalize informal spaces into the logic and structures of the system. Rather, these informal spaces and cultural practices should be appropriated by the community itself towards its own autonomous counter-institutions. Ritual celebration offers a venue for the production of conviviality within the social, spiritual, and psychological space present in Chicano communities.⁵⁷

“Community” is too casually invoked, both within the social sciences as well as in the world of social change, without fully interrogating the complexity and political implications of doing so. The literature I have examined helps us to think of community beyond over-simplified geographic and ethnic borders, by noting the dynamic and layered collective subjectivities produced within community spaces through culture and political practices. These community spaces are temporal, and must constantly be

⁵⁶ El Kilombo and Michael Hardt, “Organizing Encounters and Generating Events.”

⁵⁷ Blea, *Researching Chicano Communities*.

reproduced; they rely on traditional cultural tools to inform their members of their past, present, and future autonomy. As such, community as a category of analysis and a political strategy becomes an integral social movement practice and site of struggle against the social forces that either disrupt the articulation of community, or co-opt its regenerative power by coercing community into dominant ideological and structural frameworks.

Conviviality helps to focus the political analysis of a collective subjectivity, while cultivating the use of cultural tools that serve its social, cultural, and material needs beyond capitalist social relations. Spaces of community encounter bring together a diversity of social and political struggles through dialogs and shared stories, cultural practices, and community rituals rooted in tradition and re-invented to reflect local imaginaries and decolonizing desires. The Chicano activist community in Humboldt therefore, is a flexible, collective, and politicized identity that uses new social movement strategies of assembly and encounter to cultivate a radical imaginary. Referring to the impasse of traditional solidarity activism, El Kilombo, a collective in the U.S., articulates the process of community formation as a social movement strategy by imagining “permanent spaces of encounter”:

where no single subject (immigrant, student, industrial worker) is believed to be the principal agent of change, but rather where encounters across subjective positions allows for the creation of new collective habits. That is, this form of organization is capable not only of acting to provide for basic needs, but also of producing itself as a new collective subject (a community). In contrast to the vacuous “grassroots” rhetoric used by non-profits, we have to be careful to note here that community never pre-exists this process of self-constitution; and creating a community is not simply the process of recognizing people as they are,

but rather acting collectively on who we want to become. Therefore, we need to reclaim this capacity for ourselves, to generate and sustain community, to exercise power collectively, to realize projects of autonomy and self-determination.⁵⁸

In later chapters, I will pay close attention to the ways that the various community practices produce collective subjectivities through their cultural and political spatial practices. These practices also constitute a knowledge system, wherein information about its struggle and collective subjectivity is developed and shared through cultural and political practices. These political practices may include direct action, resistance, and intervention into the violence of neoliberal social war.⁵⁹ They also include articulations of autonomy that negate entirely the neoliberal state ideological apparatus, instead seeking to construct alternative ways of horizontal community formations and to understand and facilitate their intersection with global social movements.

⁵⁸ El Kilombo Intergaláctico, quoted in Marc Herbst, "Arriving Now, Forward to Section Three, Otherwise Known as Another Theory Section," *Journal of Aesthetics and Protest* 1 no. 6.

⁵⁹ On the concept of social war, see Limón's, *Dancing with the Devil*.

METHODOLOGY

This chapter explains my research methodology and my strategy of investigation. Activist research framed my ethnographic approach and encouraged me to consider my political and ethical obligations to the community throughout the course of my research. My goal was to facilitate the emergence of community situated knowledge through a collective, horizontal research process.⁶⁰ Both critical anthropology and feminist perspectives seek to “unravel dominant relations of power,” as they aim toward “the creation of relationships between researcher and research participants.”⁶¹

Activist Research

Activist research, according to João H. Costa Vargas, articulates, “seemingly disparate fields into a political and research agenda that was both a valuable tool in the struggle against police brutality and a contribution to the academic debate on race, segregation, and social movements.”⁶² An Activist research method is distinct from traditional participant observation in that a greater emphasis is placed on participation,

⁶⁰ “Situated knowledges”, according to Donna Haraway, “are about communities, not about isolated individuals,” and involve, “the joining of partial views and halting voices into a collective subject position....” In “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective.” *Feminist Studies*, 14, no. 3 (Autumn 1988) 575-599.

⁶¹ Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber, et.al., “Feminist approaches to Research as a Process: Reconceptualizing Epistemology, Methodology, and Method,” in *Feminist Perspectives on Social Research*, ed. Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber and Michelle L. Yaiser (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 12.

⁶² “Activist Scholarship: Limits and Possibilities in Times of Black Genocide.” In Charles Hale, ed., *Engaging Contradictions: Theory, Politics, and Methods of Activist Scholarship* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008): 170.

“such that observation becomes appendage of the main activity.”⁶³ A similar sentiment is found within militant research, which “starts from the understandings, experiences, and relations generated through organizing, as both a method of political action and as a form of knowledge.”⁶⁴ My research agenda therefore, was to both enter into academic discourse, as well as to reflect on how community practices might inform local activism. Activist research echoes refusals to objectify community struggle and “does not shy away from explicit political involvement.”⁶⁵

My ethical and political commitments toward the community guided the research process. I confronted traditionally uneven power relations between researcher and subject by considering the historical role anthropology has played in perpetuating colonialism, the homogenizing projects of educational institutions, and the researcher/community divide. Nancy Scheper-Hughes articulates similar ethical and political commitments of research with communities, stating that, “there was little virtue to false neutrality in the face of the broad political and moral dramas of life and death, good and evil, that were being played out in the everyday lives of the people.”⁶⁷ Thus, I sought to conduct research in solidarity with communities with whom I researched.

An ethical tension between protecting community safety through anonymity on the one hand, and valuing community knowledge through attribution of sources on the

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Stephen Shukaitis and David Graeber, “How to Use this Book,” in *Constituent Imagination: Militant Investigations Collective Theorization*, Oakland: AK Press (2007), 9.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Nancy Scheper-Hughes, “The Primacy of the Ethical: Propositions for a Militant Anthropology,” *Current Anthropology* 36, no. 3 (June 1995): 409–40.

other, presented itself over the course of my research. Undocumented immigrants, activists, poor people, and people of color have been historically subjected to policing and criminalization. Indeed much of the community organizing work that I participated in focused on exposing and resisting this targeted criminalization of community. This required me to consider how the policing of undocumented, activist, and marginalized populations would require a great deal of emphasis on community safety in regards to research. Community safety protocols that required anonymity and confidentiality as a basic agreement and condition of participation were generally implemented in an explicit manner as a group norm and as part of the collective facilitation process. Furthermore, the community's desire to protect its spatial practices from co-optation necessitated discretion in the depth and content of information shared within a thesis. On the other hand, I also wanted to respect individuals' expertise and oral testimony, and to honor the validity of their testimony by affording them proper attribution. To reconcile this difficult challenge while meeting institutional guidelines on human subject research, I generally focused on interpreting the collective knowledge that was produced in community spaces, rather than on individual contributions.

It is worth noting that over the course of my research activism, I participated in a small cohort of community researchers comprised of university faculty and students who regularly convened in order to develop a "convivial research" approach. Convivial community research calls for the use of trans-disciplinary research tools, as well as cultural tools present in the community in order to generate knowledge collectively and

in service of community struggle. My involvement in a “convivial research seminar” insisted on maintaining a transparent research agenda, checking in with the community at each step of the research process, and a “refusal to objectify” the struggles of community by including oneself as part of an emerging collective research subject.⁶⁸

Method

My research strategy consisted of three overall methods of making community formation observable by participating in spaces of cultural, political, knowledge activities. Consistent with an observant participation method of activist research, I participated in political actions which challenged local systems of power, privilege, and oppression. I also engaged in community research with activist intellectuals, and contributed to cultural productions designed to reclaim Mexican indigenous cultural politics. These spaces included *mitotes* convened by Acción Zapatista, as well as Day of the Dead, and what is known as *Danza Azteca* (Aztec Dance).

Secondly, I participated in popular education workshops known as *coyunturas*. *Coyuntura* (Spanish for *joint* or *conjunction*) refers to a method of collective social research and analysis, as well as to any given historical or present conjunction in which social, political, economic forces, converge and are analyzed.⁶⁹ In other words, *coyuntura*

⁶⁸ Manuel Callahan and the Center for Community Research and Autonomy, “Convivial Research | Convivial Research and Insurgent Learning Workshop,” *Center for Community Research and Autonomy*, accessed March 15, 2014, <http://ccra.mitotedigital.org/convivialres..>

⁶⁹ Enrique Valencia Lomelí and Gustavo Castro Soto, *Metodología de Análisis de Coyuntura* CIEPAC, Centro de Investigaciones Económicas Y Políticas de Acción Comunitaria, (San Cristóbal, Chiapas,

is both the method and the information produced. In my experience, *coyunturas* operated as a popular education space wherein participants learn the facilitation strategies, educational, and political theories informing the practice of *coyuntura* analysis, as well as produce locally situated information and analysis of the community's own unique struggles. During *coyuntura* activities, a particular moment of community was analyzed by looking at the actors, agents and networks acting with or against the community. I collected information produced within these *coyuntura* activities in order to re-represent it as collectively produced, observable information that emerged from and about community struggle.

I invited key participants to participate in *coyuntura* analysis where activities were designed with my specific thesis research questions in mind. Thus, while the information I collected from previous *coyunturas* reflected the diversity of questions, participants, analyses at the time, my specific activity focused on the research question and constituent community directly pertaining to my thesis. If applied skillfully, my own research would emerge from and reflect in part those practical, historical, and theoretical perspectives that existed in various community spaces. Using the format of a community timeline, I asked participants to name particular significant struggles and events on an economic, social, and political level, focusing specifically on local militarization, resistance, and community celebration. In addition to local contributions, I included some

significant national and international events in order to make observable the interplay of social forces across time and space.

Finally, I collected oral testimonies from community members who were key figures involved in Acción Zapatista, Day of the Dead, and Peoples' Action for Rights and Community (PARC). The oral testimonies of key community agents would support collective information produced within a *coyuntura* as well as observations produced within an activist ethnography. The oral interviews occurred as open ended interviews that tended to occur alongside activist and community spaces, such that the political and cultural energy present prompted an oral testimony. The oral interviews would emphasize the expertise of the local memory-keepers.

The following chapter constructs an ethnographic narrative in order to reflect spaces of political and cultural encounter. I will revisit information produced through *coyuntura* analysis over a period of roughly five years (2005-2010) and draw from my own participation in community space, as well as from oral interviews. The information produced therein will enrich our understanding not only of the specific collective projects, networks, cultural productions and political forces within a politicized ethnic Mexican community in Humboldt County, but will also show how these strategies relate to each other as part of emergent knowledge, culture, and political formation within the new social movements.

ETHNOGRAPHY OF COMMUNITY FORMATION

Identifying convergences of struggles within different communities is essential to the formation of communities and a culture of resistance. This chapter looks at local activist resistances to militarized policing in Arcata and Eureka. While some spaces of encounter appear as direct actions that disrupt systemic violence, others gesture at creating community assembly and facilitating strategic dialogs among diverse communities in struggle. Such encounters create opportunities for sharing, strengthen relationships that were formed within direct actions, and politicize everyday conversations taking place in reclaimed public spaces. When these actions, dialogs, and storytelling become inculcated into a reliable local network, that network can be engaged through community celebrations. As a strategy of community formation, these spaces relied on Mexican and indigenous cultural rituals that were read through a politics of Zapatismo. Together the community spaces that I observe create a social infrastructure of community, and built as spaces of encounter of overlapping struggles along lines of mutual solidarity in Northern Humboldt County.⁷⁰

In the first section of this chapter, I look at how environmental actions against the Sun Valley Floral Farm in Arcata converged with an affinity project known as PARA (People Affected by the Raids in Arcata), whose members resisted Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raids that occurred at Sun Valley. The ICE raids followed seemingly unrelated collective environmental actions by community activists. The anti-

⁷⁰ I am grateful to Manuel Callahan for introducing the concept of “social infrastructure” in relation to the community formation process.

toxins campaign against Sun Valley included attention to migrant worker conditions and were taken by a separate activist contingency that would later overlap in strategically convened community spaces. I examine key events that would facilitate such an encounter. Specifically I look at Acción Zapatista's production of *mitotes*, *coyunturas*, and *tertulias*, as local articulations of Zapatismo. Finally, I examine the *Día de los Muertos* celebration as it was produced by Humboldt County Chicanos in order to further reveal the politicization of interpreted indigenous culture and the influence of local political struggles within this community renewal space.

Sun Valley and the War on the Poor

In 2005, an affinity group began distributing pamphlets at the Arcata Farmers Market in protest of Sun Valley's inclusion as a vendor. The pamphlets warned against toxic chemicals at Sun Valley, and called into question the validity of an industrial flower operation at an ostensibly small-scale and "organic" marketplace. One pamphlet for this time warned of Sun Valley's use of toxic chemicals, citing studies conducted by the Californians for Alternatives to Toxics (CATs) and listing effects of toxic chemicals used. The affinity group also raised the issue of Sun Valley's exploitative labor practices that exposed workers to health risks associated with the use of chemicals. The following quote was included within the Sun Valley worker testimonials that were collected and distributed as a pamphlet series:

“As a worker for SVFF, I was exposed to sulfur that was used in violation of the federal regulations, the regulations which were clearly labeled [only in English, however] on the bag in which the sulfur was contained.

“Sulfur was applied on a field in which myself and other employees were working, on a windy day, and sometimes, the sulfur blew over us. The packaging on the sulfur clearly stated that workers should not be in the fields for 24 hours after the application.

“Chicken manure was applied in an equally neglectful manner. After employees lodged complaints about unsafe work conditions, the work crew was divided between brown people and white people. When the spreader came around again the white people were told to leave the field, while the brown people continued to work there.”⁷¹

The quote above suggests a racialized division of labor at Sun Valley, wherein migrant, Spanish-speaking workers are placed in tasks that result in greater exposure to toxins compared to Whites. Protests against SVFF at the Arcata Farmers Market led to early engagement at the site of protest between the Sun Valley activist affinity and migrant workers. The encounters between activists and workers would develop into the documentation and publication of community testimonies – stories from migrant laborers who were subjected to 12 hour work days, nose bleeds, and respiratory and musculoskeletal problems as a result of the toxicity of their worksite. I contend that this activist strategy of public protest, in addition to challenging the sites of corporate injustice, act as spaces of encounter in which the two constituencies – environmental activists and ethnic-Mexican migrant workers – build community through practice of listening, sharing stories, and solidarity. These relations then can be maintained, cultivated, and regenerated with great care, and a strategy of encounter can be reproduced

⁷¹ “WHAT ABOUT POISONS AND SUN VALLEY FLORAL FARMS: First Issue in Pamphlet Series to Educate People About the Unethical & Toxic Practices of Sun Valley Floral Farms & Inspire Individual and Community Action to End Those practices.”

during future interventions against the nexus of corporate capitalism and policed communities.

In the summer of 2008, Sun Valley continued to be a targeted site of environmental struggle. At the same time, what was perceived among critical environmental activists as a green-washing campaign by Sun Valley manifested in its promotion of “organic” stock. Eco News reported a list of chemicals still in use by Sun Valley and the possibility that they were part of a pesticide spill on the North Coast,

Sun Valley has been attempting to reduce its pesticide use and tap into the lucrative organic flower market, but the company has been unsuccessful in eliminating chemical use altogether and still uses substantial amounts of pesticide in Arcata and Smith River.⁷²

Layered over this small contingent of environment actions were ongoing community actions to confront the “War on the Poor.” The War on the Poor was directed, activists argued, against poor and homeless communities in Humboldt. It included police killings of youth, houseless, and Native American individuals in Humboldt. Included in the list of victims of police violence in Humboldt County are: Christopher Burgess, Cheri Lynn Moore, Zachary Cooke, and Martin Fredrick Cotton II, who were all killed by the local police.⁷³ In response to a pattern of police violence and violation of rights, individuals like Verbena Leah, who was involved in environmental protests mentioned earlier, were instrumental in initiated the he emergence of Redwood Curtain Copwatch.

⁷² “ECONEWS: Possibility of Pesticide Spill Haunts Smith River” by Greg King. Accessed online from the Northcoast Environmental Center on 7/21/2008.

⁷³ “Honor and Resist for Victims | Redwood Curtain CopWatch,” accessed October 26, 2014, <http://redwoodcurtaincopwatch.net/taxonomy/term/259>.

Copwatch is an unincorporated project designed to monitor police activity, document testimonies of police abuse, and share knowledge with people on the street and in the community about handling police encounters by exercising their rights. Copwatchers collected testimonies from houseless people; some of them were hesitant were discouraged from speaking by the local homeless shelter in front of which Cotton was killed. Copwatch patrols made use of radio scanners to locate police activity, or simply walked in small crews of two to five people, through the streets of Eureka and Arcata. Armed with video cameras and pamphlets, Copwatchers handed out “Know Your Rights” leaflets, and filmed police activity while joking and telling stories that retold a history of past actions, the lessons gained from them, and the where the adversarial characters as well as the allies sit within systems of power. Copwatch and some of the victims’ families also participated in critical community spaces, known as *mitote* and *Día de los Muertos*, that were produced by local Chicano activist communities pursuing a politics of Zapatismo. I will elaborate on *Mitotes* and *Día de los Muertos* in later sections.

Copwatch activists like Verbena were also closely linked to People Project, a project that sought to confront anti-homeless sentiment and “quality of life” ordinances that were designed to eradicate, relocate, or jail the homeless community. People Project consisted of “houseless and poor people (and allies) fighting for rights of houseless and poor people. We use direct action, sharing, and open dialogue. We work to build community with DIGNITY!”⁷⁴ One of People Project’s key actions involved an

⁷⁴ “About PEOPLE PROJECT | PEOPLE PROJECT,” accessed October 30, 2014, <http://peopleproject.wordpress.com/about/>.

encampment in Arcata, in a park near Humboldt State University during the summer of 2007. After lasting several weeks and mobilizing student activist support, the People Project encampment was forcibly removed by an inter-agency police action that included the Humboldt County Sheriff and Arcata Police Departments.

During winter of 2009, a similar encampment, or “safe sleep space,” was constructed as a temporary tarp shelter, this time in the City of Eureka. Again, after weeks of shelter, free meals, warm blankets, the safe sleep space was broken up after identified “leaders” were targeted for arrest by the authorities, and the People Project’s documentation equipment along with shelter materials and personal property was smashed or destroyed in the process. Following the arrests, a “jail support” plan was implemented, wherein those on the outside insist on the release of prisoners and begin to take advantage of legal self-help tactics in order to jam up the legal pipeline, file DIY legal motions, and have charges dropped or won in court.

The encampments and safe sleep spaces meet a direct and immediate need for shelter and food. They are grassroots efforts insofar as they shelter that is unmediated by, and radically different from, the social service and non-profit methods of service. They serve as political spaces of encounter that challenge the system of oppression by exposing the public and private institutions’ refusals to provide basic services fundamental to human dignity. The politics connected to these spaces insisted on the dignity of all people while exposing state violence and reclaiming public space. At the same time, among the

protestors, an encampment cultivates new relational identities and collective self-organization tools.

In the fall of 2007, Copwatch and People project began operating out of a rented office space in Old Town Eureka named, Peoples Action for Rights and Community (PARC). PARC was a small space that relied on community donations to make rent. PARC remained intentionally free from the cumbersome organizational structures and blunted political discourse embodied by non-profit organizations. The space hosted other activist projects, allowed houseless people to pass through for showers, food, blankets, or rest from the streets, and provided a workshop space for community projects.

Verbena explained to me the reason why PARC chose to exist beyond the purview of the NPIC:

Grassroots keeps you honest for one, right? People volunteer, at least People Project or PARC, there's never been anything that costs any money either.... But the non-profit world either overtly or indirectly tries to de-legitimize grassroots work.... [T]he non-profit world is like, "This is how it has to be. This is how we do it. If you're not doing it this way, then you must not be legit." I mean that's what you hear and that's what you can feel.

And in this area, I call it the "grand-daddy non-profit," it's called the Redwood Community Action Agency.... Well now RCAA it's like, "If you ain't under RCAA, what are you? You're not a real program in this area. You're not a real project." What I learned about board of directors a long time ago when I worked at the Arcata Endeavor before it was totally co-opted. But it had a board of directors and at that time...when it became more, funded by the feds, community development block grants and all that stuff – *total control* over what happened. Total control. But what I did learn about boards was that they just didn't do that much. They were just this like, head, kind of, you know, necessity. We did start a non-profit when I was young. I was just like one of the members, it was called PAC – Peoples', anyway I can't remember what it stood for but the idea was it was several of us who were working with and as people on the street and formerly on the street just trying to have that "status" right? Like, "we need some organization so we can have, you know, "homelessness conference," and

funded. But even then I found that I ended up working with one or two people that, eh, they kind of just wanted a board because they want to be on a board. So I think it's accurate to say there's a non-profit industrial complex. And we're often in conflict with what we more simply call "poverty pimps," in the poverty world, where it's like these people we call "poverty pimps" are just getting a gig. And end up doing what the *cops* do, stealing people's stuff, tearing up their camps. And they're getting funded. And that's why they're doing it. And so they exert all this control. They take on the role of the government and the police and they're doing it "to help." And they have this very patronizing – they're not with the people who they're supposed to be serving. They're just creating a job for themselves, or perpetuating one. So we try to stay clean of all that stuff, and actually expose it, because it's a hollow space.⁷⁵

The independent work of Copwatch proved invaluable to seeking justice despite the complicity of more mainstream organizations. In September of 2011, the family of Martin Cotton was awarded 4.5 million dollars in a federal civil rights trial against the Eureka Police Department. Cotton was one of the victims of police violence who was beaten to death in 2007 by the Eureka Police Department. An Indy Media blurb summarized the verdict:

On August 9th, 2007, Eureka police officers Justin Winkle, Gary Whitmer, Adam Laird, and five others were involved in beating an unarmed Martin Cotton II to death. Eureka police pummeled Martin Cotton's body and head in broad daylight, using pepper spray repeatedly. Martin Cotton was then sent to jail without being offered medical treatment. He died in jail within about an hour. A federal civil rights trial in Oakland was filed to seek justice for Martin on behalf of his young daughter. The case, Siehna Cotton et al v. City of Eureka, included the testimony of police readily admitting they beat Martin Cotton all over his body and did not seek medical assistance for him afterward.... At about 1pm on September 23rd, the verdict was announced for the two-week trial. A seven-person jury found unanimously in favor of the plaintiffs, big time. A rare award of punitive damages against the three officers required a finding of "malice, oppression, or reckless disregard" to the decedent's [sic] or plaintiffs' rights Crucial to the verdict was the testimony of two witnesses who bravely reported that they had indeed seen at least officer Winkle striking Martin Cotton's skull. Painful video of Martin Cotton dying in jail was presented during the trial which

⁷⁵ Verbena Leah, Interview, August 29, 2011.

obviously effected jurors, four of whom wore black in solidarity with the family today as the verdict was read.⁷⁶

The 2011 verdict was the culmination of ongoing work of Redwood Curtain Copwatch. Without foundation funding (community donations comprised the overwhelming majority of income), Copwatch, in particular Verbena Leah, took the lead in this example of direct action casework by collecting oral testimony of witnesses, filing freedom of information requests, organizing public protests, letter writing, and acquiring bro-bono legal support. Aside from the arduous footwork, however, was the insistence on the fundamental human dignity of those who live in poverty, a refusal to partake in the dehumanization of the poor so common in a classist society, and a critical interrogation of the official narratives promoted by the authorities. Copwatch and PARC continue to document cases of police abuse in Eureka.

The story of Copwatch and People Project highlights local militarization and police violence, presumably as part of a gentrification strategy that seeks to create a climate of hostility toward those who have little value in the local consumer market , other than to provide a job for the police and network of social services whose job, ironically, is to eliminate those people off whose poverty they live. This militarization and policing of working class also includes the migrant worker community in Humboldt, as I would come to experience during my research activism.

⁷⁶ Dave Id, "Martin Cotton Family Awarded Over \$4.5 Million in Trial Against Eureka Police, Interview: Video : Indybay," accessed April 13, 2014, http://www.indybay.org/newsitems/2011/09/23/18691150.php?show_comments=1#18691838.

One morning in June of 2008, I answered the Copwatch phone line at the PARC office in Eureka. A woman called from her job at a local coffee house in Arcata to report that a fleet of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) vehicles were cruising in the area. Copwatchers responded and located an ICE raid in process at the Sun Valley Floral Farm. ICE had conducted its worksite raid at Sun Valley with the cooperation of Sun Valley management and the use of a Coast Guard station for processing detainees. Persons detained during this raid were taken in unmarked vans, with their hands zip tied or in cuffs, to be processed at the Coast guard station in McKinleyville. The mostly Spanish-speaking detainees were then pressured under the threat of deportation to sign documents written in English. They were then released and asked to voluntarily appear at an ICE office operating in downtown Eureka. Others in the local undocumented community were rounded up at their homes.

The response by Copwatch and the activist infrastructure built by PARC would aid in the support of those families affected by the ICE raids. Chicano and student activists who were “in community” – that is to say, who had a working political comradeship – with PARC, were able to respond at the site of violence by creating a symbolic human blockade of the ICE vehicle that transported the detainees. Later, some of these Mexican American and Chicano community activists would rely on PARC’s efforts to resist police abuse and rights violations. The activists created an ongoing encounter with the Spanish-speaking and migrant community as they tried with some success to collectively manage their crises of community. In later sections I will highlight

those strategic spaces that relied on *Zapatismo* to convene the various social struggles occurring amongst the diverse local community.

Back at the PARC space in Eureka, Verbena and others continue to carry breakfast fixings each week to a public corner in Eureka to serve any and all passersby who wish to partake. Coffee, steel cut oats, entire bags of bagels that were “dumpstered” from behind Los Bagels – a popular café in Eureka – and hot tea are laid out on a coffee table. Washable dishes are carried to and from PARC during community breakfasts, along with a banner that reads, “Good Morning Neighbors: People Project.” Sometimes, people walk by without eating, keeping a curious but safe distance at first, until Verbena invitingly calls out while lifting her bowl as a sign of offering, “Breakfast!” When neighbors who are unfamiliar with the People Project Breakfast inquire about the project, Verbena credits the Black Panther Party breakfast programs of years past as an inspiration, then usually has informational pamphlets about upcoming actions, workshops, or recent police killings that include names of victims and their killer cops on hand to give to those who partake in breakfast.

Humboldt Zapatistas: Resisting Locally, Engaging Polyculturally

This section explores *Zapatismo* through a discussion on the political practices, strategies, and tactics of Acción Zapatista de Humboldt (AZ). *Zapatismo* in Humboldt County involved radical politics, anti-capitalist discourse, anti-racism, and a democratic decision process based on consensus. *Zapatismo* as a political and cultural practice

articulated and informed Chicano activists' strategy of making use of spaces of encounter as sites of direct action that produced oppositional and situated knowledge. AZ's strategy of community formation influenced ongoing efforts among activist and Chicano communities as they engage in local action and community cultural celebration.

As a person of color, moving to Northern California made me feel hyper-aware of that fact. It's not as if one has ever forgotten, but daily interactions that seem suspiciously like subtle racism seem more pronounced in a rural, majority white area. Coming from an ethnic Mexican community, one loses a sense of security, safety, and orientation. As I get acclimated to the township of Arcata, a series of micro-aggressions ensue. A white apartment neighbor offers me, the new brown student, a stiff cocktail and some homemade brew. I oblige, and am nicely buzzed when the elder neighbor proposes that I help him sell marijuana, which he happens to grow in a nearby forest. "There is no mafia," he says. I look for a way to excuse myself for the evening, knowing that this neighbor must be kept at a cordial and safe distance from this point forward.

We pick on (rather, *critique*) hippies a little bit, for what we see as rampant cultural appropriation and their expressions of white privilege. Yet it is the more rugged-looking white folks, with pickup trucks, gun racks, and Carhartt Jackets whom I also am a bit wary of. There are rumors of Klan activity in neighboring McKinleyville. In any case, this liberal bastion seems to be open-minded, unless that is, you raise critical race issues.

Meanwhile, The Eureka Times Standard, features periodic articles about evidence of a Mexican cartel element who have come to grow marijuana in the forest.⁷⁷

These cultural disorientation and subtle racial micro-aggressions give rise to a crisis of community (or lack thereof). I sense that I must find a community with which to compare experiential data as a collective reality check, or alone face the increasingly alienating experience of questioning whether whatever perceived racism just took place was, in fact real, or a figment of my unreasonably paranoid imagination. One needs community in order to disrupt a feeling of either invisibility or conspicuous brownness, and one senses a duty to undermine a system that could create such derision against the poor, which is, the general attitude taken here toward travelling groups of houseless folks who line downtown Arcata.

As I contemplate this new setting in front of the University Library, racial unease gives rise to anger. I witness campus police officer escorting a black male away in handcuffs. It is apparently no cause for interruption in students' course of study, for individuals trek by the arrest scene without notice. I taunt the white female officer with accusations of racism.

How does one pursue and education, find community, disrupt this racial unease in this "ecotopia" of Humboldt County? I am invited to attend Dr. Manuel Callahan's Chicano Studies lecture, where he lays out his theory and method of activist research color schematics on power point. "Direct action should be about learning...we probe our

⁷⁷ "The Influence of Mexican Drug Cartels in Humboldt County," *Times-Standard.com*, accessed November 25, 2014, http://www.times-standard.com/ci_7247948.

enemy, to learn how he responds, so then adjust our strategy accordingly.” The professor facilitates my integration into the activist collective, priming the circle of participants with Zapatismo cultural politics, relating them to a recent history of local direct action, and suggesting an Convivial Community Research as theory as developing methodological platform that is designed to support communities in struggle.

My comrades, who are more advanced theoretically and more experienced in direct actions, and point me to a local archive of actions contained within the pages of the *The Matrix*, HSU’s Women’s Resource Center newsletter edited by women of color who were also associated with AZ. For example, a direct action during a campus, “Dialog on Race,” that featured Angela Davis as a key note speaker, women of color intervened by taking aim at the systematic silencing of women of color voices on campus. Within their prepared statement read:

We stand here today as Women of Color and those who stand in Solidarity with Women of Color to highlight our struggle in the classroom, on campus, and in the community.... We cannot feel safe on a campus/institution that is built upon racism and sexism, and that supports the prison industrial complex (i.e. dorm furniture from San Quentin [State Prison])...and the oppression and exploitation of people of color (i.e. flowers that come from Sun Valley).⁷⁸

In looking at the intervention made by Women of Color, it is clear that an analysis and localized resistance to the economics criminalization on campus. Furthermore, Women of Color demonstrated opposition to the racialized division of labor at Sun Valley, which will be a key site of the policing of migrant communities. Actions by Women of Color intervened into the mainstream notions of multiculturalism. They later

⁷⁸ Women of Color Liberation Army, “An Example of Resistance,” *The Matrix*, Spring 2006. Humboldt State University Women’s Resource Center.

reflected on this particular action that we, “must not be derailed from the purpose of liberating our communities for the purpose of ‘Multiculturalizing’ the movement...”⁷⁹

The analyses, action planning, and interventions on campus cross pollinated with Zapatista spaces, and employed similar tactics and political readings, and in fact shared “members.” I would later learn that the overlap in analysis, strategy, and tactics emerged critical reflection and action spaces known as *coyunturas*.

As the fall 2007 semester progresses bi-weekly Acción Zapatista meetings are convened on alternating Wednesdays, taking place within the Behavioral and Social Sciences building at HSU. With each AZ meeting, an alternating meeting facilitator steps up so as to rotate responsibility and to allow for individuals to practice this art of facilitation. In AZ, I listen to retelling past direct actions that where AZ engaging with the local activist community. For example, the People Project Encampment that took place outside of the HSU campus in April of 2007 created a sustained houseless encampment that successfully rallied student support prior to the encampment being forcibly removed by an interagency police force. Importantly, actions like these are discussed in term of learning teaching and learning outcomes. For example, an encampment exposes neoliberal enclosure of public space and its creation of a precarious working class. The use of dialog, dignity, and direct action are key components of Zapatismo politics, and the cross pollination of these two unincorporated projects – People Project and Acción Zapatista – is no coincidence, but the result of carefully built community solidarity. Within AZ spaces, I learned, an infrastructure of community was

⁷⁹ Ibid.

cultivated in such a way as to be able to respond to actions such as People Project. AZ proposed a space wherein direct actions like the encampment to be considered as a knowledge practice, by examining the argument, strategy, and learning outcomes, such as police tactics, direct action tactics, and the ability to make observable the struggle to reclaim common spaces.

As an introduction to AZ's work, one *compañero* explained to me, "We're not just sending rice and beans to our 'little brown brother.'" The point made to me during this early engagement with AZ illustrated how as a collective, AZ departed from the subtly racist and paternalistic tone of "charity." For AZ, solidarity with indigenous peoples in the South must not reinforce the uneven power relations between the South and North. A desire to go "beyond solidarity," as AZ iterated, stemmed from a close reading of the Zapatistas' answer to those of us who wish to help, which has been for communities in struggle to analyze and resist local neoliberalism and to image radical alternatives in their own communities.

Mitote

One alternative political space in Humboldt focused on convening community assembly, imagined on the North Coast as *mitotes*. *Mitotes* were spaces of encounter wherein collectives could build mutual solidarity by sharing projects, struggles, strategies, stories, and food through ritual celebration and politicized dialogue. The word *mitote* originates from the Nahuatl language, and signifies a ceremony or community

celebration.⁸⁰ Through the process of colonization, the word became associated with criminality by the Spanish, and as a result, the word in contemporary Mexican Spanish carries a negative connotation. One who engages in drinking, partying, or gossiping, for example, might be labeled a *mitotero*. Thus, AZ's invocation of *mitote* reflected a sense of delinquency, marginalization, and rebellion that is embraced by the *mitoteros* (those who engage in *mitote*). Furthermore, from an indigenous perspective, *mitote* recognizes the sense of community spirit and power gained from such celebrations. Manuel Callahan explains:

Organized for the purpose of ritualized celebration and knowledge sharing, these spaces are defined by ceremony, sharing of food, and dance. Or at least, that is how we defined these spaces in our reclaiming of the code. As spaces of community regeneration through ritualized celebration and knowledge sharing they mark a reclaiming of a tradition of facilitating spaces of encounter as part of more complex strategy of resistance, rebellion, and autonomous political formation.⁸¹

Expanding on Callahan's definition, Universidad de la Tierra states:

Often criminalized in the popular consciousness, the *mitote* works as a reclaimed public space of celebration convened to generate poetic and strategic knowledges that privilege arts, dance, and embodied research...As strategic sites of insurgent learning and convivial research, *mitotes* operate as spaces of encounter in service of complex, emergent strategies of rebellion and autonomous political formation.⁸²

⁸⁰ Mario Aguilar, "In Ipanoltimēh Mi'totli Me:xi'ca'/Conchera'/Chichimeca' Los Pasos de la Danza Azteca/Conchera/Chichimeca The Steps of the Aztec/Conchero/Chichimeca Danza" <http://aguila-blanca.com/pdf-files/Los%20Pasos%20de%20la%20Danza%20Azteca.pdf>.

⁸¹ Manuel Callahan, Email "RE: Mitote Part 2" 6/16/09

⁸² Universidad de la Tierra reflects is a more recent iteration of the Zapatismo that took place in Humboldt. As a San Jose, California community project, it reflects the movement of individuals and strategies across geography, and shares its namesake with two other autonomous learning projects in Mexico.

The *mitote* convenes activist and community projects in order to share situated knowledge, culture, and politics beyond professionalized community organizing and single-issue campaigns. Instead, *mitotes* favor community assembly. Gaining student access to University resources, such as meeting spaces and mini-grants, allowed AZ to host movement activists and intellectuals at *mitotes*. By hosting radical intellectuals and veterans and activists of various peoples' movements, *mitotes* instituted a space through which community formation practices and a gesture at small popular assemblies could take place. Such a space creates a politics of encounter, for example, between local activists struggling against police abuse of poor and houseless communities, migrants resisting ICE terror, students of color who are underserved and marginalized by the university, and documentarians of the Zapatista movement. More than a space to air grievances, the *mitote* is imagined as a community assembly that claims radical imagination, a spirit of rebellion, and cultural celebration of resistance.

For example, in 2009, I attended a *mitote* at the Eureka Labor Temple. University micro grants are used to deliver and honorarium and travel expenses to Gloria Muñoz and Alejandro Reyes, Mexican journalists from within the Zapatista movement. Muñoz had just released her book *The Fire and the Word*, which celebrates the Zapatista's 10th anniversary of their uprising in 1994 and 20th anniversary of their initial 1984 foundation. After a discussion given by Muñoz on campus, the *mitote* convenes as an activist encounter and celebration of resistance. Facilitators convene the *mitote* and introduce a context for the space, discussing Zapatismo in Humboldt County as we see it in local

resistance, activist *encuentros*, and community celebration from, “below and to the left.”

Reclaimed food that has been turned into meals is served. The silverware and dishes are provided by People Project’s free breakfast program in Eureka. As those who are hungry are fed, and the facilitated activist encounter concludes, we send the rest of the evening helping ourselves to the keg of local artisan brew, laughing, dancing a bit, politicking a little, and celebrating the togetherness, temporarily disrupting the alienating brood brought about by racial oppression.

Another *mitote* occurred in December of 2010 and coincided with an anarchist book fair in Humboldt. The book fair happened to fall around the move-in to the *Jakalito*. A 3-bedroom home in Eureka, the *Jakalito* (little hut in English), would serve as a staging ground to hold meeting spaces with families affected by ICE raids at Sun Valley. The 3-bedroom home would also see its garage converted into a “safe sleep space” for houseless folks on the street, offering temporary shelter from cold, police, and from the religious and non-profit monopolies on homeless shelter. During HSU’s Dialog on Race, the *Jakalito* served as a convening space in which artists, key note speaker Boots Riley of revolutionary hip-hop group The Coup, and AZ-ers now living in the Bay Area could reunite, plan their Dialogue on Race workshops, and *convivir* by partaking in brew, hand-rolled tobacco, or some Humboldt green if so desired.

The use of a rented house as an activist space, a safe sleep space, and organizing venue for migrant communities does not go unnoticed by those who enforce the social order; namely, the Eureka Police Department. One evening at the *Jakalito* radical folks

of color in Humboldt County gathered for *mitote*. With neither probable cause nor a warrant, EPD, some of whom were involved in the beating death of Martin Cotton, entered the premises through a side gate in order to gain access to the *mitote*.

Copwatchers like Verbena, who were amidst active process to bring truth and justice to the family of Martin Cotton at the time, were present inside the home when the cops showed up. As the police entered the steps of the back porch, making their way towards the back door, *mitoter*os began to shut the door, saying clearly and matter-of-factly, “No warrant, no entry.” The police slammed the door open, hitting one partygoer against the head with the back door, and forced their way inside as the party gasped then fell into quiet rage. The fact that many attendees had been trained in how to handle police encounters, as well as the outnumbering of witnesses to police aggressors might have contributed to EPS’s decision to back down, returning only briefly a while later to politely reclaim a set keys they had lost in the invasion.

Tertulia

As part of AZ’s strategy of *encuentro*, weekly gatherings known as *tertulias* were set up in public social spaces, appearing on a surface level as an evening gathering for brew and pizza. *Tertulia*, “refers to neighbors who gather at an accessible public space, such as a pub or coffee house, to share news and information that affect the community.”⁸³ The *tertulia*, I learned, can be reimagined as a political space or as a “virtual center” – an ostensibly apolitical eatery that can be temporarily repurposed to

⁸³ “Universidad de La Tierra Pamphlet,” n.d.

serve as a political space. *Tertulias* politicized the affective bonds of community, encouraged a “politics of generosity” and created an informal social infrastructure wherein insurgent imaginations were cultivated. In Humboldt County for example, *tertulias* took place on Wednesday evenings at a Carmela’s Mexican restaurant, or the Arcata Pizza and Deli, and often followed more formalized strategy meetings on campus.

The idea behind the *tertulia* was to set up a regular presence among alternative communities while politicizing an otherwise enclosed privatized space. “Thus,” explains Universidad de la Tierra, “a consistent and accessible *tertulia* can be a site where community members develop projects, coordinate activities, facilitate networks, share resources, and promote research.” Because it takes place in a popular pizza spot, we often find acquaintances stopping in for a bite to eat, and bring them into the fold of conversation for a while before they rejoin their party.

I meet Verbena Leah, one of the key activists who would soon become a dear comrade of mine, for the first time at the Arcata Pizza Deli, early in the fall of 2007 after a Convivial Research Seminar that has reconvened at the “APD.” Verbena is wearing her trademark black and grey wool coat, with a patch pinned to the upper arm that reads, “No officer I do not consent to a search.” Inside her coat pockets, Verbena is usually carrying a pouch of American Spirit rolling tobacco and Redwood Curtain Copwatch literature to hand out. I tell her what I witnessed earlier, that a black male was taken in handcuffs, and that I responded with angry taunts at the cops, calling them racists and dogs. In this initial encounter I learn that about the death of Martin Cotton, a homeless man beat to

death by the Eureka Police Department. Before long, I will have involved myself in Copwatch, participating in planning meetings for the October 22nd Day of Action against Police Brutality, going on Copwatch patrols, or facilitating “Know Your Rights” workshops. One of the key features of *tertulias* is its capacity to cultivate a spirit of conviviality and politics of generosity. In practical terms, this might look like sharing of pitchers of Great White or other local craft brews. It also means careful listening and honest speaking.

Coyuntura

While *mitotes* and *tertulias* politicized community celebration and social space, a third strategic space focused explicitly on collective, democratic, and politicized knowledge production through the practice of *coyuntura analysis*, or simply, *coyunturas*. *Coyuntura* is a popular education method designed to generate a shared analysis by communities about their collective situation. Widely used in social movements in Latin America, the *coyuntura* facilitates the emergence of a collective analysis of social forces, actors, agents, projects, and networks that pertain to a community and its struggles. This participatory research space produces collective, situated knowledge and available strategies by making use of available popular education activities. *Coyuntura* spaces themselves can also be used as an assessment tool following a direct action in order to evaluate tactics, analyze relations of social forces at the present conjuncture, and make adjustments in strategy and tactics.

One such *coyuntura* enabled the community of AZ to name its struggle, articulate community, and clarify its strategy. Within this particular *coyuntura*, participants theorized Zapatismo, in part through critical assessment and refusal of liberal multiculturalism. Alternatively questions arise related to the community desire to live collectivity, and to recognize the interconnectedness of our individual lived realities, and to participate in the construction, protection, and sharing of our cultures within appropriate social and political contexts. Participants in Humboldt *coyunturas* recalled that that these *coyunturas* prompted the recovering of local *Día de los Muertos* celebrations in Humboldt County – this particular cultural celebration is the focus of the ensuing section of this chapter.

Coyunturas function particularly well strategically when they work alongside direct actions. The *coyunturas* create spaces to assess local sites of violence, for example at the Sun Valley Floral Farm, reflect on information produced within direct actions against violence, and identify new strategies of action or sites of intervention. Furthermore, the *coyuntura* itself is a form of direct action. One interviewee mentioned to me how direct action,

doesn't have to be a "lockdown," you know it doesn't have to be something totally confrontational with the state It can just be mobilized action, mobilized activity with a very specific purpose. And in our case the direct action also really has to be considered in terms of "what kind of space are we creating through the action?" A space for ourselves in terms of for us to think through our Zapatismo, and that can only happen through action.

Typical spaces within which a *coyuntura* may take place would include on campus, in the HSU Behavioral and Social Sciences Building, in the HSU Native Forum,

or any other campus space that can be accessed by supportive faculty or students and inclusive of off-campus community projects like People Project or Copwatch. The activity, method, and information produced within a coyuntura depend on those present and the desires, observations, facilitation, and moment of analysis. The coyuntura may also identify contradictions around a chosen theme and the local projects, agents, resources, processes that make such contradictions observable. For example, the contradiction of Humboldt County as an enlightened liberal bastion on the one hand, yet very much invested in systems of colonialism on the other.

In order to produce such information, the coyunturas that I participated in often worked from the American Friends Service Committee facilitation manual for coyuntural analysis.⁸⁴ The AFSC manual contains a series of exercises that convey key concepts, i.e., identity, analysis, contradictions, vision, etc., as well as exercises and processes that elicit an analysis of the relations of social forces. For example, if one exercise examines the concept of “the moment,” participants might be asked to share a defining moment, “politically or otherwise” of their personal history. If there is a sense of openness and trust, as was the case in my participation in the collective, this simple exercise can become a convergence, a space in which testimonies are shared. A basic agreement to respectful and active listening and a comradery ideally supports such an activity and enriches a closeness to those present.

⁸⁴ “Coyuntural Analysis, Critical Thinking for Meaningful Action: A Manual for Facilitators” Written and Produced by the Chicago Office of the American Friends Service Committee. Chicago, 1997.

But we're not here "just to hold hands and sing Kumbaya." There is a political analysis that emerges from the coyuntura activity. A "7 problems" exercise involves breakout groups identifying 7 initial problems. Each group sends their list of problems to their neighboring group for comments, questions, and feedback made in the form of notes, edits, or comments that are written directly over the meeting note paper on which the previous group's seven problems were listed. In this particular instance, the 7 original problems were narrowed after several full rotations around each breakout group, into three problems: Kapitalism with a capital K, ideology, and disconnectedness. Of course, these three broad concepts might have been a way to summarize the themes discussed over the course of a 7 problems activity.

In one analytical exercise, participants identify relations of social forces through the use a timeline that shows local militarization and criminalization, which include cases of police violence, as well as worksite raids at Sun Valley against migrant workers. Layered with militarization timeline is a parallel timeline showing Peoples' Action, including May 1st March, Sun Valley protests at Arcata Farmers Market, and Safe Sleep encampments. Lastly, the category of Community Spaces included on a third timeline, to include cultural production and community formation name the some of the spaces of facilitated encounter and cultural renewal; community *mitotes*, *tertulias*, and *Día de los Muertos* here. The timeline exercise encourages those who were present to share their experiences of oppression, resistance, and community, and makes observable the relations of social forces in a community over time (Figure 1).

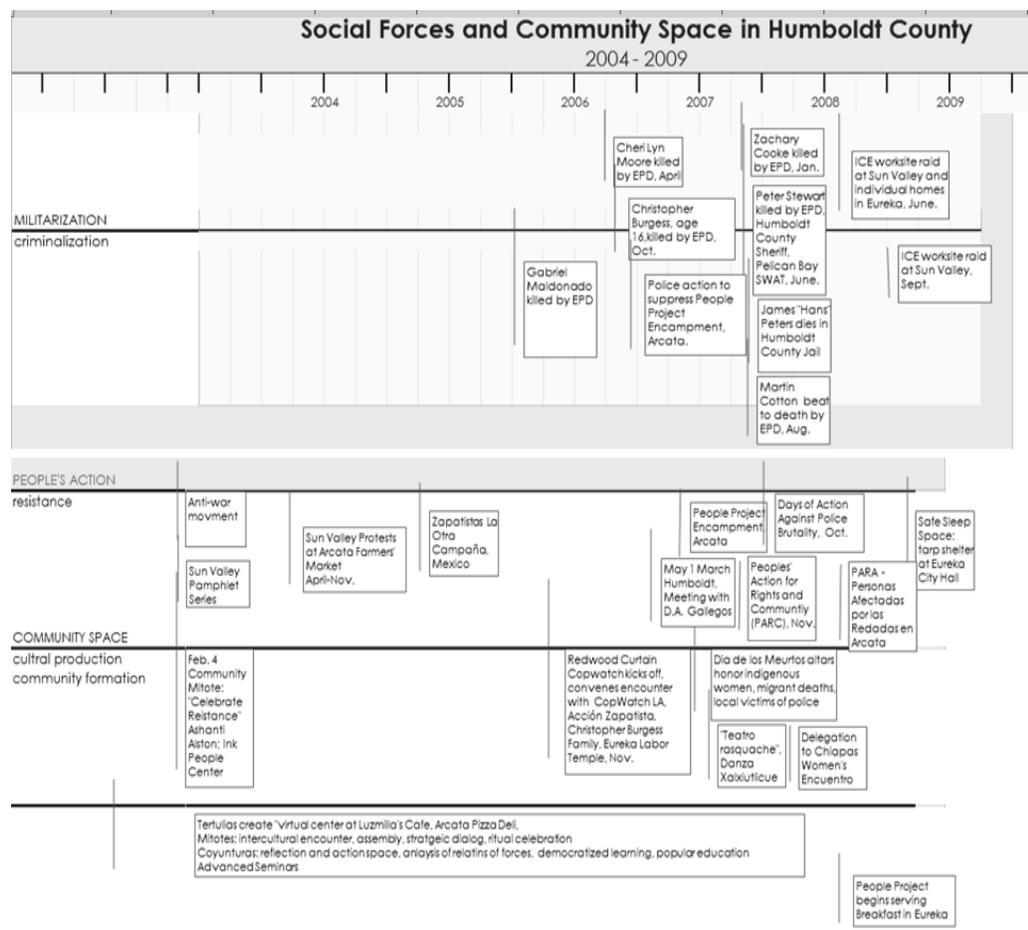


Figure 1. Social Forces and Community Space in Humboldt County.

In Humboldt, *mitotes*, *tertulias*, and *coyunturas* they served as spaces of encounter that convene community assembly and articulate collective knowledge. They should be understood as key moments emerging from relations of forces at that particular moment of community struggles, and it is necessary to continue to analyze and re-invent new forms of radical community spaces. Such spaces in Humboldt produced shared definitions of community that were defined by listening, trust, engagement, clarity, regeneration, celebration, and encounter. Other communities might have their own

culturally appropriate and inherited ways of convening community and producing spaces of encounter, and utilize those cultural practices accordingly.

Recurring tendencies of generosity, dialog, listening, and hosting were nurtured in spaces claimed by AZ. These qualities politicized everyday life, placed dignity at the center of its ways of being with community. They cannot be quantitatively measured or artificially reproduced by formal organizational structures because these principles are guided by the spiritual regeneration of community.

In public, regular meeting spaces become venues where a politics of generosity - both in spirit and materially - and political dialog facilitate a bond of comradeship. Everyday life is politicized such that political conversations are the norm. It is refreshing to have a community network of people we call *compañeros* who we share our reality with. The feeling is one being both sickened by the seemingly everyday racism, and yet playfully sarcastic and mocking of our transgressors, while loving towards each other.

A critical political perspective that lacks spirit is a recipe for self-destruction. After sharing in the trauma of police abuse, the overwhelming and intolerable sadness of existing within a violent empire, and the everyday microaggressions of white supremacy that slowly kill the spirit, creating spaces of community renewal and cultural celebration that reclaim the joy of struggle become absolutely necessary. In the next section, I'm going to further explore community spaces that accessed a *Mexico Profundo*, that is, an indigenous system of knowledge, culture, and politics, through the celebration of *Día de los Muertos* and *Danza Azteca*

Death and Community Regeneration

Local articulations of *Día de los Muertos*, a traditional Mexican celebration of the dead during the month of November, has created a space of community regeneration and political solidarity.⁸⁵ In the process, the community has affirmed its identity as indigenous people. *Día de los Muertos* employs lived cultural tools that are used to construct collective identity, convene, and regenerate community. Indigenous cultural productions in Humboldt include *Días de los Muertos*, Aztec Dance, or *Danza*, and *Teatro*, and come together to create spaces of community renewal that intersect with local struggles. In this section I'll reflect some of the knowledge expressed in these practices and continue to highlight their relation to the cultural, political, and knowledge systems emerging alongside the grassroots community formations discussed in this thesis.

Días de los Muertos, or Days of the Dead, is a traditional Mexican celebration of Death and the dead. During this time of communion with the dead and of honoring Death, we, the living, invite our ancestors to join us in the living world for feast, music, and prayer. As Day of the Dead typically occurs on November first and second, some point to the celebration's indigenous roots that were eclipsed at one point by the coinciding Catholic tradition of All Souls Day. In fact, prior to Spanish conquest, *Días de Muertos* lasted about a month, with special days at the beginning and end of this period for *bienvenida* (welcoming) and *despedida* (farewell party) of the dead. The aesthetics of

⁸⁵ This particular celebration is often referred to as the singular *Día de los Muertos*, indicating the celebration takes place on a single day. In general, I refer to the plural *Días de los Muertos*, in order to account for the multiple days, both traditionally and in local interpretations, over which the celebration takes place.

Día de los Muertos are recognizable in the imagery of *calacas* – or the skeletal counterparts that are represented doing human things like dancing, feasting, or singing. Some celebrants paint their faces as stylized *calacas* that have gained mainstream cultural appeal in recent years.

In Humboldt County, two key spaces facilitated the production of *Días de Muertos*. The first took place at the Bayside Grange, located just between Eureka and Arcata, thanks to Grange members Suzanne Guerra and Jack Surmani accessing this space and serving and facilitating the celebration. In this case, by facilitating, I don't mean speechifying or imposing a particular agenda, as Suzanne in her quiet way tells me that she prefers to work behind the scenes so as to make available the space and materials for the broader community to pick up and use. Nevertheless, as I will show further down, Suzanne's affiliation Zapatismo will influence the specific ways in which culture is politicized. A second location takes place at the Ink People Center for the Arts in Eureka, again, a product of social networks accessed by key figures in pursuit of facilitating Mexican cultural celebration. As a result of accessing this space, the migrant, Spanish-speaking and Chicano cultural activists accessed infrastructural territory.

For example, *Personas Afectadas por las Redadas en Arcata* (PARA) a group of migrant workers who were rounded up during the Sun Valley ICE raid in 2008, used the *Día de los Muertos*, to collect funds in order to help them comply with Department of Homeland Security check-ins, and to attend court proceedings in the San Francisco Bay in order to continue to appeal their charges. Since the 2008 raid, AZ “members” had

worked to support PARA, first by engaging in direct action that temporarily blockaded the roundup at Sun Valley, and later using the *Jakalito* as an organizing venue for PARA, wherein a similar collective decision making and democratic facilitation process was employed, and “Know Your Rights,” trainings employed in Copwatch carried over into the PARA group. At the Bayside Grange, members of PARA are preparing beans and *picadillo* (with a vegan option), *jamaica* (hibiscus drink) and regional Oaxacan *horchata* that, unlike the ready-made *horchata* mixes found in restaurants, contains slices of melon and almonds. Several members of PARA are from the Mexican state of Oaxaca, where the tradition of *Día de los Muertos* is especially renowned.

At the Bayside Grange, we are building *Altars* – an essential component of the celebration – to honor the dead with photos, marigold flowers, and *pan de muerto* (bread of dead), which is fresh cooked bread molded into the shape of a *calaca*. Tequila, *comida* (food) and other offerings are left on altars for the *animas* (spirits). Traditionally, alters are constructed in homes, at cemeteries, or in public spaces, and Mexican homes often have a less elaborate altar kept year-round. At the grange, a three-step community altar is covered in cloth and decorated with dry beans, *xempaxochitl* (marigold flowers), and pictures of relatives. The community altar is marked by a bamboo arch wrapped in flowers, and has a backdrop of *papel picado* – colorful tissue paper that is snipped into *Día de los Muertos* themes and strung together.

Additional Alters in at the Grange took on political themes and reflected the community values and desires expressed by those who built them. For example, some of

the “Women of Color Liberation Army,” who had intervened into institutional racism and sexism on campus, created an alter commemorating indigenous women warriors. The indigenous women’s alter contained photographs of Comandante Ramona, a female Zapatista commander of the EZLN in Chiapas who died in 2006. The women’s included a photo of Frida Kahlo, along with a written statement about *Las Mujeres de Juarez* – the women of Juarez, Mexico who have become victims of femicides along this border region and free-trade zone. As I look down the hallway of the Ink People, Verbena of Copwatch and the Martin Cotton’s family have placed pictures of Martin, hand written messages from his family, and Copwatch pamphlets that implicate the Eureka Police Department in the death of Martin Cotton. As more individuals, cultural activists, Chicano students, and community activists, survivors of police violence present themselves, festivities take on more collective life. A diversity and deepened collective wisdom manifests in the contributions the celebration.

Teatro Rasquache

As I make a second pass around the *Día de los Muertos* venue at the Grange, someone has remembered the Mexican entertainer Mario “*Cantinflas*” Moreno. And how appropriate to remember Cantinflas, who began his career in the tent theatres, given that in Bayside, a collective of young ethnic Mexican and Central American HSU students will recover their *carpa* (tent theatre) tradition at the Grange.

Following a Chicano movement practice of guerilla theatre, *Teatro Rasquache* consisted of a handful of unofficial Chicano actors at HSU, who produced a theatre piece

that narrated violence and resistance at a local cut flower farm in a rural part of California (presumably depicting the Sun Valley farm in Arcata). *Rasquache* uses Chicano theatre in the tradition as left by *El Teatro Campesino*, who in the United Farmworker strikes performed on the backs of trailers for farmworkers and depicted anti-foremen and pro-union views. By some definitions, is literally, the “wretched of the Earth,” but is commonly used as a lighthearted embracing of the underclass’ improvised inventions made from limited resources.⁸⁶ Thus, *Rasquache* pokes fun at its own lack of sophistication, while at the same time, presenting a sophisticated (and funny) political protest.

The *teatro* performance is set in the fictional town of “Forcata” (an allusion to the cities of Fortuna and Arcata) at a cut flower warehouse. In the play, a female migrant worker is sexually harassed by her foreman, is mislabeled as Mexican despite her Honduran nationality, and is subjected to worksite immigration sweeps. The theatre performance explores a precarious, clandestine experience of migrant workers in Humboldt County, and references worker conditions at Sun Valley, the local cut flower operation in Arcata that would in fact become subjected to ICE raids in the future. Ultimately, the female, undocumented workers in “Forcata” prevail, beating the ICE agents (who are dressed in whiteface and are lured with expensive cheese) with rolling pins. As far as I know, none of the actors in the play were not in the situation of working at Sun Valley in Arcata, however, the *teatro* clearly identified with local migrant worker

⁸⁶ For a discussion on *rasquachismo*, see José Anguiano, “Rasquachismo in the Mix: A Case Study of the Rasquache Sensibility in Chicano and Mexican Rap Music.” *The Berkeley McNair research Journal* (2003). <http://aad.berkeley.edu/journals/2003Journal/JAnguiano.html>.

struggles, and chose two methods – *teatro* (theatre) and *rasquachismo* (“rasquachism”) to express their solidarity.

Apart from the theatre, Fernando Paz, one of the actors and organizers of the event, appears as Subcomandante Marcos of the EZLN. Wearing a Zapatista Ski mask and holding Marcos’ trademark tobacco pipe, our Marcos (Paz) tells us a story about death, perhaps incorporating the following quote from Marcos:

In the mountains of Chiapas, death was a part of daily life. It was as common as rain or sunshine. People here coexist with death, with the death of their own, especially the little ones. Paradoxically, death begins to shed its tragic cloak. Death becomes a daily fact.... You see it as someone you sit down with at the table, like an old acquaintance. You don’t lose your fear of death, but you become familiar with it. It becomes your equal. Death, which is so close, so near, so possible, is less terrifying for us than for others. So, going out and fighting and perhaps meeting death is not as terrible as it seems. For us, at least. In fact, what surprises and amazes us is life itself. The hope of a better life, going out to fight and die and finding out you’re not dead, but alive, and, unintentionally, you realize you’re walking along a middle path between death and life. You’re walking on the edge of the border between them.⁸⁷

Danza Azteca

My danza journey begins after a night of heavy drinking that led into a two-day binge. The weight of political struggle, graduate school pressure, geographic isolation from family, and living in a setting that constantly reminds one of his race have coalesced into a habit of boozing. Fernando, one of the *compas* whom I mentioned earlier, intervenes, telling me, “I’m going to take you to danza,” adding one of his favorite

⁸⁷ A Place Called Chiapas, 1998, Zeitgeist Films

sayings, “*La cultura cura* (culture cures).” So I begin *Danza Azteca*: with a hangover, remedied by a circle of *compañeros*. A physical prayer of steps and turns, the smell of burning copal sap, indigenous pride, and the honor of inclusion reorients me from pettiness and fear from the pettiness of white supremacy to the spiritual journey of discovering ancestral knowledge.

I had been familiar with *danza* in Santa Paula, my home, because my aunt Luz Maria Espinosa has led a *Danza* group for over 25 years, having converted from the revolutionary Chicano movement to the spiritual and cultural work of *Danza* over the years. I know from my *tia* (aunt) that in California in the 1960s, Chicanos like herself, conscious of and resistant to the Catholic Church’s historical role in the colonization of the Americas, sought an alternative spiritual practice that would connect more closely to their indigenous roots. Luz Maria and many of the existing *capitanes*, like Mario and Beatriz Aguilar in San Diego, or Anamaria “Malinalcihuahatl” in Central California credit Andrés Segura Granados and Florencio Yescas with planting the seeds of *La Danza Azteca* flourish north of the U.S. and Mexico border. Many of the existing groups in California share a cultural lineage to Segura and Yescas, whose names are commonly invoked during ceremonial *palabra*.⁸⁸ Of the living *danza* elders, In Mexico, the *danza* lineages go back several generations and groups are inherited by family.

⁸⁸ *Palabra*, or, “the word,” is a key component of Aztec Dance ceremonies that takes place throughout the process, but especially at the conclusion. During *palabra*, individuals, groups, and those who hold ceremonial positions in the ceremony share their words, thoughts, or prayers. They often begin by expressing thanks to God, ancestors, one’s *danza* teachers and elders, and the hosts.

The *Conchero* tradition – one of the major schools of thought within *danza* – is so called because of the shells or *conchas* that are used by dancers. The conch is blown to convene the ceremony, seed pods of the *chachayoyote* tree are worn on the ankles as percussion instruments, and the stringed mandolin made of an armadillo shell, called a *concha* is played. Within the *velación*, the night vigil that traditionally precedes the dancing; songs of praise called *alabanzas* are sung as different groups in attendance arrive and are incorporated in the ceremony. By most accounts, the use of concha came as a result of Spanish conquest, after the frightening noise of the drums were outlawed roughly 520 years ago, dancers began dancing to the tempo of the *concha* and singing praises to Jesus Christ and the saints during the *velaciones*.

As with other ceremonial objects, the concha is treated as a sacred, living spirit. When not playing the concha, *danzantes* may hold the concha's face close to their heart, or place it face down on the earth. When one is in a state of tiredness from the *velación*, and disorientation from the whirlwind turns during the *danza*, the concha sounds as if the spirits of ancestors are singing, encouraging one to continue despite the battle fatigue. And indeed, *la danza* is considered *una batalla* (a battle) and organized according to military ranking system consisting of generals, sergeants, and captains. A *sargento*, responsible for arranging the parade of dancers, will put the all those who carry a concha toward the front of the long line during a procession. The concha is handmade, with intricate patterns of woodwork, and sometimes painted or encrusted with abalone or design inlays.

Danza in Humboldt manifested in quite unique ways. Likely due to the remoteness of Humboldt from well-established Chicano communities like San Jose, Los Angeles, or San Francisco, Chicanos in Humboldt had little access to institutional cultural resources to draw from. Aztec Dance groups were scarce in Humboldt. With little access to living *capitanes* (captains), Humboldt *danzantes* invented creative ways to cultivate their indigenous identity as *danzantes*. An occasional road trip to Salinas, Fresno, Ventura County, or Los Angeles, where we as *danzantes* had access to elders in our respective communities of origin yielded some learning of danza that was carried back to Humboldt and shared with the community. The use of the university library yielded codices whose imagery could be reproduced and interpreted by visual artists in the group.

In Humboldt, 2007 Day of the Dead marked the beginning of an Aztec Dance group in Humboldt County, named *Kalpulli Xalxiutlicue*. *Xalxiutlicue* is aptly named after a female deity associated with rivers – quite appropriate given that local indigenous spiritual life centers heavily on the Klamath River. Consistent with Humboldt's *rasquache* tendencies, *Xalxiutlicue* had little access to what most *danzantes* would consider necessary components: *conchas*, *ayayotes* (except for one or two members who had acquired a pair away from Humboldt), or, the regular presence of a *jefe* or *capitán*, who holds the position of authority. In fact, reflecting the non-hierarchical tendencies of those present, *Danza Xalxiutlicue* eschewed the formal hierarchical military structure of traditional groups, resisted a formal leadership, emphasized collective and democratic decisions, and incorporated political resistance into the group ethos.

For example, one year during Día de los Muertos, the *jefa* (leader of “boss”) of our group, “Malinalcihuatl,” came to support the use of *danza*, leaving the a new group responsibility into the hands of Gustavo S., who at the time was a Humboldt State University Student and active participant in Acción Zapatista. Having planted the seed of *danza* in a new locale, as previous *jefes* had done for her, Malinalcihuatl returned the following year to find that while the group had practiced the *danza* steps quite faithfully, respect for the ultimate decision-making authority of the *jefa*, and the generally apolitical positions of *danza*, had somehow been lost on the group over the course of the previous year. The result would be the eventual separation of the group from its *jefa*, Malinalcihuatl.

In another example, during the following *Día de los Muertos*, a separate *danza* group, Ehecatl Quetzalcoatl, arrived in Humboldt to perform and dance alongside *Xalxiutlicue*. Unfortunately, some of the all-male *danzantes* used their status as *danzantes* (which, believe it or not, can be quite meaningful for young Chican@s who are just beginning their journey into indigenous self-discovery) in order to try to hook-up with the females in the group by making several uninvited passes at them. As a group, a decision was made to return the drum that was gifted to *Xalxiutlicue* by Ehecatl Quetzalcoatl, as well as to uninvited the group from any future events in Humboldt, in addition to insisting that the offending parties are held accountable by their *jefe*. A group that held the principle of “unity, conformity, conquest,” as they say in *danza*, higher than the

principles of dignity and resistance, might have accepted such treatment by more experienced *danzantes*, and in fact, many (though not all) of them have.

While *danza* has long been part of the production of an indigenous identity for Chicanos, groups generally focus more on spiritual matters than direct action. This is not to suggest that *danzantes*, especially Chicanos, are not *using* *danza* as part of their decolonization – certainly many of them are. However, in Humboldt within *Xalxiutlicue*, political militancy played a greater role in the ceremony itself and did not merely inform the identity of its members. Furthermore, for the more seasoned *danzantes* of California, students of Florencio Yescas, Andres Segura, the 1960s and 1970s is their reference point for Chicanismo. The unique convergence of Zapatismo in Humboldt, however, influenced the militancy with which an indigenous identity emerged in Humboldt, as well as the strategy of collectivity and responses to violence and authoritarianism. For *Xalxiutlicue*, *danza* was inextricable from a political standpoint of indigenous autonomy. When, during one *Día de los Muertos* celebration, *danzantes* covered their faces in *paliacates* (bandanas worn over the faces of Zapatistas), they identified themselves not only with a profound indigenous Mexican identity, but one as a polycultural view suggests, engages directly in the political and social history of its grafted cultures. A similar point can be argued about a *Día de los Muertos* celebration that incorporates women’s indigenous struggles, migrant worker struggles, and Zapatismo into its celebration.⁸⁹

⁸⁹ The *paliacate* is a red patterned handkerchief that the Zapatistas use to cover their faces.

Claiming the Word

Common to spaces of encounter, both in AZ mitotes and Mexican or indigenous community spaces, was the use of the word, or, *palabra*. For the Zapatista communities in Chiapas, the use of the word is embodied in their claim that “our word is our weapon.” In AZ, this has manifested through direct actions that confront the political bosses, boards of supervisors, city councils or police chiefs in order to intervene into the official narratives. Additionally, within the activist community itself, one’s word is claimed by sharing their struggle, points of view, and analysis through facilitated community dialog.

Within danza, a similar adherence to the word appears as the *palabra* that is shared at the conclusion of each ceremony and the importance that is placed on the individual order of palabras – *primera* (first), *segunda* (second), *tercera* (third), etc., – which are held by group members on an ongoing basis or given as temporary positions of responsibility and returned at the conclusion of each ceremony. The order of *palabra* also indicates the rank and command structure of the *danza*. During the *palabra*, *danzantes* are given, in order of rank, the opportunity to share their word, which generally comes as a prayer. This *palabra* serves to transmit an oral tradition, as those who know how to listen can glean wisdom and history.

Community Assembly

A second commonality found in AZ-affiliated spaces and Danza is the tendency for community assembly. For the Zapatistas, assembly is a key political space wherein decisions are made collectively through participatory practices for direct democracy.

While not operating at the level of the Zapatistas, AZ's mitotes reflect a strategy that centered on convening community and using community as a key site of political mobilization. The mitote acted as a platform through which radical political dialogs could take place and new relationships and solidarity could be formed. The same could be argued for an Aztec dance ceremony, wherein community is convened not so much for political dialog, but for spiritual and cultural renewal that accounts for our ancestral connections.

In the figures below, these concepts of *palabra*, assembly are represented through an indigenous Mexican perspective. Figure 2 depicts the Aztec written word meaning conch shell. As we know, the conch, or *atekokoli* is blown to each of the four directions before and after each ceremony in order to invite and send off ancestors from the spirit world, as well as to signal the convening of various groups into a single *danza* community during ceremonies. In another layer of meaning, the symbol depicted below in the first figure also represents the concept of *palabra*, or the word. As we know, emphasis on the word is found in Aztec dance, where responsibilities are handed out in the form of *palabra*, and *palabra* is shared after each ceremony as dried *copal* sap burns in a *sahumador* (incense burner). The word is also found within the cultural politics of Zapatismo, where, as they say, "Our word is our weapon."

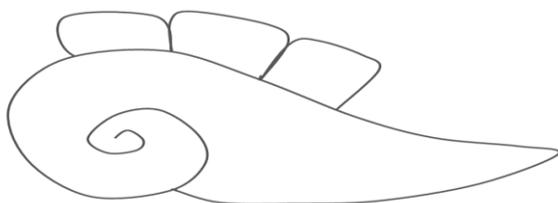


Figure 2. Aztec *atekokoli* depicts a conch shell, used to convene community, organize *danzantes*, and to invites ancestors, (i.e. the dead) to celebrate. Symbolizes the concept of the word. May also represent other shelled creature, such as a snail.



Figure 3. *Zapatista Caracol* seen in the Zapatista community of Oventic. The Zapatistas have designated Oventic as a “*Caracol*,” a site of “Good Government Council,” through which autonomous communities convene in their radically democratic process and through which outsiders are hosted. The recurring Zapatista character of a snail, carrying the *caracol* on its back, is saying, “Slowly, but I move forward.”

The Politics of Hosting

In each case, both in *Danza* and AZ, out of town guests are invited to incorporate themselves into the community and to participate in the community space, encompassing a “politics of hosting.” During *Día de los Muertos*, we host includes those relatives and honored guests who have passed on to the other side of life. In *Danza*, this hosting also includes the “hosting of other gods” wherein an ostensibly indigenous tradition dedicates ceremonies and a good part of its songs to the Catholic gods like the Santo Niño de Atocha, or the Virgen of Guadalupe. In practical terms, a politics of hosting, wherein guests are offered food and lodging, ensures the establishment and maintenance of local and international networks of solidarity communities.

I offer a few key examples of how hosting may take place. In 2008 amidst the economic crises of 2008 hits, I find myself with no income for housing which I will need to complete my graduate work in Humboldt County – a precarious existence indeed.

Despite being adversely affected by the crisis themselves and struggling to weather economic hardships, Suzanne Guerra and Jack Surmani opened their home to me. Of course it is profoundly humbling to be housed; I believe a politics of hosting, a political solidarity, and a personal resistance on their part against the prevailing ideology of austerity, and against capitalism's manufactured scarcity that partially motivated Jack and Suzanne opening their home, providing material support for my political and research activism.

In another example, *mitotes*, provided a venue through which hosting was part of the facilitation strategy. When an invitee such as Ashanti Alston comes to speak, AZ convenes a *mitote* in order to host not only the honored guest, but also the community at large through facilitated encounters and community celebration. Commenting on his experience with *mitote*, Alston stated:

So here, on smaller scale, is such a great simple way to combine social and political. People coming together to eat, from different organizations and communities, representing different issues, to talk, to party.... And the *mitote*, being something different, is something that I'm like, "oh, we got to try that over here, we got to do that more consciously, I think, over here."⁹⁰

Should Alston so desire, he may wish to use the *mitote* as a cultural tool in order to advance the struggles of the Black community. Yet rather than imposing *mitote* as a specific model or format, polycultural communities, when exchanging stories, building solidarity, and sharing tools, have the ability to adapt re-imagine their shared tools in a way that most appropriately reflect that communities culture, place, and political struggle.

⁹⁰ Interview with Ashanti Alston found in, "The Matrix in Dialogue With... Ashanti Alston," *The Matrix*, Spring 2006.

CONCLUSION

Community as Overlapping Spaces of Knowledge, Culture, and Politics

The spaces of encounter observed here possess overlapping components of knowledge, culture and politics. For example, *Día de los Muertos*, what might be considered a cultural space, is imbued with the transmission of knowledge about collective situation that is politicized through the production of teatro. It creates a space through which identity is politicized as decolonial gesture against assimilation and toward the cultivation of indigenous epistemologies produced within danza. It re-appropriates an inherited tradition involving communion with the dead and contextualizes it within the political present of university Chicanos and migrant workers creating spaces for themselves with appropriate deference, solidarity, and respect toward the original tribes of Northern California.

In what might be considered a primarily knowledge space, such as a coyuntura, there is always overlap of culture and politics that inform and are informed by the participatory popular education space. For one, the knowledge production process itself is taken from a tradition of popular education movements in Mexico, Latin America and the U.S., that are designed to facilitate community power, democratized learning, and collective action. In this sense, the critical pedagogies employed through coyunturas allowed for the emergence of a political culture wherein counter-knowledges could be produced in resistance to the official local narratives about homelessness, immigration,

gang intervention. These spaces in other words allowed for critical theory to be lived through struggle, and, conversely, for local struggles to be theorized, and for dominant narratives to be read critically. Thus, popular education in Humboldt County, with its overlapping political culture, functioned as temporary spaces of critical reflection and oppositional consciousness.

Finally, a political space can be interpreted as both the community celebration that seeks to convene disparate political struggles through a politics of Zapatismo, as well as the social protest, such as an immigrant rights march, a day of action against police brutality, or a pamphlet series against the green-washing at the Arcata Farmer's Market. As a political space, an overlapping knowledge production arises through the direct actions that are designed as intelligence operations – missions that test the response and alliances of political adversaries - as much as they are about whatever demand. Furthermore, they constitute a learning space through which collectives learn to do action and analysis, and, moreover, learn through radically democratic processes of consensus, dialog, listening, assembly, and encounter. This is what Eyerman refers to as the cognitive praxis – or the ways that social movement practices act as sites of knowledge production.⁹¹ That these spaces were animated by Zapatismo shows how constituents sought culturally appropriate ways of struggle to inspire them, even as they adapted such practices to their local situation and context.

⁹¹ Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison, "Social Movements as Cognitive Praxis," in *Social Movements: A Cognitive Approach* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991).

A challenge moving forward is for these spaces to move geographically with the individuals “in diaspora” as well as to operate on a more consistent basis, such that spaces of encounter serve as reliable and consistent spaces that operate as counter-institutions. PARC has established itself as one such institution. With no paid staff, no foundation funding or non-profit status, enduring tenacity, and commitment to the “defense of mother earth and her peoples,” PARC has established itself as a fixture of the community for those who are despised and dispossessed by the elitist mentality. This love for the disposed human and natural life refuses to be depoliticized or sanitized, and is driven toward the practical application of protest, refusal, and resistance.

“Las Zapatistas no Están Solas!”

“The Zapatistas are not alone,” is one of the slogans of the movement that speaks to the promise of Zapatismo. This phrase is open to multiple points of interpretation of solidarity activism. On one level, it refers to the international solidarity community’s commitment to struggle beside the indigenous communities in Chiapas, to take action against the repression carried out by the governments of Mexico (with material support of the United States) against the Zapatistas. On a more profound level, it speaks to a way of “being with” that is implied by the practice of assembly and encounter. Community convergence spaces, which in Humboldt, I have argued, included *mitotes*, *coyunturas*, *Día de los Muertos*, temporarily disrupt the alienation and unnamable malaise brought by precarious experiences within postmodern capitalism. Furthermore, for individuals

thinking, learning, and doing critical theory and politics, it is no accident, effortless, nor insignificant to create spaces to celebrate political dissent when so much of that activism is marginalized and dismissed as negative or unreasonably angry.

Full Circle

Each year in June the City of Santa Paula, thousands of people visit through the month to pay homage and leave petitions for the Santo Niño de Atocha, a Mexican catholic deity to whom many devote their faith second only to the Virgin of Guadalupe. The Niño is brought from its home cathedral in the state of Zacatecas, Mexico, and housed at Our Lady of Guadalupe Church. An Aztec dance ceremony is given in his honor. Songs of praise are sung throughout the night, followed by an army of feathered dancers the next day. In June of 2011, Humboldt County Danzantes made the 12 hour drive to the city of Santa Paula, to attend the ceremony. I've become part of my aunt, Luz Maria's group, *Danza Azteca Tonantzin*, where in Santa Paula, *Tonantzin* hosts the *Ceremonia del Santo Niño de Atocha* (Santo Niño de Atocha Ceremony) each year. The Niño, a patron of the sick, and of prisoners, provides an object toward which the community can focus its faith. This faith mobilizes thousands in the streets for a procession.

By the time I am completing this thesis, I am in Santa Paula, CA. When my parents return from Sunday Mass on November 2, they tell me that the deacon who delivered the sermon that morning has advised the congregation that *Día de los Muertos*

is against the values of the church and that it should not be celebrated. It's par for the course for this conservative deacon, who would rather not see our culture continue. As part of the church, we have danced during special masses to honor the virgin of Guadalupe, or the Santo Niño de Atocha. On one occasion, when the deacon and our *danzantes* happened to occupy the same mass, the deacon made it a point to warn the congregation that Aztecs practiced cannibalism, therefore, the indigenous culture should be left untouched and a more civilized Catholic Faith be practiced instead.

Nevertheless, we pray through the night with *Alabanzas* and dance through the day. Until we have exhausted our faculties, we pray, venerating these Catholic gods better than the Catholics themselves, and thus, the Catholics embrace us. While the church holds much sway in this community, it apparently cannot sway the people from their culture. A Día de los Muertos event is held at the Santa Paula cemetery, a catholic priest presides over the services, hundreds attend. A few hundred attendees are divided between the priest's blessing at the community altar, and laughing in lawn chairs at the site of their loved ones' resting place. We as *danzantes* lead a procession of dance through the cemetery.

As Día de los Muertos becomes a mainstream cultural phenomenon in the U.S., we as Chicanos must answer to the question of appropriation. A tradition like does not belong to formally appointed individuals, and becomes more vibrant as participation is embraced by diverse community memories and traditions that are incorporated into the Day of the Dead. At the same time that this custom becomes available to broader

communities, it opens itself to misappropriation, cultural profiteering, and hipster pastiche. Sometimes within our own community, they think we're playing Indian. I get fed up with drive-by photographers peering at me like a zoo animal, interrupting our *palabra*, or asking my *compañera* to pose as a hood ornament for their low-riders. We still have a way to go, and these experiences cause us to pause and reflect each time we don a *traje*. These are the spiritual battles of today, against ignorance, mockery, and the commodification of culture in hopes of reaching a Mexican-American youth, an elder, or an ancestor.

With the movement of Acción Zapatista comrades to and from Humboldt, Zapatismo continues to be explored by radical educators and solidarity activists. In San Jose and parts of the Bay Area California, Zapatismo has emerged through the project of Universidad de la Tierra California – also known as Unitierra Califas. As an informal and unincorporated organization, Universidad takes its name from the Universidad de la Tierra in Oaxaca and Puebla Mexico, which author Gustavo Esteva is a key figure. Prior to Unitierra Califas' emergence in the Bay, a contingent of AZ Humboldt visited Unitierra in Oaxaca during the summer of 2006. While back in Humboldt, AZ mitotes played host to Gustavo Esteva. Unitierra Califas' broadsheet summarizing its strategy includes the *mitote*, *coyuntura*, and *tertulia*, and claims these spaces as critical sites of decolonized learning that serve community struggles. Manuel Callahan has been a key figure to both AZ Humboldt (and its earlier iteration in Austin, TX) and Uni-Tierra Califas. And while collective processes, goals, and values shift depending on the

community, the movement of key figures like Callahan over space and time has clearly influenced the emergence of local Zapatismo in those communities. Additionally, with the internal migration of local Zapatismo, new relational affinities are established, and new possibilities for spaces of encounter begin to flourish and are connected and strengthened through regional and international networks of solidarity.

I hope I have demonstrated the interlocking social forces of power, privilege, oppression, resistance, and renewal within an ethnic Mexican activist community in Humboldt County. The framework of militarized policing plays out in the daily experiences of the working classes existing under precarious conditions – undocumented migrants, students, and the jobless and houseless peoples. This low intensity conflict, what People Project calls, a “war on the poor,” can and should be identified, resisted, and undermined through a process of community formation as well as peoples action. In order for these constituencies to disrupt the historical wedging of working classes along race, gender, and nation, it remains critical to facilitate encounters wherein we can share and observe clearly our collective situations, such that a principled solidarity and community emerges.

Community spaces of encounter offer a strategy for convergence of overlapping struggles. A Sun Valley worker, an environmental activist, a Chicano *teatro*, and a women of color collective all experience, understand, and convey Sun Valley from their unique perspectives. Zapatismo as a strategy of community formation in Humboldt relied on Zapatismo to create an open space wherein these collective subjectivities could be

articulated, reflected on, and re-told using cultural, political, and educational tools, such as danza, direct action, or mitotes.

The enclosure of neoliberal capital into social and cultural life has if far from being permanently disrupted, as evidenced by the carefully engagement within existing social and material infrastructure, i.e., the university, local non-profits and associations. Thus conviviality was temporary, although possible to reproduce, in the sacred tie of Día de los Muertos, and in the politics of hope, generosity carried out in everyday life by serving breakfast on a corner of Eureka, or sharing a pitcher of Great White with *compas* in Arcata.

The cultural celebrations as practiced in Humboldt, i.e., *Días de Muertos*, *Mitotes*, *Danza Azteca*, went beyond multiculturalism, insofar as they were tools used in the production, rather than consumption, of community. Further, they were critical spaces through which “who we are,” “where we are” “where we come from” and “what is our struggle” could be considered, and collectively articulated. Each space employed a unique combination of knowledge, culture, and politics. In a tertulia, a politics of generosity, listening, and dialogue is employed, while a coyuntura relies on popular education and democratic, strategic knowledges.

Indigenous cultural practices, like *Día de los Muertos*, *danza*, or even *mitote*, act not only as a space of politicized culture, but a teaching and learning technique wherein culture is learned and practiced in a way that reflects the political and social realities of our present, as well as the desires of our future. I suggest to our community that this

culture needs to be protected, but not hidden; shared, but not sold. I suggest to our elders that we be entrusted with the responsibility to practice our culture in the context of our collective desires, our indigenous roots, and our radical imaginations.

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