WHAT'S GLOBALIZATION GOT TO DO WITH IT?
POLITICAL ACTION AND PEASANT PRODUCERS
IN GUERRERO, MEXICO

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Introduction

1 I thank Judy Boruchoff and Jonathan Fox for helpful comments on an earlier version of this paper.
How does globalization impact the collective struggles of peasant producers in the Mexican countryside? In the late 1980s, hundreds of campesino organizations throughout Mexico united around the guiding principle of “apropiándose del proceso productivo.” In practice, “appropriating the productive process” involved deepening vertical and horizontal market integration to obtain just terms of trade. How have these peasant enterprises and movement organizations fared as the markets they seek to control become more global? What economic and political strategies have they adopted to achieve the movement’s twin goals of autonomous development and democracy?²

In this paper, I explore the relationship between globalization³ and Mexico’s rural producers movement by comparing the trajectories of two organizations that emerged from this movement in the southern state of Guerrero. Using ethnographic materials from a field study conducted in 1998 and 1999,⁴ I highlight how producer organizations that encounter very different opportunities and obstacles on the road to market integration develop distinct approaches to political empowerment. Both organizations I describe mobilize small farmers of indigenous descent to access international markets for commodities produced in Guerrero’s Montaña region. But one has taken up the struggle for the rights of indigenous peoples to regional self-governance whereas the other lobbies for campesino interests in electoral arenas. Why has self-governance become salient for one whereas electoral politics has become central to the other?

The argument I develop below is that globalization has constricted niches for peasant participation in traditional mass markets for cash crops like coffee while simultaneously expanding small but significant niches in alternative trade markets for products of secondary economic importance such as handicrafts. This variable “economic opportunity structure”⁵ has led peasant organizations with similar economic goals, ideological orientation and ethnic composition down different paths to political empowerment. For some, integration into mass markets from the 1980s onward generated deep-seated grievances whose resolution required the constitution of a political body separate from conventional political institutions. For others, access to highly

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² This thumbnail sketch glosses over important features of this movement, especially with regards to its relationship to the Mexican state. Deemed Mexico’s “new agrarian movement” (Harvey 1990, Otero 1989) to distinguish it from older and on-going struggles for land, this movement emphasized negotiating or “concertando” with the state for control of infrastructure and capital from parastatal enterprises downsized or dismantled by neo-liberal reform. Although this imperative necessitated cooperation with state agencies, regional movement organizations jealously guarded their right to democratic and autonomous decision-making. Indeed, “autogestión” and “democracia” became central tenets of Mexico’s new agrarian movement. See Gordillo 1988 and the essays in Bartra et. al. 1991 for a more thorough description of the movement’s goals and relationship to the state.

³ For the purposes of this paper, I focus on the economic aspects of globalization and their impact on peasant enterprises. In earlier work, I discuss globalization in broader terms including, for example, the diffusion of transnational discourses on human rights.

⁴ This study forms part of doctoral dissertation research that examines the impact of international development aid on political activism among rural producer organizations in Guerrero, Mexico. Here I draw on case material from two of the seven peasant organizations included in the dissertation.

⁵ I borrow the term “opportunity structure” from social movement theorists who developed the concept of “political opportunity structure” to capture the ways that political processes mold movement origins, repertoires of action and outcomes (c.f. Tarrow 1994).
subsidized “solidarity markets” in the 1990s engendered a sense of economic dynamism and political efficacy that inspired engagement in institutionalized electoral politics.
Ahora sí, hay que cuidarnos a nosotros mismos porque el gobierno no nos va a ni cuidar.

Vamos a formar nuestras propias leyes porque de otra manera no se va a poder controlar la delincuencia.

Peasant Leader, San Luis Acatlán, Gro.6

Coffee and Community Policing: The Unión de Ejidos Luz de la Montaña

The Unión de Ejidos y Comunidades Luz de la Montaña7 (LuzMont) came into existence in 1985 to access national markets for coffee produced by thousands of Tlapanec and Mixtec campesinos in Guerrero’s Montaña region. LuzMont grew out of the broader peasant movement that urged small farmers across Mexico to “apropiarse del proceso productivo.” In the late 1980s, autonomous coffee organizations in Chiapas, Oaxaca, Guerrero and Veracruz demonstrated great skill taking control of coffee processing and sales. Motivated by the need to fill the economic niches vacated by a neo-liberalizing state and buoyed by a booming international coffee market, these regional organizations formed a dense national network, the CNOC,8 that represents small coffee growers to this day.

In the 1990s, LuzMont made considerable progress “appropriating” the various stages of the coffee enterprise originally contemplated by the movement. To gain greater control over production, it purchased and distributed fertilizer to members. To add value to the product, it acquired sorting and drying equipment. And to take control of marketing, it obtained credit to purchase a large percentage9 of local output each year, a warehouse to store it until seasonal prices peaked, and vehicles to transport it out of the region. However, the conditions under which small growers labored to sell their product had changed dramatically since the late 1980s. Most significantly, Mexico’s withdrawal from the International Coffee Organization exposed producers to rapidly and wildly fluctuating world prices.

When I initiated my study in 1998, I wondered what “taking control of the productive process” implied now that neo-liberalism had tied the fortunes of local coffee growers more closely to global economic forces. My field work revealed that for LuzMont, the challenge of autonomous coffee marketing expanded in an unexpected

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6 I extend special thanks to Sabás Aburto, Domingo Altamirano, Olegario Candia and Miguel Olivera for generously sharing their time and insights. I thank Felipe Francisco for the welcome that made my work with Luz de la Montaña possible.

7 See García 2000 as well as Ravelo Lecuona and Avila Arévalo 1994 for invaluable background information on Luz de la Montaña’s economic activities. See Flores Félix n.d. for more information on the region’s community policing initiative.

8 Coordinadora Nacional de Organizaciones Cafetaleras.

9 García estimates that LuzMont together with a similar but smaller coffee organization, the Unión Regional Campesina, purchases between 70 and 90% of all regional coffee production each year (García 2001, pp. 306-7).
direction to include a task unfulfilled but not relinquished by the state: safeguarding the security of regional roadways.

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In the warehouse that doubled as LuzMont’s processing plant and office space, a coffee grower from the highland community of Iliantenco recounted how his village’s first attempt to collectively market coffee outside the region in the 1970s failed. “Esa carga no llegó.” That truckload of coffee never arrived. “Esa carga no llegó” because thugs hired by wealthy merchants or acaparadores intercepted it en route from the mountains up the coast to the commercial center of Atoyac. “Esa carga no llegó” because law enforcement and local government turned a blind eye to the abuses of this merchant class and its exploitation of indigenous farmers. “Esa carga no llegó” because it predated the presence of INMECAFE, the state-owned enterprise that ultimately weakened local intermediaries in the 1980s by purchasing coffee directly from producers.

In the months to follow, I would become acutely aware of how the physical inaccessibility of the mountain villages and government neglect remained deep-seated grievances for the people of this region. In spite of two decades of mobilization spearheaded by LuzMont, the sorry state of regional roadways coupled with the police’s inability to catch and unwillingness to prosecute highway robbers continued to hinder movement in and out of “La Montaña.” Repeatedly, villagers had suffered insults, theft and even rape not only at the hands of common criminals but also at the hands of the state police that investigated these crimes.

By the time I arrived in the field, LuzMont had adopted a novel and politically controversial strategy for redressing these grievances. Together with another autonomous coffee organization and local Quinientos Años activists, LuzMont endorsed a regional council comprised of indigenous authorities from 42 villages to debate the extent of lawlessness in the region and to propose solutions. In 1996, this Consejo Regional de Autoridades Indígenas mobilized 500 patrolmen ("policías") and 36 commanders ("comandantes") to take matters into their own hands.

As the social organization with the strongest rank-and-file, the most experienced leadership, and the longest history in the region, LuzMont played a central role consolidating this community policing movement. LuzMont members served as policías and comandantes. LuzMont vehicles transported comandantes and autoridades to assemblies. And, in the fall of 1998, LuzMont launched a series of human rights courses to arm local indigenous authorities with the legal tools necessary to defend their policing initiative.

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LuzMont held the first human rights workshop I attended in a Tlapanec community with a spectacular view of the peaks and valleys that separated us from the

10 Instituto Mexicano del Café.
Pacific Ocean. Months earlier, LuzMont leaders had enlisted the support of a lawyer and human rights advocate willing to facilitate these workshops who came highly recommended by autonomous coffee organizations in Chiapas and Oaxaca. As an active member of the Zapatista Solidarity Network in Mexico City, he brought not only legal expertise but also firsthand knowledge of the Chiapas struggle to Guerrero’s Montaña region.

Shortly after noon on the first day of this workshop on “instrumentos internacionales de derechos de los pueblos indígenas,” a dozen men arrived together on foot, in blue uniforms and baseballs caps that identified them as policías comunitarias. They joined the fifty or so LuzMont members already assembled. In its third year of operation, the community police had already had several run-ins with state law enforcement officials. At first, the community police turned the criminals they captured into the Ministerio Público, but magistrates refused to press charges and repeatedly released prisoners on bail. Now when the community police catch offenders red-handed, they detain them in the village where they have committed their crime until the Consejo de Autoridades determines that they have repaid the victims in community service. Government officials accuse these policías of violating the rights of their prisoners. LuzMont leaders perceived this workshop as an invaluable “forma de lucha” to counter these claims.

Over the next three days, LuzMont members and I would learn that Mexico had signed international conventions and treaties that uphold the rights of indigenous peoples. And we would learn how to appeal to the Organization of American States (OAS) when Mexican government officials violated these rights. “Sometimes marches, demonstrations and hunger strikes aren’t enough,” the facilitator would tell us. “Hay que juridizar las demandas de los pueblos indígenas.”

The purple workbooks we received contained text from the UN’s 1966 International Pact on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; the UN’s 1969 International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination; and, the Organization of American States’ 1997 Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The organizers distributed copies of the International Labor Organization’s Convention No. 169 under separate cover. We should learn to use these documents as tools to ensure our everyday survival, like a hand mill to grind corn for tortillas or a machete to clear the fields.

In small groups we reflected upon excerpts from these conventions. No one in my group spoke Spanish as a first language and few had more than a grade school education. But a bilingual school teacher among us read slowly and deliberately from Article 1 of the UN Pact on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights on the right to “self-determination.” “Todos los pueblos tienen el derecho de libre determinación...En ningún caso podrá privarse a un pueblo de sus propios medios de subsistencia.”

In the afternoon we reconvened and reviewed passages from the ILO’s Convention 169. What did the right to “auto-determinación” guaranteed by 169 mean to
the Tlapanec people assembled that day? “El derecho de aplicar nuestras leyes para castigar los culpables de un delito.” “Que las autoridades de afuera reconozcan nuestros reglamentos internos.”

The final day of the workshop taught us how to use international governmental organizations like the OAS to report violations of the collective rights of indigenous peoples. Divided into small groups once again, we filled out the sample complaint form on the last page of the workbook based on real-life experiences. My group denounced the Mexican government for intervening in a regional-level community policing meeting. A sub-procurador from a nearby municipality had arrived with warrants for the arrest of several autoridades and policías on the grounds that the community police operated “fuera de la ley.” The "sample" denuncia began: “Siendo las 11 horas del 17 de abril de 1998, llevando a cabo la reunión regional de las autoridades, reunidas 36 autoridades…”

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During this workshop and two others that I had the privilege to attend, I observed how a pragmatic issue of self-defense transformed itself into a principled issue regarding who has the right to govern. In the 1980s and 1990s, the neo-liberal state devolved the economic functions of financing, processing and marketing coffee to the private and civil society sectors. But in Guerrero’s Montaña region, the state also devolved—de facto if not de jure—the responsibility for public security to those individuals and collectivities most affected by its absence. Inspired by local and extra-local indigenous rights activists, LuzMont’s move to fill this void engendered a process of “concientización” that challenged orthodox notions of who makes and enforces the law. LuzMont’s struggle to appropriate the productive process had expanded to include the appropriation of the legitimate bases of law-making and enforcement.

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As I headed down the dirt road towards LuzMont’s warehouse on the outskirts of the market town of San Luis Acatlán, a young man greeted me and introduced himself as a member of the organization’s “comité de comercialización.” He hadn’t attended the human rights workshops. January and February are the peak months for harvesting coffee and LuzMont needed to train dozens of locally elected “receptores” to collect this crop. In a two day training course that overlapped with the most recent workshop, these “personas de confianza” learned to sack, weigh and account for the 18 to 20 thousand “quintales”11 that local producers would entrust to the organization for sale this year. In the past, LuzMont had sold to a Mexican prestanombres for the Nestlé corporation. But LuzMont hoped to directly export 30% of this year’s crop, even though they had not yet received their permit and had no prior experience exporting.

These comments reminded me that in spite of its success controlling crime and fomenting an awareness of indigenous peoples’ right to self-governance, LuzMont’s community policing initiative had not resolved many of the basic dilemmas integral to

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11 A “quintal” consists of approximately 60 kilos or 130 pounds (CNOC website).
"appropriating" international coffee markets. That evening I boarded the Volkswagen mini-bus that would transport me down the sloping hills from San Luis Acatlán to the Costa Chica, and I remembered my first field visit to LuzMont. Torrential rains had washed out a bridge along the coastal highway from Acapulco forcing travelers to unload their cargo into wheelbarrows and traverse the riverbed on foot. The same rains had swollen a river en route to San Luis so that only travelers brave enough to cling to the fenders of a John Deere tractor to cross it could continue their journey.

These physical barriers dramatized the durability of the obstacles that blocked LuzMont’s access to free and fair global markets, and the precariousness of their attempts to access them directly in the future. And they symbolized the extent of the disjuncture between a state-promoted pattern of development based on an export commodity and the state’s inability to provide the infrastructure essential to sustain market-driven development. But my time in the region also suggested that this contradiction had served as a lightning rod for a broader and on-going struggle to achieve an alternative form of political empowerment.
El tiempo en que las organizaciones eran apolíticas ya pasó a la historia.

Se decía, “Ahorita ni pensararlo, la organización está enpañales.” Pero no descartes que para el otro período algún compañero esté luchando la presidencia de algún municipio.

Peasant Leaders, Chilapa, Gro.\textsuperscript{12}

Handicrafts and Electoral Politics: The Sociedad de Solidaridad Social Zanzekan Tinemi

The Sociedad de Solidaridad Social Zanzekan Tinemi\textsuperscript{13} (Zanzekan) crystallized in 1990 to boost local maize production and the distribution of government-subsidized corn among \textit{campesinos} of Nahua descent in the northwestern quadrant of La Montaña. Like LuzMont, Zanzekan emerged from the national-level peasant movement that aspired to “appropriate the productive process” from parastatal agencies and exploitative intermediaries. Unlike LuzMont, however, Zanzekan took root in a part of La Montaña that lacked a state-promoted cash crop such as coffee. These \textit{campesinos} cultivated corn, but small plot size, low productivity and vulnerability to drought meant that the fields frequently yielded less than required even for family subsistence. The sustainability of their \textit{campesino} existence came to depend on seasonal migration to agro-industry in northern Mexico and the United States. For Zanzekan, then, taking control of the productive process dictated different economic and political strategies than its coffee-oriented counterpart.

In its early years, Zanzekan mobilized to take control of processes related to both corn production and consumption. Joining a critical mass of peasant organizations in Guerrero engaged in similar struggles, Zanzekan appropriated the chain of state-owned stores that supplied basic consumer items—including corn—to 56 far-flung villages in the region.\textsuperscript{14} Moreover, Zanzekan established a fertilizer enterprise that sold this vital input at prices that undercut both the parastatal FERTIMEX and market prices. In 1995 alone, Zanzekan made 180,000 tons of fertilizer available to local corn farmers.

By the end of the decade, however, Zanzekan had expanded and diversified its economic agenda. Most significantly, the commercialization of handicrafts surpassed corn production and supply as Zanzekan’s most dynamic economic undertaking even though the overwhelming majority of the organization’s members continued to farm corn. In large part, this shift responded to the availability of international aid and solidarity markets for peasant entrepreneurs willing to adapt local products to the aesthetic tastes of

\textsuperscript{12} I am indebted to the kindness and candor of many individuals affiliated with Zanzekan Tinemi, among them Rogelio Alquisiras, Jesús Andrade, Emiliano Cerros, Eleucadio Teyuco and Albino Tlacotempa.

\textsuperscript{13} See the work of Miguel Meza Castillo for a more detailed description of Zanzekan Tinemi’s economic activities (2000, 1995, 1992).

\textsuperscript{14} See Fox 1992 for an excellent account of the relationship between autonomous peasant organizations and this government initiative.
global consumers. Whereas globalization exposed Guerrero’s coffee growers to the vagaries of the world’s mass market for coffee, it simultaneously opened a small and highly subsidized market niche for locally-produced handicrafts.

“The trick is to constantly feed the design machine.” As I peered out her office window onto the Mayan pyramid that dominates the mezzanine of the Inter-American Bank’s Washington DC complex, a Bank representative explained the nuts-and-bolts of successful handicrafts marketing. “You need to accurately assess your production capacity and, above all, constantly feed the design machine.”

Impressed by Zanzekan’s openness to the notion of “feeding the design machine” and convinced of the Mexican craft sector's export potential, in 1996 the Bank approved a US$500,000 loan and US$150,000 of non-reimbursable technical support for Zanzekan's handicrafts enterprise. When I visited Zanzekan in the first months of 1997, the lump sum for technical support had arrived and the bare-bones concrete offices that housed this operation buzzed with activity. Zanzekan had hired several new staff members and contracted external consultants to train them in their respective areas of expertise: accounting, business administration, crafts production, quality control, marketing and sales, and new product development. Two Japanese Peace Corps volunteers had also arrived to help Zanzekan streamline its burgeoning micro-business. One wrestled with the gargantuan task of computerizing the operation's anachronistic accounting and inventory systems. The other, a fashion designer and photographer, focused on new product development.

I soon discovered that “new product development” or “feeding the design machine” formed part of Zanzekan’s broader strategy to penetrate the European alternative trade market for handicrafts. One of Zanzekan’s key consultants and an owner of a handicrafts cooperative in Cancún introduced me to the principles of the fair trade movement that regulated access to this market. Sipping organically grown coffee from a stainless steel mug, he described how Zanzekan had agreed to pay just prices to local artisans and to replenish the natural resources that artisans depleted in the production process. In exchange, “alternative trade organizations” or ATOs purchased woven palm handicrafts exclusively from Zanzekan, reselling them to consumers willing to pay higher-than-market prices in solidarity with Latin American poor people’s movements. In other words, “appropriating the productive process” for the alternative trade market entailed the additional task of demonstrating the equitable and environmentally friendly nature of production practices.

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15 “Events since 1994, more specifically the signing of NAFTA and the devaluation of the Mexican peso, are giving rise to new hopes for selling Mexican crafts on the international market. The Mexican crafts industry, with its unique sense of design, color and creativity, shows good potential to compete with other countries on the world market. However, it will be unable to compete successfully until it understands the market and adapts to market demand.” IDB Internal Memo on Financing and Technical-Cooperation Funding for SSS Zanzekan Tinemi. February 1, 1996.
Through the thick smoke of burning burro dung that kept the biting gnats at bay, I watched as artisans from the Nahua community of La Esperanza took up the challenge of “feeding the design machine” for the European alternative trade market. “Storyboards,” glossy tableaus picturing elaborate domestic scenes, circulated among the half dozen men and women gathered in an artisan’s daub and wattle home for this yearly exercise. Compliments of Fair Trade Holland, these “storyboards” portrayed the aesthetic trends projected for the decorative and utilitarian handicrafts market two years hence. The rich browns and greens in the Oriental motif contrasted sharply with the electric pinks and yellows common to woven palm handicrafts in Guerrero’s Montaña. On unlined notebook paper with Crayola crayons, these artisans sketched a breakfast tray and a tissue box cover in keeping with this motif. In the weeks to come, they would experiment mixing dyes to achieve earth tones. And within months, they would produce samples to become the newest of the new products developed by Zanzekan with Fair Trade Holland’s financial compensation and technical expertise.

The Guerrero delegation of the Instituto Nacional Indígena (INI) wholeheartedly supported Zanzekan's efforts to export woven palm handicrafts. In the past, the INI and the Fondo Nacional de Artesanías (FONART) had helped other types of artisans from Guerrero’s Montaña contact international clients. As a result of these initiatives and of the remarkable creativity of local artisans, the mountain community of Olinalá had earned world recognition for its exquisite lacquer boxes fashioned from the fragrant wood of the linoloe tree. But these artisans had also gained notoriety for a fierce individualism that hindered attempts to market their goods collectively.

INI officials in Guerrero pinned high hopes on Zanzekan’s ability to induce woven palm artisans in La Montaña to work cooperatively to achieve a greater economy of scale. With its strong organizational track record and financing from the international development community, Zanzekan had already consolidated a network of nearly two hundred artisans. The INI stood to benefit directly by facilitating Zanzekan’s commercial success in international markets. Zanzekan’s story would serve as a powerful symbol of Guerrero’s growing class of business-savvy indigenous entrepreneurs and of the INI’s ostensibly indispensable role nurturing this growth.

Over wine and cheese at the Canadian Embassy in Mexico City, I translated Chief Deslisle’s request for samples and more detailed information on the product lines that Zanzekan’s handicrafts enterprise offered. President of the Indio International Inc. import-export firm based in Quebec, the Chief had come to Mexico City on a trade mission sponsored by the INI and the Aboriginal Business division of the Canadian Ministry of Trade in the spirit of NAFTA. He hoped to promote Canadian tourism in Oaxaca and to open markets for a variety of Mexican-made products in Canada. Following the reception, he and his compatriots would embark on a two-day Oaxacan tour to meet potential trading partners.
Zanzekan representatives arrived at the Embassy in the company of INI personnel from the Guerrero office. This particular exchange of Canadian and Mexican indigenous businessmen focused almost exclusively on Oaxaca, but Guerrero’s INI delegation hoped to secure a prime place on the next mission agenda. Zanzekan knew that consummating a commercial relationship with any of these Canadian contacts was a long shot. “Lo de la economía indígena de Canadá es otro mundo” one leader conceded to me before the trip to Mexico City. Eyeing the participants list that included the Cree Construction Company, a multi-million dollar firm with 400 employees, I had to agree. But attending the event fulfilled the unspoken expectation that Zanzekan serve as an emissary of Guerrero’s indigenous entrepreneurs and sustained Zanzekan’s mutually beneficial relationship with the INI.

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By 1998, Zanzekan’s handicrafts enterprise had come to the attention of other government agencies and elected officials who now courted the organization’s loyalty in return for material support and promises of influencing public policy. Guerrero’s Secretaría de Desarrollo Social (SEDESOL) delegation frequently invited the organization to planning meetings and Zanzekan’s headquarters had become a routine stop on the campaign trails of high-profile political candidates. Encouraged by a newfound sense of political efficacy, Zanzekan now aspired to participate more directly in electoral processes.

My field research coincided with the full cycle of electoral activities for Guerrero’s February 1999 gubernatorial contest as well as preparations for Guerrero’s October 1999 congressional and municipal elections and the nation’s July 2000 presidential race. During that time, I observed how Zanzekan worked tirelessly to enhance its position vis-à-vis political parties to make electoral politics more responsive to campesino interests. To do so, Zanzekan turned to a national network of autonomous peasant organizations and campesino lobbying group, the UNORCA.16

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On a Sunday afternoon, a dozen Zanzekan dirigentes gathered around the chrome and glass coffee table in the comfort of a SEDESOL official’s home in a nouveau riche neighborhood overlooking the urban sprawl of Guerrero’s capital, Chilpancingo. They had received word that SEDESOL solicited their presence in an upcoming meeting with the five government institutions that would be coordinating federal social spending in Guerrero during the next fiscal year. Zanzekan leaders stopped by the home of their high-ranking SEDESOL contact for more details.

Over three bottles of mescal and a carton of cigarettes, conversation turned to Zanzekan’s efforts to mobilize politically. “Hay que dejar de llevar agua al molino de

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16 Unión Nacional de Organizaciones Regionales Campesinas Autónomas.
“One needs to stop carrying water to another’s mill.” Tired of the PRI’s attempts to claim Zanzekan’s partisan support without fully incorporating the organization’s proposals for rural development into the party platform, Zanzekan leaders resolved to build up their own political organization in conjunction with the UNORCA. For months, Zanzekan had worked feverishly to recruit grassroots support in Guerrero for a national political action committee that would serve as UNORCA’s brazo político or political arm. Zanzekan leaders already had enlisted over one thousand members in this agrupación política nacional.”

Recent reforms to Mexico’s Federal Code of Electoral Institutions and Procedures allowed civic associations like UNORCA to form “agrupaciones políticas nacionales” or APNs. This legislation entitled APNs to the right to participate in elections via formal agreements with registered political parties. Zanzekan anticipated that membership in UNORCA’s APN would strengthen its ability to negotiate candidatures for the state congress and municipal presidents in October. Without formal status as a political player, Zanzekan had little hope of inserting candidates into internal party hierarchies. Their SEDESOL host endorsed these efforts to harness the movement’s momentum for its own political purposes. He nodded approvingly. “Hay que dejar de llevar agua al molino de otros.”

If Zanzekan’s drive to create an independent political organization reflected frustration with the political system’s lack of accountability to campesinos, it also belied an underlying belief in the potential of reforming—or at least beating—this system. Zanzekan’s marketing enterprise captured the attention of Mexican government agencies that traditionally dispensed funds for rural development in exchange for political loyalty to the PRI. What struck me as remarkable about Zanzekan was its use of a broader network of relations with national and international actors to resist local political co-optation.

Zanzekan’s goal of marketing handicrafts internationally resonated with the multi-lateral development community interested in making the Mexican crafts industry competitive in world markets. It attracted European ATOs committed to combating the pernicious effects of free market competition in solidarity with Third World producers. And Zanzekan maintained close ties with the national organization that represented an important faction of Mexico’s campesino movement. Zanzekan now aspired to parlay these multiplex relationships into political capital in the electoral arena by negotiating municipal president candidatures with both the PRI and the PRD.

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17 The Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) is Mexico’s official or historically dominant political party. The PRI has held power in Guerrero’s state government since the party’s inception in the 1930s.
18 Note that this legislation also entitled APNs to federal funding for civic education. Funds earmarked for APNs total 2% of the amount allocated for all political parties in a given year. In 1998, this amounted to approximately US$2 million divided among 12 active APNs (IFE 1998).
19 The Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD) is Mexico’s major left-leaning opposition party.
LuzMont had also experimented briefly with electoral politics. In the mid-1990s, it allied with the PRD to expel a corrupt municipal president from office in San Luis Acatlán and elect an opposition candidate. But this temporary alliance proved insufficient to make larger political structures responsive to the needs of local coffee growers. By the time I arrived in the field in 1998, the organization had channeled its political momentum away from opposition parties into the Consejo Regional de Autoridades Indígenas.

Discussion

The experiences of LuzMont and Zanzekan suggest that economic globalization has profound consequences for the political trajectories of popular movements in Latin America. For the past decade, activists and academics have grappled with specifying the ways that globalization impinges upon civil society actors such as social movements. For some, globalization denotes freer and faster flows of capital, labor and information across national borders. For these theorists, globalization empowers firms over both nation-states and civil society. For others, globalization connotes the emergence of a transnational civil society. For these scholars, globalization stands to strengthen social movements relative to states and sometimes even to firms.

My ethnographic analysis reveals that, ironically, globalization may handicap peasant enterprises relative to big business while simultaneously strengthening their position vis-à-vis nation-states. The case of LuzMont confirms the conventional wisdom that globalization privileges capital-intensive firms over peasant enterprises in internationalized mass markets. In the world market for traditional coffee, the concentration of highly mobile capital in the hands of transnational corporations like Nestlé has precluded effective competition on the part of small coffee producers. Far from demobilizing LuzMont, however, this economic predicament inched the organization forward along the path to political empowerment vis-à-vis the Mexican state. Mobilizing the Consejo to restore order and mete out justice in the region, the indigenous producers that make up LuzMont both assimilated and asserted their rights to regional self-governance. To date, Guerrero’s state government has opposed but not disbanded the Consejo’s police brigade, and national and international human rights advocates have rallied to defend this initiative.

The case of Zanzekan indicates that globalization may have opened another viable option for political empowerment to Mexico’s campesino movement, namely, participation in electoral politics. Although Guerrero’s state government has gained notoriety for its heavy-handedness and lack of electoral transparency, solidarity with diverse national and international supporters emboldened Zanzekan to take up the

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20 See, for example, Sassen 1996 on firms as “economic citizens” and the possibility that this form of citizenship displaces political citizenship grounded in the sovereignty of nation-states.

challenge of representing campesino interests through institutionalized channels such as municipal elections. This corroborates the thesis that globalization may strengthen social movements, but with an interesting twist. Scholarship on transnational movements has shown that when states block redress to movement organizations within them, international advocates may bolster local movements by mobilizing external sources of pressure on these states. The case of Zanzekan suggests that ties to international supporters enhanced the organization’s political status not by delegating activism to third party advocates but by motivating engagement in domestic political institutions.

In conclusion, globalization clearly impacts the collective of struggles of peasant producers but in non-obvious and sometimes counter-intuitive ways. In Guerrero, Mexico, it has led campesino movement organizations with similar economic goals and ideological orientations down divergent paths to political empowerment. Along these paths, Mexican peasant enterprises and movement organizations stand to become more effective political actors and agents of autonomous development.

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22 For instance, Keck and Sikkink’s theory of and empirical findings on the “boomerang effect” (1998).


