## **Dissertation Synopsis**

Fusing Identities and Mobilizing Resistance in Chiapas and Mexico, 1994-2009

In this dissertation, I argue that Zapatista political identity functioned as an alternative mobilizing resource for the Chiapas rebellion in Mexico in the 15 years between 1994 and 2009. I argue that the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) generated core themes of socioeconomic rights and socio-political justice from left-aligned, progressive Catholic and indigenous narratives associated with the Zapatista's diverse political identity. Coinciding with the commencement of NAFTA, the Zapatistas captured a burgeoning agitation against globalization in Western democracies and helped frame new tensions between neoliberalism and alter-globalization. The Zapatistas articulated new kinds of demands outside of a Cold War paradigm at a pivotal time during the political realignments of the post-Soviet era, when neoliberal ideology, free trade treaties, and World Bank/IMF-driven structural adjustment programs were accelerating globally.

My research traces the development of the different narratives in Zapatista political identity – that aspect of group identity that has become politicized, such as ethnicity, party affiliation, nation-state membership, economic status and/or language (Smith 2004: 302) - from the broad political left to indigenous rights. For instance, the proto-left narrative (which includes varieties of Maoist and post-Marxist philosophies, anti-globalization/anti-neoliberalism, socioeconomic justice, post-modern revolutionary ideation, anarchism, radical democracy, rebellion and resistance) helped foster the initial movement, creating its agitprop, a strong narrative base in injustice and resistance, and a broad appeal globally through the reimagining of revolutionary symbols. This narrative first developed with early pre-EZLN guerillas in the jungle in the 1970s and connects the rebellion to the global sphere with non-indigenous activists. Had the movement been only about the left, it would have not have appealed to conservative campesinos, nor to non-violent Christian groups.

The progressive Catholic narrative (which includes liberation theology, non-violent resistance, social justice, norms of inculturation, and syncretic Catholicism) gave the movement another identity base – one that began in the early 1960s when Bishop Ruiz first began deploying Maoist catechists in the Lacandón to teach forms of action-reflection theology. It is rooted in the Catholic church's attempt in the twentieth century to

reclaim cultural, religious and political territory as a means of admonishing its colonial history of indigenous abuse, and includes machinations around the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) and the Medellín Latin American Bishops Council (CELAM, 1968). This story provides the EZLN with a broad support base that extends through many different peasant and/or indigenous organizations in Chiapas. Yet, had the movement been only about progressive Catholicism, this would have alienated the radical left which in general shuns religion.

The indigenous narrative (which includes indigenous resistance, Indian rights, claims for cultural protection, autonomy and self-determination, Mayan history and mythology) provided the movement with the third aspect of its core identity. This narrative gave the movement its strongest claim in the public sphere and with the law, by connecting it to indigenous rights discourse, international law and other indigenous movements around the world. During the course of the rebellion, the Mexican state agreed to the International Labor Organization's Convention 169 and later the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People. The indigenous component of the Zapatista story gives the movement a strong resonance and longevity, particularly as class-based narratives begin to have less salience over time. By comparison with purely left-aligned rhetoric, cultural preservation and autonomy provided a new avenue for achieving political results. Yet, if it had been *only* about indigenous people and rights, the movement would have had trouble mobilizing anti-globalization activists who may not have embraced proto-Indian politics in the same manner.

By developing a broad-based discourse in their declarations, communiqués and stories which united local concerns in Chiapas with global issues of neoliberal hegemony and indigenous rights, the rebellion resonated with many different kinds of actors and was able to stimulate innovative support networks locally and globally. The movement also developed in new ways via the substance of and interactions of these core narratives. This dissertation examines the rebellion in the context of the constitutive components of the Zapatista's diverse political identity. By observing the dynamics of identity and discourse in the Chiapas rebellion, this research demonstrates the significance of identity in social movement formation and mobilization, and has implications for the study of collective action and political identity formation more generally.