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**Rethinking Latin American
Social Movements**

Radical Action from Below

Edited by Richard Stahler-Sholk,
Harry E. Vanden, and Marc Becker

Chapter Four

Mexico

Political Cultures, Youth Activism, and the Legacy of the Oaxacan Social Movement of 2006

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For six months in 2006, a broad-based social movement exercised grassroots control over the capital city of the southern Mexican state of Oaxaca.¹ Originally formed in response to government repression of a strike by the local wing of the National Education Worker's Union, the movement came to include over 300 existing social movements and organizations, as well as individuals without such affiliations or previous organizing experience. The movement, which has been called the first insurrection of the twenty-first century, brought together an incredibly diverse set of actors with different experiences, norms, political agendas, and visions of social change.² This included those activists who had been politically formed through their militancy in vertical organizations such as leftist opposition groups and labor unions, as well as libertarian,³ anarchist, and autonomist youth who vehemently rejected any form of hierarchical organizing. In this chapter, I will offer an ethnographic account of how these vertical and horizontal organizing forms and norms operated simultaneously in the context of the social movement of 2006.

The movement lost control of the city in late 2006 following a sustained and violent campaign of paramilitary and police repression. Attempts to hold the movement together post-2006 proved difficult, as internal fractures were deepened by the government's dual strategy of repression and co-optation. These pressures, coupled with the loss of territory, caused currents within the movement to move in different, sometimes complementary and at other times contradictory directions. Importantly, however, the history of the Oax-

acan social movement does not end in 2006. I argue that the horizontalism experimented with during the grassroots takeover continues to be honed through subsequent youth political and cultural projects that are part of the movement's legacy. Youth participated in various capacities during the social movement, including erecting and managing a citywide network of barricades, creating protest art, participating in movement-run radio stations, video documenting and disseminating, and forming the frontlines in self-defense and defense of territory against attacks by police and paramilitary forces. Youth translated these experiences into the formation of political and cultural collectives rooted in the horizontal organizing logics and ideals that were part of the experiential knowledge they gained during the grassroots takeover.

Horizontalidad, translated as horizontalism or horizontality, is both the goal and tool for social movements that attempt to construct the horizontal (flattening out of) social relations they seek in the present. Horizontalism “involves—or at least intentionally strives towards—non-hierarchical and anti-authoritarian creation rather than reaction. It is a break with vertical ways of organizing and relating” (Sitrin 2006, 3). Importantly, horizontalism is a dynamic process and not a static outcome to be achieved, celebrated, and then abandoned. In this chapter, I argue that the social movement of 2006 served as a self-organizing incubator for a culture and practice of horizontalism that activists continue to experiment with years later. Youth activists who came of political age through their varied participation in this social movement have been important in carrying on the horizontal politics of the movement beyond 2006. In this chapter, I will focus on the vital role that youth played in expanding the horizontal dimensions of the movement during the six months of grassroots control in 2006. The production of social movement spaces that were organized around antiauthoritarian and participatory decision making was a crucial aspect of the expansion of horizontalism within the movement.

AUTHORITARIANISM AND GRASSROOTS ORGANIZING IN OAXACA

Oaxaca is a mostly rural state in southern Mexico, rich in natural resources and ethnic diversity. It is home to sixteen Indigenous groups, each with its own language and culture, making it both the most diverse state in Mexico and home to the most Indigenous language speakers in the country. Similarly, the state has the highest percentage of communally owned land in the country, and the Indigenous communal assembly is officially recognized as the decision-making structure in 418 of the 571 municipalities in the state,

meaning that governance through political parties and electoral politics takes place in a minority of municipalities (Esteva 2010, 982).

Although the state remains mostly rural, the neoliberal abandonment of the countryside (i.e., massive cuts in subsidies and price supports for small-to medium-scale farmers) over the past two decades or so has led to massive migration to urban centers and large-scale agriculture centers throughout Mexico and the United States.⁴ Over that same time, Oaxaca has seen a proliferation of grassroots, Indigenous, women's, peasant, urban, youth, student, and labor organizing movements. Notable among these have been struggles to democratize labor unions (Cook 1996; Zafra, Hernández-Díaz, and Zepeda 2002), the right to Indigenous self-determination and control over local development (Campbell 1994; Howe 2011; Rubin 1997), access to education (Rénique 2007; Zafra, Hernández-Díaz, and Zepeda 2002) as well as the development of community and alternative media (Stephen 2013; Zires 2009). These organizing efforts by civil society have been met by increasingly authoritarian state and national regimes that enforce unpopular policies and repress dissenting voices. Especially important when considering the social movement of 2006 is the fact that political violence and political arrests in Oaxaca were widespread under then governor Ulises Ruiz, and his predecessor, José Múrat (Martínez Vásquez 2007).⁵

Most political struggles in Oaxaca, at one point or another, manifest themselves in urban public space. Even though local politics have long been brokered through local caciques (political bosses), the official institutions of the state have been housed in the historic center of Oaxaca City since colonial times. For this reason, political conflicts throughout the state often result in marches, roadblocks, and/or encampments in the center of Oaxaca City, with the *zócalo* (main square) being the most regular target. Part of this is because the Palacio de Gobierno (state capitol building) has been housed in the *zócalo* for centuries. This changed, however, when Governor Ulises Ruiz took office in 2004. One of his first acts was to relocate the executive branch from the *zócalo* of the capital city to Tlalistac de Cabrera, a town outside of the city where the new Ciudad Administrativa (Administrative City) currently sits behind large metal fences and armed guards. His reasoning for doing so was clear, yet ultimately unsuccessful—to avoid encampments in the *zócalo* (Díaz Montes 2009). The investment in public space, by both protesters and government, highlights the centrality of public space as a significant terrain for politics and the exercise, negotiation, and contestation of power.

One of the most powerful organizing forces in Oaxaca has been Sección 22 (Local 22)—the local dissident wing of the National Education Workers' Union (SNTE). The SNTE is the largest and arguably most powerful labor union in Latin America with 1.2 million members, although the administration of President Enrique Peña Nieto threatens to weaken the union with neoliberal educational reforms and the February 2013 imprisonment of long-

time leader Elba Esther Gordillo (Hérendez Navarro 2013).⁶ Originally formed in 1943 under the corporatist system of the postrevolutionary Mexican state, the teachers' union was granted a monopoly on representing all of the nation's educational workers in primary and secondary schools, and like other "favored" unions their membership was converted into vast electoral reserves to be tapped during election cycles (Monroy 1997). Gordillo continued this legacy of corporatism during her tenure as the head of the SNTE, where she was largely seen as a corrupt leader who served the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) and their interests above that of rank-and-file teachers or students. Teachers in Oaxaca, however, have been part of a national struggle to democratize the union, a struggle that has lasted over forty years and has cost over one hundred teachers their lives in Oaxaca alone (Bacon 2006; Cook 1996). Political scientist Jonathan Fox refers to this strategy of fostering, co-opting, and repressing unions in Mexico as part of the Mexican government's system of "authoritarian clientelism" (1994). In 1979, the struggle to democratize the union led to the formation of the democratic caucus within the SNTE, the National Education Workers Coordinating Committee (CNTE).

Local 22 of the CNTE, Oaxaca's dissident wing of the teachers' union, has mobilized its membership of over 70,000 teachers on an annual basis for the past three decades in order to pressure the state to renegotiate their contracts. On May 1, 2006, Local 22 continued this tradition and mobilized in Oaxaca City, presenting the government with a list of demands for a new round of contract negotiations. The list contained seventeen demands including the restructuring of wages, classrooms/schoolhouses for rural communities where teachers were forced to teach outdoors, scholarships, and uniforms and shoes for low-income students (Martínez Vásquez 2007, 60). That year, however, Governor Ulises Ruiz refused to enter into meaningful negotiations with the union. He entered office with a hard-line stance against protests, declaring an end to sit-ins and marches. Instead of negotiating, Ruiz launched a media campaign aimed at turning public opinion against the teachers. Union officials also accused the secretary general of the state of fomenting internal divisions within the union. Most notably, union leader Enrique Rueda Pacheco was widely believed to have accepted bribes from the government.

On May 22, 2006, Local 22 set up an encampment in the *zócalo*, and on May 31 the members mobilized and blocked access to gas stations and main roads in the historic downtown area of the capital. At this point public opinion was divided, as many people seemed to be as tired of the frequent protests by the teachers as they were skeptical of the governor, who entered office amid widespread allegations of fraud. On a national level, attention was largely focused on the highly contested presidential elections to be held on July 2. Felipe Calderón was declared president-elect, although he entered

the presidency on very weak political footing amid widespread popular protest and allegations of electoral fraud. Parallel to the elections, the Zapatistas spearheaded La Otra Campaña, a project meant to strengthen connections between communities, groups, and social movements in Mexico as an alternative to the process of political party campaigns. Also in May of that year San Salvador Atenco, a town near Mexico City, was besieged by state and federal police after residents set up roadblocks in support of flower vendors who were attacked by police. The government responded to this act of solidarity by sending in police, who, according to a 2008 human rights report, killed two youths, arrested over 200 people and sexually assaulted and tortured forty-seven female detainees (Comisión Civil Internacional de Observación por los Derechos Humanos 2008, 15). The swiftness and brutality with which the state responded can be partially explained by the fact that Atenco was already a beacon of hope for social movements and communities in resistance. In 2002 residents of Atenco formed the People's Front in Defense of the Land (Frente del Pueblo en Defensa de la Tierra) and successfully resisted the federal government's attempt to displace them in order to construct a new airport on their land (Arellano Chávez 2010; Gibler 2009). The siege of Atenco in 2006, the contested presidential elections, and the momentum surrounding La Otra Campaña are all significant background for understanding the importance of the social movement that emerged that summer in Oaxaca and the brutal response by local, state, and federal government.

THE OAXACAN SOCIAL MOVEMENT OF 2006

It is in this context of ongoing struggle that the 2006 social movement emerged, giving surprising coherence to the grievances of a highly diverse segment of Oaxacan society. The final action that triggered the formation of this social movement occurred during the very early morning hours of June 14, 2006, when police forces numbering anywhere from 870 to 3,000 officers (Osomo 2007; Martínez Vásquez 2007) violently removed sleeping teachers and their families from the encampment in the *zócalo*. Police used batons, dogs, guns, and tear gas launched from privately owned helicopters on the sleeping teachers. The indiscriminate bombing of the area with tear gas left hundreds of people seeking refuge and medical assistance—including many nonteachers who lived, worked, or had other business in the busy downtown area that morning. The police repression resulted in 113 people registering at local hospitals with injuries ranging from gunshot wounds to miscarriages and perforated lungs (Martínez Vásquez 2007, 66).

In addition to the encampment, the union had a radio station called Radio Plantón, which served as a parallel public space to that of the encampment.

According to Margarita Zires, a professor of communications and politics, once the union set up its encampment in the *zócalo* on May 22 “this radio began to convert itself into an important voice of the Movement, a alternative media public space . . . it formed part of the milieu of the encampment in the *zócalo*” (2009, 164). In fact, the radio warned of the possibility of a police action directed at clearing the encampment in the days leading up to June 14. When the time came and the police attacked the encampment, they also attacked the teachers’ union headquarters and the radio tower, taking the station off the air.

The governor’s decision to repress the teachers immediately backfired, however. Many people who were not otherwise sympathetic to the teachers union joined them and their supporters in the streets, and by midday they retook the *zócalo* (Sotelo Marbén 2008). The coalition that formed that day included a wide range of people and organizations with varied agendas and motivations for participating. For example, a retired nurse I spoke with named Doña Inés⁷ lent her medical services to those in need on June 14 at an impromptu medical clinic set up at a nearby church. She made a point of emphasizing that she had always been “apolitical” and not necessarily in agreement with Local 22’s tactics, although she respected the rank-and-file teachers and had family members who were active in the union. Her support that day and in the following months was borne out of the outrage she shared with many *Oaxaqueños* when they learned of the indiscriminate and unprovoked use of force ordered by the governor. On the other end of the spectrum, many of those who came to the defense of the teachers following their eviction from the *zócalo* were youth. Some helped repel the police and retake the *zócalo* because they had family members who were teachers; others lived nearby and were affected by the indiscriminate tear-gassing that morning; yet others participated in large part because of an antagonistic relationship with police that predated the movement.

The participation of graffiti artists and punks, for example, has particular antecedents as many of them were already accustomed to being profiled, arrested, and mistreated by police. The criminalization of their lifestyles and of their very bodies has marked many of them deeply, as has their social marginalization. Several *graffiteros* and punks mentioned their relationships with police prior to 2006 as part of the reason they were ready and willing to be at the frontlines of battles with police on June 14 and in the months and years that followed. A young man who has been a part of the “punk movement” since he was a teenager in the early 2000s explained his participation on June 14 to me in an interview several years later—he asked to be cited as *Mentes Liberadas* (Liberated Minds):

Before that [repression of June 14] we were already coming down to the *zócalo*, to the teachers’ encampment. There, we would run into people from

other collectives and from our own collective, CESOL [Social Libertarian Center]. We were already on the lookout because there were always the rumors that they were going to be evicted from their encampment and all of that. When the repression started on June 14 . . . a friend called me, it must have been 5:30 or 6:00 in the morning and he asked me if I was ready because the repression had begun. By that time we were already living here [a popular neighborhood in the Northwest outskirts of the city], so I got on my bicycle and rode towards downtown. Once I arrived, I ditched the bike and joined the teachers. When I arrived, I saw several friends and thought “Holy shit this is really it!” It was cool, you know. It lasted several hours; I think it was around 11:00 a.m. that we were able to recover the *zócalo*. In my opinion what motivated the *banda*⁸ to go and support the teachers [was that] we were sick and tired of so much repression. That was the moment for all of us to show them that we were fed up with so much injustice by all pouncing at the same time against the police. They were the ones who were always fucking with us. This way we would show the government that it wasn’t cool to keep doing what they were doing anymore.

Overwhelmed by the sheer numbers of people who mobilized against them, the police returned to their barracks and refused to take further action against protesters. Teachers reestablished their encampment in the city’s *zócalo* but were now joined by other formal organizations and youth collectives who also set up encampments. Simultaneously, university students at the Benito Juárez Autonomous University of Oaxaca (UABJO) organized the takeover of their university’s radio station, Radio Universidad. This radio station proved to be as crucial for the emerging movement as Radio Plantón had been for the teachers, helping organize actions and mobilizations. Two days after the police attacks, hundreds of thousands of Oaxacans participated in a massive march demanding the governor’s removal.

On June 17, the teachers union convened a public assembly, inviting over 300 organizations and movements who were active in Oaxaca to discuss how best to capitalize on the momentum generated over the past days. The teachers proposed extending the structure of their union’s assembly-style decision-making body, the State Assembly of Local 22 Delegates, to the larger Oaxacan civil society (Martínez Vásquez 2007). They called the new organizing structure the Asamblea Popular de los Pueblos de Oaxaca (Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca, or APPO).⁹ The assembly is far from a union invention; it has a long and dynamic history in Oaxaca as the main decision-making structure in a majority of the state’s municipalities where Indigenous communities are governed by *usos y costumbres* (Indigenous customary law and tradition). While the APPO assembly was far more inclusive than the existing political institutions of the state, it was largely dominated by organizations that brought preexisting, often vertical, political practices and agendas to the movement. It should also be mentioned that youth, women, and unmarried men are often barred from participating in community assemblies,

and while such exclusions were not explicit, many of the social forces behind them were replicated in the APPO assembly. For example, with one notable exception youth were largely excluded from participating, and the assembly was dominated by an aggressive masculine style of debate that alienated many people who had not been formed in such political cultures.

After the first meeting, the assembly agreed on the resignation of Ruiz as their principal demand, though it would be a mistake to limit the grievances of the APPO to this single goal (Osorno 2007). The APPO also pushed for a new state constitution that represented the pluralism of the state and demanded an end to the repression of political dissent. The APPO was the main organizing structure and “civic space” of the movement, made up of large numbers of civic organizations, nonprofits, and political associations and organizations, all with diverse agendas (Esteva 2010). It is important, however, to acknowledge that many individuals and collectives who participated in the movement did not necessarily identify as *appistas* (APPO members). For this reason it is important not to conflate the broader social movement of 2006 with the APPO. This is an especially pertinent distinction when considering participation of youth who identified as libertarian or anarchist, and others who participated in the more horizontal spaces of the movement but rejected the more formal spaces that tended to privilege established organizations, activists, and political styles.

Ultimately, through both horizontal and vertical organizing, the movement was able to control the capital city of Oaxaca from June to November of 2006. During those six months of popular control, the movement held cultural events, massive mobilizations, and executed state functions such as policing, trash collection, and governance, and also the transmitted original grassroots radio and television programming throughout the state, and internationally via the Internet. These channels became widely accessible after a group of several hundred women marched to the main public radio and television station and requested airtime. When they were denied airtime, they decided to take over the public station. A teacher named Maribel¹⁰ explained the situation leading up to the takeover:

Unfortunately, the media always says that nothing is happening in Oaxaca—this is because they are all bribed by the government. This is why we women took *Canal 9*. We had to tell our side of the story. We had to show that yes, there is something happening in Oaxaca and it is not what the bad government or its media say. We Oaxacan women had to take the TV and radio to show that in our state *el pueblo* stood up and said, “Enough, we have had enough of this corruption, of this violence, of these bad politicians.”

With support from fellow activists in the movement, women maintained control of the station for several weeks. Eventually, however, paramilitary forces succeeded in destroying the transmission towers. The movement re-

sponded by taking over the remaining thirteen radio stations in Oaxaca. Movement-run radio and television stations were essential for internal and external communication, but they were also central mediums for grassroots participation in the movement and for public visibility for women, youth, Indigenous language speakers, and other marginalized groups who otherwise lacked access to such forums. In addition to the radio and television stations, youth denounced government repression and advertised popular resistance in Oaxaca through political street art, which covered the city and was highly visible for local, national, and global audiences.¹¹ Through these actions, the popular movement reclaimed, reconfigured, and redefined public spaces and severely challenged the government’s ability to govern.

YOUTH AND SPACES OF HORIZONTALITY

Movements like the Oaxacan social movement of 2006 offer valuable lessons for those interested in the study and practice of social movements, especially in relation to the potential of horizontalism in social movement organizing, as well as the challenges involved in such emergent organizing forms. Elsewhere (Magaña 2010), I analyze the simultaneity of vertical and horizontal organizing logics in the Oaxacan social movement of 2006 through the framework of what Arturo Escobar (2008) and Manuel De Landa (1997) call meshworks. The meshwork lens allows us to follow the parallel power structures operating within the Oaxacan social movement in order to appreciate how they act to yield a total effect. Here, I focus on the important role that youth played in developing and advancing horizontalism within the social movement and within Oaxacan popular politics more generally. In the paragraphs that follow, I offer examples of how youth participation in a citywide network of barricades in 2006 prefigured an emergent horizontalism.

An essential element that allowed the social movement to maintain control of Oaxaca City for six months was a citywide network of barricades. Numbering some 1,500, the barricades were originally raised as part of a grassroots strategy of self-defense and protection for the antennas of the radio and television stations that women from the movement had taken over. They were erected between 8:00 and 11:00 p.m. every night, and most were removed every morning at 6:00 a.m. to allow traffic to circulate, although some were more permanent, especially after the mass deployment of the Federal Preventive Police (PFP) in late October who were sent by the federal government to retake the city and disarticulate the movement. Neighbors gathered rocks, tires, downed trees, cars, commandeered buses, and semi-trailers, or whatever objects they could acquire to build the barricades.

The dense network of horizontally organized barricades provided the physical space for many young people and others with little or no previous

organizing experience to foster a sense of ownership in the movement. If you lived in an urban or peri-urban neighborhood you could participate in the growing movement without even leaving your neighborhood. This was especially important for those for whom the political rhetoric or aggressive style of established opposition groups that dominated the more formal spaces of the movement did not resonate. This was the case for many young activists who were not accustomed to this style of politics, and as Lynn Stephen (2013, 249) documents, the “sometimes nasty debate discouraged people who came from rural and Indigenous communities” as well. In many of the barricades, however, it was families, neighborhoods, anarchist youth collectives, and graffiti crews, *not* opposition parties, unions, or NGOs, that served as the main organizing forces.

For many, the barricades served as an *entrée* into the movement. Silvia, a young woman who was active in the social movement, explained her involvement to me in 2010:

Many of us met for the first time in the barricades in 2006 . . . the barricades became part of my daily life but they were also part of a greater strategy. That was how we protected ourselves and the radio, but also how we showed, through our civil disobedience, that the government could not govern the city.¹²

Silvia migrated to the city from a town in the *Costa* (coastal) region of the state, and was studying sociology at the public state university in 2006. Her involvement with the movement began as a researcher, but one of the most important barricades in the city, Cinco Señores, blocked the entrance to her neighborhood so she passed through it every day. As she began spending more time there with her neighbors, her participation soon changed from researcher to *barricadera* (participant in the barricades). In the above quote, Silvia makes the important point that beyond the practical strategy of self-defense and defense of territory, the barricades were a symbol to the government, media, and local residents that signaled popular control of the city. Moreover, the barricades acted as hubs for local, grassroots control of territory. In the barricades, people were not subject to the political will of external forces but rather made decisions among themselves in response to their needs, desires, and principles.

The barricades quickly became community spaces where neighbors who may have never spoken before would spend all night drinking coffee, eating, dancing, and talking while reclaiming the streets, their neighborhoods, the historic city center, and their right to be free from violence. As the street is a basic unit of public life, an everyday public space where people are brought together to interact (Tonkiss 2005), it is not surprising that the reclaiming and reconfiguring of Oaxaca’s streets in 2006 proved to be a transformative

experience for the countless people who participated. The raising and guarding of barricades turned strangers into comrades, and turned neighborhood residents into active participants in radical direct-democracy, a dynamic that Dace Dzenovska and Iván Arenas describe as “barricade sociality” (2012, 646).

The social space created by the barricades provided a laboratory for experimenting with the alternative, nonhierarchical social relations that are integral to practices of horizontality. These spaces were extended in subsequent youth projects, which Silvia alludes to above when she states that “many of us met for the first time in the barricades.” She is referring to the fact that she and other youth who met through their participation in the barricades formed what proved to be one of the most prominent (youth) collectives to emerge from the movement, VOCAL (Oaxacan Voices Constructing Autonomy and Liberty) in 2007. VOCAL provides an organizing space where young activists continue to hone the praxis of horizontalism that emerged in the barricades.

Grffiti artists also played an important role in the movement, partially through their artwork in the barricades, which served to demarcate territory and disseminate news. When I asked members of local street art crews Arte Jaguar and AK Crew about their participation in the barricades in a group interview in 2010, several mentioned being asked by their neighbors to contribute pieces to their barricades. One of the artists who belongs to both crews, and lives in the colonia of Pueblo Nuevo, remembers painting a piece at his neighborhood barricade:

I was at the barricade the first day of the *desmadre* [PFP repression]. I painted a semi-trailer for the people of my barrio because they asked me, since they knew that I painted, “Why don’t you paint something over here, in the barrio?” I said “Of course!” [It read] *¡Viva Pueblo Nuevo! Oaxaca, Mexico . . .* I remember vividly, it had a woman with her fist raised, and the damn phrase took up the whole trailer.

Arte Jaguar was one of the more prolific and respected street art crews in Oaxaca at the time the social movement emerged. Members came mostly from *colonias* throughout the city, although some were migrants to the city from Indigenous villages. As a collective, members were weary of being labeled as “political artists” or of having their work pigeonholed to 2006. Like many graffiti artists, however, they were active in the social movement as artists, *barricader@s*¹³ and in confrontations with the police. In fact, the barricades became rich sites for the production and display of graffiti and other public visual art, as well as grievances and words of protest scrawled on any available surface. Testimonies like the one quoted above remind us that the cultural and social space of the barricade, where community elders validated youth participation, was vital in fostering a sense of youth owner-

ship in the movement, their neighborhoods, and the city. This collective experience and sense of belonging for otherwise marginalized youth proved to be transformative, not only for youth but also for the expansion of the social movement beyond the more formal spaces of the teachers' union and the APPO.

In addition to being an *entrée* into the struggle for many, the network of barricades, along with a series of occupied radio and television stations taken over by women in the movement, were crucial in deepening the grassroots power of the movement, which encompassed broad sectors of Oaxacan society cutting across vast differences and geographies. Oaxaca-based intellectual Gustavo Esteva supports this view of the barricades:

The sudden presence in the movement of groups from the popular neighborhoods . . . was unexpected. It was not known to what extent the communal social fabric also existed in those neighborhoods. The barricades arose spontaneously as a popular response to the governor's attacks on the APPO encampments, and rapidly took on a life of their own, to the extent of becoming autonomous focal points for social and political organization. Long sleepless nights provided the opportunity for extensive political discussion, which awakened in many young people a hitherto nonexistent or inchoate social consciousness. (2010, 985)

Esteva highlights the importance of the barricades in fostering the participation of Oaxaca's popular neighborhood residents and youth in particular. While I am cautious about overstating the "nonexistent or inchoate social consciousness" of young people pre-2006, young people in Mexico are among the most vulnerable to the impacts of the recent global economic crisis and the neoliberal assault on social programs and public education. In fact, the current generation of youth in Mexico carries with them the stigma of being referred to as the generation of "*Ninis—ni estudian, ni trabajan*" (they don't study, they don't work). The implication is that the marginalization of Mexican youth is a result of their own laziness and complacency, not the effect of global economic restructuring and neoliberal policies. For poor and working-class youth in Oaxaca there were (and continue to be) very few spaces open to them where they could feel their participation was legitimized by larger Oaxacan society. It was in this social milieu that youth with diverse levels of political training and organizing experience found a space for meaningful participation in the barricades.

The way that barricader@s organize today is greatly influenced by their experiences in the barricades. Instead of replicating age, race, gender, class, and other existing social hierarchies, the more radical barricades were social movement spaces where everyday Oaxacans were able to construct new social relations and identities based on principles of inclusiveness and equity. People began to identify as being from Barricade X or Barricade Y, and

among youth we see the emergence of an identity as "barricader@s," or participants in the barricades, which continues to carry significant social capital. A young activist named Monika, for example, remembered the horizontal power produced in the barricades as one of the more important legacies of the social movement:

I think that all of us that are in the movement, that are still in the movement, were and are barricader@s. That is where we come from. That is where we learned so many things . . . things that I had never done before nor could have imagined doing. That is where the people came together and when it was time to act, and if we all felt it was correct, we would do it. Even if, for example, [Local 22 leader Enrique] Rueda Pacheco tried to stop us.

The grassroots power produced in these moments, when the barricader@s chose actions that challenged the leadership class of organizations, strengthened horizontal relations created in the barricades. These kinds of alternative, counterhegemonic relations are much more difficult to produce from within established organizations and movements where existing social inequalities tend to become entrenched and reproduced, despite the most sincere of revolutionary intentions. In 2010, I asked a VOCAL activist named Daniel, who participated in the barricades, what it was like to mobilize and organize alongside individuals and organizations that were used to having a leadership class, and he responded:

That would be the organic or structural part of the Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca. That [space] was mostly formed by people who were already organized by organizations that have been around for many years. Many of them already had the vices that were taking shape here in Oaxaca. It's a way of interacting that is very complicated, in part because it was such a wide spectrum of organizations that were found within the organizing structure within the APPO . . . what we tried to do and what we keep trying to do, is to stay faithful to the principles of the movement: no negotiating with the government; no participating in political parties; and seeking profound change. These are things that do not agree with the agendas of the more visible members of the organizations. It has been a give-and-take within the assembly but ultimately the consensus has been to stay faithful to the principles of the movement.

When Daniel speaks of the "vices" entrenched in more established organizations within the APPO, he is referring to the complicated history of authoritarian clientelism, whereby the Mexican government fosters or co-opts those organized sectors that it finds politically useful and represses those that are not (Fox 1994). This strategy has given rise to a particular political culture where groups with enough political capital know that if they mobilize their membership, the government will likely offer them economic and/or

political concessions. Depending on the organization, the concessions may or may not be distributed among the bases. Through collectives like VOCAL, young activists attempt to decenter the state by focusing their organizing energy and power toward the creation of horizontal relations between various sectors of society (locally, nationally and internationally). In doing so, collectives like VOCAL are extending the horizontal, participatory political culture that emerged from the barricades in 2006.

Importantly, some activists who contributed to the development of horizontalism in the barricades had previous experience organizing in leaderless movements. Montes Liberadas, the young man from the punk movement who I cited early, shared his history of activism with me as follows:

We are from the punk movement . . . in the punk movement is where I actually found what I was looking for, which is an autonomous movement, a libertarian movement where there are no leaders, where I can contribute. Where I could build a fanzine, a flyer and distribute it, build a pamphlet and make it move. Where I could express myself against something without the necessity of having to report my actions to anyone or having a leader who would tell me what to do and where to go. It's not like that [in the punk movement]. What I enjoyed about it was collective participation, getting together with various people, exchanging points of view about the things that actually mattered to us. And in doing so, none of us who were involved at the time were after power or profit where if we do this then the government will sit us down to negotiate and they will say to us "Here's the deal, I will give you this amount of money, now go relax." These were the things we didn't want. Before 2006 we already had a participation, [we have been active] since about 2000 . . . I was 16 or 17 years old.

Montes Liberadas began his testimony speaking about collectivity and belonging. He makes clear that the punk movement is not just about a particular aesthetic or music but that it is about social and political participation. He stressed this point frequently, using the word *participación* (participation) and the phrase *tener una participación* (to have a participation) repeatedly during our two-and-a-half-hour interview. He spent a lot of time talking about his early involvement in the punk movement and various collectives such as Centro Social Libertario¹⁴ (Social Libertarian Center or CESOL) pre-2006. He was making clear that his political participation did not begin in 2006 and that the space opened by the punk movement for youth like himself to participate on their own terms, without an imposed agenda or leadership, were key aspects of what attracted him to the movement.

While the punk movement was an important antecedent for leaderless horizontal organizing among young people before 2006, the barricades provided an important space for horizontalism within the 2006 social movement. In a published interview, David Venegas, one of the few members of the APPO Council who was a youth activist and who was a founding member of

VOCAL, described the impact that the barricades had in decentering the formal spaces of the movement and expanding the more horizontal spaces:

That's when my participation, along with the participation of hundreds of thousands of others, began to make a more substantial difference. . . . We eventually started discussing agreements and decisions made by the APPO Council and the teachers' union. There were a number of occasions when the barricade chose actions that went against those agreements, which in my view only strengthened our capacity for organized resistance. In this way, the barricades reestablished and modified the social fabric of the neighborhoods. (quoted in Denham et al. 2008, 290–91).

Here, David contrasts the horizontal decision making at the barricades to the top-down practice of the "APPO Council and the teachers' union," which speaks to some of the tensions within the movement that led youth to form their own spaces built on more horizontal models experimented with in the barricades. David's analysis echoes Monika's and Gustavo Esteva's in terms of the role that the barricades played in expanding the horizontal power of the movement. David grounds the long-term impacts of the barricades in the city's *colonias* vis-à-vis novel and strengthened social relations. Subsequent organizing efforts by movement youth, such as VOCAL, seek to extend these social relations to greater Oaxacan society and political organizing.

During a discussion in February 2010 at a youth-run cultural and political center named CASOTA (Autonomous Oaxacan Solidarity House for Self-Managed Work), David again referred to the tensions between the horizontal and vertical structures within the APPO. He described an occasion when the APPO Council entered into negotiations with the government and offered to remove the barricades, even though the government had yet to address any of the movement's demands. David explained:

People who claimed to speak on behalf of the assembly told us [at the Brenamiel barricade] to let the ADO [private bus company] through because they had come to an agreement with them. *Ni madres* (fuck that) we told them! We took control of this street and they are not going through here. If you want them to go through, let them through the streets that you have taken.

In November of 2006, following one of the more violent battles with federal police, the barricade in Silvia's neighborhood (Cinco Señores) produced a flyer addressing the issue of ongoing negotiations with the state. In it, the authors criticize the APPO Council for offering to remove the barricades without consulting the barricades as collective actors. The authors go on to acknowledge the need to engage the state, particularly in order to end the repression, but denounce the fact that the council acted unilaterally without consulting the barricades. This was just one of several moments when the

competing logics of vertical and horizontal organizing within the movement proved to be contradictory. These were important moments, however, where the horizontalism practiced in later projects such as VOCAL and CASOTA was honed in action and in contrast to the vertical models exhibited in other movement spaces. These examples, both of what youth activists want and don't want, continue to serve as important reference points as they continue the difficult project of enacting social relations that break with the dominant relations in society that perpetuate hierarchy and privilege.

YOUTH AND SOCIAL MOVEMENT LEGACIES

The social movement that emerged in Oaxaca in 2006 underwent many fractures, mutations, and revivals in the years following the grassroots takeover of the capital city. A combination of brutal repression, co-optation, and internal divisions has left participants with very different understandings of the movement's impact and legacy. Some participants remain disillusioned that key figures and organizations sold out the movement for personal gain, and feel that the opportunity to create real change was lost when they lost physical control of city. Others are convinced that the movement never died, that it is alive in the collective conscience of all who were touched by the extraordinary events of 2006, and that when the time is right, people will again take to the streets to continue what they started. I argue that focusing on the projects of youth activists that emerged out of the social movement provides a window into the movement's legacy.

Many of the youth who helped erect and maintain the citywide network of barricades continued organizing after the Mexican federal police crushed the barricades in late 2006. VOCAL, for example, was formed in 2007 and brought together dozens of youth from various barricades, and provided them with an organizing space through which they could continue forging and strengthening a sociality and politics based on horizontalism and grassroots power. The physical and social spaces produced through reappropriated public space was essential for the incubation of an emergent horizontalism in 2006, but collectives such as VOCAL provided laboratories for the process to continue once occupying that space became unsustainable. It is through the horizontalism that youth and other participants in the social movement continue to expand and reshape, that the legacy of the Oaxacan movement lives on.

NOTES

1. I was afforded the time, space, and intellectual support for the writing of this chapter thanks to an Institute of American Cultures Postdoctoral Fellowship through the Chicano Studies Research Center at the University of California, Los Angeles, as well as support from a

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2. See Osorno (2007) for claims of the Oaxacan social movement being the first insurrection of the twenty-first century.

3. In this study, libertarian reflects my translation of activists' own identification as being *libertario/a*; this does not coincide with the libertarianism found in the Libertarian Party or certain sectors of the Tea Party Movement in the United States, which emphasize the rights of the individual and fiscal conservatism. Rather, libertarians in this study are more in line with a libertarian-socialism and in some cases use the labels "libertarian/ism" and "anarchist/ism" interchangeably.

4. See Cohen (2004), Kearney (1996), and Stephen (2007) for more on Oaxacan migration.

5. See also Comisión Civil Internacional de Observación por los Derechos Humanos (2008) and Latin American Studies Association (2007).

6. The education reforms are part of larger neoliberal reforms aimed at weakening labor unions and the power of public workers in general. Elba Esther Gordillo remained in power despite being widely unpopular due to her loyalty and utility for Peña Nieto's Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). Her loyalty had come into question, and her imprisonment can be seen as a calculated political "sacrifice" by the PRI to give the impression of a "new PRI" that was entering the presidential office by cracking down on the corruption of the "old PRI" that exercised single-party rule over postrevolutionary Mexican politics until 2000.

7. I gave everyone who participated in this research the option of using pseudonyms to protect their identity. Some, including "Doña Inés," opted to use a pseudonym, while others chose to have only their first name used for security reasons.

8. *Banda* is a word used repeatedly by many of the youth in my study. This word is sometimes translated as gang but that is not the usage here. In this context, *banda* tends to refer to youth from popular neighborhoods or specifically to the speaker's group of friends. I chose to retain the original *banda* in my translations of interviews because of the messiness of translation.

9. Originally the *Pueblos* (Peoples) in APPO was singular, the *Pueblo* (People), but was soon changed to reflect the plurality of Oaxaca's people and of the movement.

10. Pseudonym.

11. See Freidberg (2007) for captivating video documentation of these moments.

12. Interview conducted by author and Lynn Stephen, August 9, 2010.

13. The use of the "@" is meant to challenge the de facto masculine designation of the "o" ending by including the feminine "a." It is a political statement that many youth are making throughout Latin American and the United States. I include this usage here since it is the usage that the majority of youth activists and collectives use. Other alternatives are to replace the "@" with an "x" or with an "A" inside an "O," which is also the common symbol for anarchy.

14. CESOL is one of the libertarian groups that has been more active in Oaxaca over the past decade and is composed largely of punks. They have been active in publishing fanzines, organizing punk concerts, and mobilizing in support of political prisoners, among other work.