



**CONTESTING AUTHENTICITY:  
BATTLES OVER THE REPRESENTATION  
OF HISTORY IN MORELOS, MEXICO**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The Mexican state's use of revolutionary history to invoke nationalistic sentiments nurtures a lively tradition of storytelling. Ironically, Buena Vista's storytellers criticize the inauthenticity of official representations of the past even as they draw on the images and ideals of 'official' history to weave their own tales. This paper explores the power of storytelling to create an aura of authenticity in a setting where the boundary between true and false, pure and impure, is contested.

### **RESUMEN**

La utilización de la historia revolucionaria por parte del estado mexicano para invocar sentimientos nacionalistas sustenta una viva tradición de cuentos. Irónicamente, los cuentistas de Buena Vista critican la falta de autenticidad de las representaciones oficiales del pasado, aun cuando ellos mismos emplean imágenes e ideales de la historia 'oficial' para forjar sus propios cuentos. Este trabajo explora el poder que tiene la narración de cuentos para crear un aura de autenticidad cuando los límites entre lo verdadero y lo falso, lo puro y lo impuro son debatidos.

## THE PROBLEM OF AUTHENTICITY

Designating an experience or object authentic implies distance between the designator and the designee, whether social, physical or temporal. Authenticity is not a term likely to be used self-referentially within a folk group [Staub 1988: 172].

The literature on authenticity suggests that a concern with authenticity reflects the dilemmas posed by modern society. Modern humans roam the world in search of the authentic experience gleaned from a vision of the “backstage” of human interaction (MacCannell 1989) or in pursuit of the truly ‘authentic’ object of folk art. Thus, many scholars posit a connection between fascination with the authentic and a desire to redeem an experience of community that might overcome the alienation of modern life. Staub’s statement (above) is an example. Therefore, when I encountered a discourse of authenticity in a community in Morelos, Mexico, I was surprised.

In the first weeks of fieldwork in Buena Vista, Morelos, Mexico, I conducted a simple survey that served primarily to calm my nerves about fieldwork and to confront my insecurities about my gringa accent.<sup>1</sup> I boldly knocked on doors with a conviction that I did not feel. Fortunately, the women (I conducted my surveys in the mornings so usually women and small children were the only ones at home) who opened their doors to me were always friendly and warm, although many later gossiped about what this strange foreigner was ‘really’ doing. I asked questions that I thought were appropriate for a budding anthropologist: numbers of people who live in the house, residence before marriage, residence after marriage, land ownership. But, when I put away my pen and my crude survey form, the women began to express their anxieties about the future more openly. They wondered where their children would find land, and they complained about the wealthy outsiders whose money had inflated land prices. Poor peasants from Guerrero and Oaxaca were grabbing up the communal land; this was land that should be reserved for people who were truly ‘Buena Vistans’—people who had lived there for generations.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In 1984 I travelled to Buena Vista to carry out research for my dissertation. I have returned to the community three times since then to continue my work (in the summers of 1988 and 1991, and during January 1989). My research has been funded by Professional Development Grants at the University of the Pacific and Earlham College, and by a Fellowship from the Kellogg Institute for International Studies at the University of Notre Dame. In order to protect my informants and to preserve the delicate trust I have established with politically active members of the community, I have changed the name of individual informants as well as the name of the town.

<sup>2</sup> Morelos villagers recognize three types of land: ejido land, communal land, and private property. Ejido land and communal lands are similar in that they cannot be sold but they can be passed down to heirs. They differ, however, in the minds of community members in that

The local-level Committee for the Defense of Communal Resources sought to protect communal land by clarifying the boundaries of the community, by halting illegal sales of land, and by stopping illegal land takeovers by owners of private property. They constituted an informal vigilante committee that worked alongside the official Office of Communal Resources to ensure that local authorities did their job. Committee members established regular meetings in the Office of Communal Resources, creating an informal power structure in which the Office was de facto controlled by the Committee. During the course of my research the number of members attending meetings varied from about seven to about thirty-five, but two members—one in his sixties; the other, his seventies—never failed to attend. Occasionally, they were joined by other *ancianos* (elders) from the community.

Older members of the Committee frequently interrupted meeting discussions of land problems with tales of past struggles that rendered moral and strategic lessons concerning present-day problems. The tales were woven from events of the Mexican revolution in Morelos (1910-1920) or from the time immediately following the revolution which the *ancianos* remembered more clearly. The grounding of these tales in everyday problems and the intimate connection between the storyteller and the events of the story seemed to contrast the manipulation of history that I had observed in political speeches and ceremonies. Later, I learned that storytellers borrowed images, narrative structure, and ideals from the official history of the Mexican state. Yet, the elders asserted that their stories, not the government's, were '*auténtico*' (authentic).

Buena Vistans limit their concerns with authenticity to the issue of history. Many Buena Vistans make baskets for household use, but they do not speak of their authenticity. The community maintains a ritual cycle, but I rarely heard discussions about the authenticity of rituals. And, although they acknowledge changes in customs, they do not search the past, as do some modern tourists, for examples of more authentic ways of life.

This paper explores the connection between two characteristics of discourses of authenticity: first, the fact that discourses of authenticity emerge in settings where we are least likely to find the 'pure forms' implied by the term; and, secondly, that one finds a dimension of performance associated with activities and objects viewed as authentic. The connection between these two attributes of authenticity lends an ironic quality to the discourse which challenges us to interpret the proliferation of a discursive formation that clearly depends on that which it negates: the integration of political, economic, and ideological systems in a global economy.

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communal land is connected to preconquest forms of land holding while ejido land is the result of colonial and postrevolutionary land grants. As communities have become engaged in projects of resisting the rights of the national government to plan projects for the community this distinction has become central. The government prefers to suggest that what once was communal land is now ejido land.

One is tempted to hear in the discourses of authenticity a language of denial or a longing for precapitalist or premodern social formations. These expressive aspects of a discourse of authenticity are undeniable, but the instrumental power of the performance aspect of authenticity is equally compelling. The power of the 'performance' lies in its ability to 'coax' listeners along a path of boundary creation in an otherwise unbounded, interconnected system. The performance does not merely deny connections; it erases them.<sup>3</sup>

To set the tone for this paper, I begin with a discussion of the ironies of authenticity viewed through the lens of revealing examples in folk art and politics. Emphasizing storytelling and the problem of boundary creation in the representation of history, the remainder of the paper examines discourses of authenticity in Morelos, Mexico.

### **The Ironies of Authenticity**

In 1983, a German Gypsy basket maker happened upon an amazing discovery: "Last year at Colonial Days [a fair held in Central Pennsylvania], I started one of them hampers, and the lady said, (I only had it about that far, about five or six inches) she said, 'I want that.' I said it will take awhile till I get it done. 'It don't matter. I'll be here all day.' So I finished it for her. Never in my life seen nothing like it" [quoted in Staub 1988: 170].

The basket maker's surprise speaks to the irony of authenticity. Viewing himself through the lens of capitalist logic, he had assumed that the value of the object depended upon the quality of the object and the marketplace. His labor, he assumed, was merely an abstract commodity. But his customers viewed the matter differently: his public act of production was so important that they were willing to purchase an unfinished basket! Like any capitalist entrepreneur, the basket maker has now turned his discovery into an effective marketing strategy. He sets aside some sturdy, well-constructed baskets for display, but the baskets that he sells to customers are those that he makes there at the fair upon request (Staub 1988). They are flimsy baskets, but his customers leave with much more than a basket: they leave with a tale.

I doubt that the basket maker has duped his customers into thinking that a radically different set of laws distinguishes this purchase from the purchases they make in everyday life. His customers must be aware of his interest in making a profit, and perhaps even of his insightful marketing technique. Nonetheless, the public performance of the productive process is the difference that distinguishes this purchase from all others.

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<sup>3</sup> Derrida uses the term "under erasure" to draw attention to the ways in which conceptual categories are both inadequate and necessary. The inadequacies of our categories invite a project of deconstruction that conserves, "all these old concepts within the domain of empirical discovery while here and there denouncing their limits... This is how the language of social science criticizes itself" (Derrida 1978: 284).

Concerns with the 'performative' aspects of the productive process underlie much of the discourse of authenticity; a central feature of this discourse is the relation between the object and its producers. To protect an aura of authenticity and tradition, New Mexico Courts have denied Hispanics and Anglos the right to sell their handicrafts under the Portal in Santa Fe alongside of Native Americans (Evans-Pritchard 1987). As one angry, Anglo jewelry maker discovered, quality and form aside, most tourists and the state of New Mexico measure authenticity in relation to the ethnicity of the jewelry maker (Evans-Pritchard 1987). Even when the amount of labor time is the same, tourists value handmade jewelry produced by Native Americans over that produced by Anglos. A trader, Robert Zachary, explains:

There is more than silver, labor and turquoise, more than adornment, more than monetary investment; there is a story...the story of a fragile, primitive culture, tenuously coexisting within our technological society (quoted in Evans-Pritchard 1987: 292).

The market value of this story encourages Native American sellers to dress in 'traditional' fashion and to produce the types of arts and crafts that tourists expect. The story, however imaginary, invests the object with a meaning that enhances its exchange value.

Narratives about the survival of 'traditional' ways of life attract attention because of their power to invert commonsense understandings of the power of modernity. Modernity promises a clean slate on which to construct a world free of the uncomfortable boundaries posed by class and cultural differences and images of the past that cannot be conquered by the present (Holston 1989: 21). But the modern world is also a world of fragments: objects disengaged from their producers, producers disengaged from their history and culture. In the absence of a premodern, stable social order, fragmented persons search for internal integration under the rubric of an elusive, authentic self (Berger 1973). They travel the world exploring communities that have survived the onslaught of modernism (MacCannell 1989). Although encased within the "semiology of modernity" (MacCannell 1989), discourses of authenticity assert the failure of modernity. They posit the existence of competing lifestyles within the domain of the modern—lifestyles in which objects are connected to producers and people to their unique history and culture.

Many of the formerly French controlled nations of West Africa fragmented along different lines from those that Berger (1973) and others have associated with modernity. Colonial regimes appropriated tribal and kinship ties for economic, political, and ideological control, leaving postindependence governments with the difficult task of disentangling indigenous and colonial institutions to create national identities (Kayamba 1984). In Zaire, President Mobuto used a discourse of authenticity in an attempt to shape a national identity that could "overcome the mental alienation brought by the colonial experience" (President Mobuto quoted in Adelman

1975). The government encouraged Zairian citizens to adopt African names and wear African clothes; renamed streets, cities, and counties; replaced statues and commemorative plaques honoring colonial leaders; promoted African art and music and began to greet foreign heads of state with traditional African drums rather than the European style twenty-one-gun salute (Adelman 1975).

These examples suggest that discourses of authenticity emerge as 'tactics' of resistance that serve to carve out an arena of control in dominated terrain (De Certeau 1980). To label some practice, object, or person authentic is to establish a boundary in an otherwise unbounded space, thereby designating a space where the forces of oppression are weakened by their association with the inauthentic. The discourse of authenticity, albeit encased within the semiology of modernity, highlights the inauthenticity of the context in which it is used. Discourses of authenticity elaborate upon minute aspects of social life that resist capitalist modes of production, the fragmentation of modernity, or the appropriation of indigenous cultural forms for state control. The attention to detail is necessary to separate the authentic from the inauthentic. The latter is particularly relevant to the Mexican example.

### **THE TECHNOLOGIES OF STATE POWER IN MEXICO**

Some of the most tenacious fighters of the Mexican revolution came from the state of Morelos. Peasants in the state continued their struggle which began in 1910 until the early 1920s (Knight 1986; Womack 1968). Their resolve must be traced to the long history of expropriation of land and exploitation of labor by the sugar haciendas and local caciques (Lewis 1972; Warman 1980; Womack 1968).<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, in those days family names such as that of the revolutionary leader, Emiliano Zapata, inspired the kind of trust needed to sustain the long years of fighting. Zapata remained the leader of the revolutionary army of the south until government troops assassinated him on April 10, 1919.

When the revolution ended in Morelos, villagers benefitted from a massive agrarian reform program that bore many similarities to Zapata's demands for land and liberty (Womack 1968). By 1927 eighty percent of Morelos villagers held provisional titles to land (Womack: 374). Nonetheless, villagers' requests for land often remained tied up in complicated legal procedures for years, and when they were given land it was never exactly in the form that they had requested or in the amounts desired or needed (Warman 1980; De La Pena 1981). In the period 1940-1960, the promise of increased income from new cash crops lured peasants to turn to small

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<sup>4</sup> Knight (1991) suggests that the major impetus for the Mexican revolution probably came from peasants living in free-holding communities and not peons who worked on the sugar haciendas. Workers from the sugar haciendas would have had more ambivalent feelings about joining with the revolutionary forces because they were dependent on the hacienda economy.

government loans to offset increased production costs. At the same time, middle men introduced new consumer items into the economy (De La Pena 1981; Warman 1980). While the costs of production and consumption rose steadily, peasants continued to receive low prices for their produce (Warman). Thus, the government used peasant agriculture to create the conditions necessary for the country's industrialization (Arizpe and Botey 1987; Warman).<sup>5</sup>

Alongside the market mechanisms for extracting surplus labor from the peasantry, the state was able to extend its control over community resources. The government carried out the agrarian reform as a gift from a benevolent state; never as a fulfillment of Zapatista demands for justice (De la Pena 1981; Warman 1980). During the 1920s the agrarian reform law was used to dilute the power of local municipal presidents by establishing separate community-level authorities to deal with communal and ejido lands (Lewis 1972: 116; Lomnitz-Adler 1980; Romanucci-Ross 1973). Later, during the period of Cárdenas's presidency 1934-1940, ejidatarios all over the country were organized into government-controlled peasant unions.

The agrarian bureaucracy served as a tool for extending state power into Morelos villages. The power of the bureaucracy did not depend on the ideals that government bureaucrats professed—these were often in line with Zapatista ideology—but on the practices that it promoted. These practices nurtured the strategies peasants used, and continue to use, to initiate a complaint at the highest level, the president of the country, in the hopes of winning justice and avoiding payoffs. Committee members referred to this process as putting 'la espina encima' (inserting the thorn above).

The strategies of appeal require peasants to employ the language of revolutionary ideology and to exchange favors with bureaucrats. In Buena Vista, a seventy-year-old man with very little formal education wrote letters to agrarian authorities. Proud of his facility with words, he complained that present-day public education fails to train people in such basic skills as writing an appeal. His appeals to the president began "Señor President of the Republic of Mexico, we present to you with all the respect you deserve, the following..." The salutation was followed by detailed descriptions of events and evidence of corruption in the state-level Office of Agrarian

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<sup>5</sup> Knight (1985) criticizes De la Pena and others for overemphasizing the power of the Mexican state in the 1920s. He suggests that the Mexican state of the 1920s is better understood as an object and victim of class conflict than as a 'relatively autonomous' state capable of rising above class conflicts and exerting independent power. Knight's ideas about the weakness of the state in the 1920s reflect his desire to develop a general framework for analyzing postrevolutionary Mexico and toward that end his observations are useful. I am confused by his criticism of the concept of 'relative autonomy' as applied to the Mexican state. Following Poulantzas (1973), the point of the concept of relative autonomy is to go beyond simplistic ideas of a state being either 'weak' or 'strong'; 'independent' or 'instrumental.' The concept suggests that the state is riddled with class contradictions that account for the unpredictable oscillations in state policy. Such an idea seems particularly useful in light of Knight's empirical data. Furthermore, as Knight himself indicates, the aim of analyses such as De la Pena's is to understand the contribution of the postrevolutionary Mexican state to the present-day structures of power.



Reform. A skilled writer, he seasoned the technicalities with the rhetoric of revolutionary struggle: references to long-standing battles between rich and poor, acknowledgments of the historic duty of the community to protect their land, and reminders of Zapata's promise of land and liberty. The letters ended, "I beg you señor President, that by your authority you..." Members of the Committee believed that a letter signed by many people strengthened their case. One man explained, "when the people speak, there is no governor, there is no president, there is only the people." To the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) a letter signed by many people may represent a budding opposition political organization, and therefore warrants a response. Often, the response involves a negotiation of demands that leads, eventually, to incorporation of the dissident group into the Party. This has not, yet, occurred in the case of the Committee, however.

In addition to letters, relations with '*gente de confianza*' inside the Department of Agrarian Reform and in other official institutions increases the chances of a problem being resolved. *Gente de confianza* (trustworthy people) are friends who use their networks of personal connections, established through exchanges of favors and economic resources, to push a problem through the sluggish bureaucracy. Of course, they may ask for a favor or a payoff in return for their help. Even in the Committee for the Defense of Communal Resources, whose members despise the system that exchanges favors for justice, members feel fortunate if they can make a good connection.

These appeals to the president of the country to resolve boundary disputes, to replace corrupt local authorities, and to protest unwanted government projects document the history of village participation in the mechanisms of state power. Buena Vistans view this history with a mixture of resentment and pride. They complain about the time and energy they must devote to gain things that they believe they legally deserve, but they are proud of their ability to organize and to exert pressure on the federal government. When I visited the Cortez Museum in Cuernavaca with one of the older members of the Committee, I was struck by the amount of time he spent reading a letter from a Morelos community. The letter, written during the revolutionary period to then President Madero, requested that justice be served in a land issue. The form and style of the letter was similar to the many letters that the Committee wrote while I carried out my research. Most appeals were never answered, but the Committee continues to write letters. The practices used for dealing with government bureaucrats influence Buena Vistans' ideas about politics. As in other communities in Morelos, an ideal of community unity clashes with the mistrust that characterizes day-to-day relationships (Fromm and Maccoby 1970; Lewis 1957, Redfield 1930). Buena Vistans' talk about community unity expresses their desire to wrestle some control of the town from the bureaucratic practices imposed by the state. People say, "We are a poor community, but we know how to defend what is ours," or in response to unwanted government projects, "Don't worry, it won't happen. The people are united." But, village gossip is also full of

complaints about neighbors, family members, and friends who use corrupt authorities to resolve legal disputes and to access government resources. One man told me, “here we have learned that every group starts out clean, but then they start engaging in corruption.” Another very astute informant presented his analysis:

The people mistrust everyone, first they gossip and when they gossip everything gets exaggerated. But, more importantly, the government has so often promised things without delivering on their promises and now the people trust no one.

My informant’s statement accents the powerful imprint of the state on the social body. These strategies have not been imposed on Morelos villagers by a conscious and clever ruling elite; rather they are part of the culture of the bureaucracy that becomes the culture of communities linked to that bureaucracy.<sup>6</sup> Where the state has shown little interest in community resources very different kinds of practices prevail (see Varela 1984).

### **History and the Mexican State**

In Mexico, the notion of authenticity thrives in the space of technologies of power that seek to disseminate particular versions of history in the name of nationalism. The concept of hegemony as developed by Antonio Gramsci and further elaborated by Raymond Williams links power structures to the organization and perpetuation of culture (Adamson 1980; Gramsci 1971: 210-176; Williams 1977: 108-114). In Gramsci’s theory hegemony develops in conjunction with a process in which a class becomes aware of its distinctive interests and its unique culture. This culture then becomes the ‘life style’ of a nation when ‘cultural producers’ use their power in institutions (the schools, media, churches, medical profession, and so on) to shape a particular view of the world (Williams 1977: 108-114). The anthropological data on nationalism implies, however, that hegemony must be constructed from the variety of cultural traditions that make up a nation. Nationalistic sentiments hinge, not on creating a new identity, but on fusing an extant,

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<sup>6</sup> Lomnitz, Lomnitz-Adler, and Adler (1990) analyze these practices as an aspect of Mexican nationalism. This is the basis for their argument that Mexican nationalism is formed from the mediation of contradictions between individualism and holism. I prefer to distinguish between discursive and nondiscursive practices and to discuss nationalism in terms of the former. In drawing on this contrast I am remaining faithful to a distinction implied by Buena Vistas when they say of politicians, “Yes, you have beautiful words, but what are you really going to do.” I believe that the model used by Lomnitz, Lomnitz-Adler, and Adler may help to explain the nationalistic sentiments of party bureaucrats and loyalists who manage the political process by assigning each element of social structure a place in the overall system. While Buena Vistan are cognizant of the place they occupy in the structure of power, this realization seems to inspire a sense of exclusion from, rather than inclusion in, the fabric that makes up the nation.

deeply personal sense of existence with continuation of the nation (Kapferer 1988). In Morelos peasant politics revolutionary history is central to that process of fusing ontology and ideology.<sup>7</sup>

While most historians agree that the Mexican revolution accomplished a change in rhetoric, they often pass over the discursive transformation to get to 'real' concerns such as land redistribution, the breakdown of the hacienda system, and the development of state power. Historians have only recently begun to consider the intellectual contributions of the revolution. (For examples, see Katz 1991; Knight 1989; Schmidt 1989). Because of the lack of attention to intellectual contributions of the revolution, culture, in any form, receives scanty attention and rarely is treated as a "central dynamic and formative moment in the everyday 'realization' and transformation of social, economic, and political relations" (Medick 1987: 78). But, the discursive formations that arose as a result of the Mexican revolution may prove to be the most resilient legacy of the years of turmoil.

The notion of *the* revolution is itself a construct that disguises the lack of ideological and organizational conformity among those who fought in the revolution (Salvuccia, personal communication). In fact, southern peasants, northern ranchers, and nationalistic entrepreneurs hoped to gain very different things from 'the revolution,' and the revolution came to an end in different parts of the country at different times. More importantly, this lack of unity meant that those who governed the country between 1920 and 1940 had to construct a concept of the revolution before they could claim to be the legitimate heirs to the revolutionary struggle.

Today, the Mexican government exploits the names of those who struggled against them, names such as Emiliano Zapata and Pancho Villa, to create the façade of a revolutionary government (Alonso 1984). Statues with inscriptions extolling the virtues of revolutionary heroes can be found in every city. Elaborate ceremonies commemorating their birthdays give representatives of the official Institutional Revolutionary Party ample opportunity to proclaim that the party is carrying on in the revolutionary tradition. But, many Morelos peasants view this exploitation of history in the construction of national ideology as a violation of their local heroes. As an example they point to the transformation in the government's attitude toward Emiliano Zapata.

The revolutionary leader, who led the peasant armies of the south, met his death through the deception of government troops. The government had expressed willingness to negotiate with the Zapatista forces, but when Zapata arrived for the negotiation the troops opened fire and killed him (Womack 1970). After Zapata's death, presidential candidate Alvaro Obregón distanced himself from the assassins when he announced that unscrupulous leaders were betraying the

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<sup>7</sup> My review of the development of revolutionary ideology in this section is informed by my experiences in the state of Morelos. In Mexico, regional differences in participation in the revolution and in the subsequent diffusion of revolutionary ideology limit the scope of any analysis of revolutionary nationalism.

revolution (Bazant 1979: 153). Obregón needed Zapata's name to reap the political benefits of his own appeal for land reform, but first he needed to rid Zapata's name of its association with the hate and violence of the revolution.

José Vasconcelos, Minister of Education under President Obregón (1920-24), is credited with sponsoring the process of producing a revolutionary culture in Mexico, although the ideas of rural teachers and some urban intellectuals were more radical than Obregon's or Vasconcelos's (Raby 1989). In the art world David Siqueiros played a central role in the creation, in 1922, of the Syndicate of Technical Workers, Painters, and Sculptors. The manifesto of the syndicate proclaimed its allegiance to the art of the Mexican people and established as its goal "to socialize artistic expression, to destroy bourgeois individualism" (quoted in Myers 1956: 29). The Mexican government contracted artists of the syndicate to paint murals depicting indigenous culture and Mexican history in public buildings. But, with the incoming Calles administration in 1924, leftist artists such as Siqueiros and Orozco lost their jobs, although Rivera was able to complete several murals during the Calles period that contributed to the production of revolutionary nationalism (Myers 1956: 59).

Public education provided another front for the construction of revolutionary nationalism but again the rural teachers working in local communities took the lead. During Vasconcelos's tenure as Minister of Education schools were established in the most remote parts of the country. Rural school teachers, experimenting with adapting Dewey's ideas of education, tried to integrate productive activities such as farming and carpentry into the education of rural children (Raby 1989), but many teachers merely drew on their own backgrounds for the values and ideas they taught (Vaughan 1990). Agrarian reformers played a major role in rural education programs, using their magazine *El Maestro Rural* as a forum for their ideas about land redistributions.

In contrast to radical classroom teachers, textbook writers of the 1920s presented the revolution as a change in elite leadership, not as a popular movement for a new society (Vaughan 1974). The textbooks used in Mexico City, for example, denigrated indigenous culture while preaching respect for political leaders and for private property. For the textbook writer Rafael Aguirre Cinta, Villa, and Zapata were outlaws and bandits who obstructed national order—not national heroes (Vaughan 1974: 23). Textbooks and formal education policy did not become more radicalized until the 1930s. Vaughan states, "The revolution as we know it in official ideology is a construct of the 1930s not the 1920s" (1981: 49).

The construction of nationalistic sentiments depended on the transformation of revolutionary passions into an ideology of harmony which assumed that further struggle was unnecessary. Even in the 1920s newspaper articles, political speeches, and memorials in his honor presented Zapata both as an agent of class struggles and as a patient, self-sacrificing Christ-like man who endured physical abuse and insult before taking up arms (O'Malley 1986).

Zapata, a likeable fellow, was equally accessible to the rich and the poor. In the early 1930s his image was transformed once again: now the humble man endowed with the spirit of class solidarity became a father figure, the apostle of agrarianism. A ruling party pamphlet written in 1934 attempted to comfort the campesinos.

Brother campesino: Be confident. A new day is born. Now you can have someone to look out for you in place of the great disappeared one, and defend your rights, as He did (cited in O'Malley 1986: 61).

The state continues to reinforce revolutionary ideology through the expansion and reinterpretation of the role of revolutionary heroes. After the 1968 student uprisings the government incorporated Ricardo Flores Magon, an influential anarchist from the early revolutionary period, into the pantheon of national heroes (Cockcroft 1983). Prior to the '68' uprising the government had rejected Flores Magon's proletarian internationalism as anti-Mexican, but the student movement provided the impetus for a reinterpretation of his role in history.

Revolutionary ideology provides a paradoxical basis for nationalistic sentiments. It draws on images of oppressive structures of power and of the revolutionary potential of the masses, thereby containing a subtle, and at times not so subtle, message about the value of overthrowing the state. These images appeal to Mexican peasants because they accord with their passionate desires for the kind of power that they believe can only come from a community united in struggle. The Mexican state responds to the paradoxes of revolutionary ideology by attempting to maintain hegemonic control over the relationship among past, present, and future. The state presents itself as the legitimate heir to the revolutionary heritage, ignoring the competing claims of peasants to revolutionary history. Stressing that Article 27 of the constitution, Mexico's Agrarian Reform Law, is based on Zapata's ideals, government officials remind the peasants of Morelos of their debt to their own local hero. But, as Judith Friedlander (1975: 156) noted in Hueyapan,

What was singularly missing from all the patriotic fanfare was the integration of the villagers' local history into what was supposed to be a Morelos state holiday...not one speech delivered about Zapata and the Revolution mentioned the fact that two villagers reputedly signed the Plan de Ayala or that the Hueypenos themselves personally participated in the suffering during the long struggle for 'Land and Liberty.'

This systematic exclusion reflects the paradox of a state whose national identity rests on an ideology of revolutionary unity. To incorporate the history of people's participation in the revolution into national ceremonial would be to acknowledge both to the government and to the people that the latter have the power to change the government. On the one hand, reminders of the power that lies dormant in the Mexican people are to be avoided. On the other, when the state systematically excludes the participation of its citizens from celebrations of their history, it

relinquishes control over the creation of a mediating unity between civil society and the state. The result is not that people forget the past, but rather that the state appears as the usurper of history.

### Local History

In the state of Morelos, the debate over authenticity began soon after the assassination of Emiliano Zapata. In 1926, six years after the assassination, Robert Redfield (1930: 203) recorded a *corrido* (a traditional form of folk song) in Morelos that tells of Zapata's sending another man to the fatal negotiating session. The *corrido* concludes,

Es positivo y no hay que dudar/Pues se engañaron porque a Zapata/Ni una razón  
le han de poder dar. [It is certain and cannot be doubted/But they were deceived  
about Zapata/They cannot put Zapata down. Translation in original.]

Local stories emphasized distinguishing features of the 'real Zapata': his missing finger or the absence of an identifying scar on the corpse the government displayed (O'Malley 1986; Redfield 1930; Womack 1969). The debates persist. An informant pointed out the statue of Zapata in Cuernavaca:

They put the horse at a gallop with all four legs off the ground to symbolize that  
Zapata died in battle. They are trying to convince us that they were able to kill him,  
but we know that it is not true.

Buena Vistans tell stories about the revolution, not only to share painful memories, but also because they view themselves as custodians of the 'authentic' image of Zapata.<sup>8</sup> Similar to others in the state of Morelos, they think of their community as revolutionary and Zapata as a *local* hero.

The significance of the revolution to Buena Vistans' sense of history exceeds the ten-year period in which they struggled with Zapata against government troops. Unlike Ilngot headhunters, who Renato Rosaldo (1980) reports are fairly accurate in their dating of historical events, Buena Vistans' memories of history ignore chronology. Without making reference to dates, people discuss events as having occurred immediately after the revolution or in the contemporary period. They further distinguish these two periods as the time after the revolution when 'the people were strong and united' and the present when the 'rich and the government are

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<sup>8</sup> Today, most anthropologists assume the existence of multiple voices when describing any facet of a culture (see Hastrup 1990). While I approve of this trend, in the case of Buena Vistans' ideological confrontations with the state over revolutionary history Buena Vistans do speak with one voice. This does not mean that individual Buena Vistans always agree on specific historical events, but they do agree that the state has usurped their history for political purposes. This level agreement might be due to the unique position of the state of Morelos in the Mexican revolution. Morelos was one of the most unified regions of Mexico in its defense of agrarian politics (Knight 1991).

strong and united.’ This blurring of time invites more people to participate in the telling of historical narratives. Regardless of their ages, the *ancianos* remember the revolution.

Government soldiers kidnapped Doña Angelina during the revolution. She, along with other *ancianos* such as Don Pedro (rumored to have been a Zapatista general) link the community to its revolutionary history. They are among the few living members of the community old enough to remember the revolution. Doña Celia claims to have been the lover of a Zapatista, but other Buena Vistans told me that the revolution was already over when she was kidnapped. Proudly, she showed me a picture of herself as a young girl with her Zapatista lover in his white uniform. She told me,

When I was 14 years old a young Zapatista came and took me from the house. I was scared and crying, but he told me that he would not hurt me and that I was lucky because if someone else had taken me they might kill me. I lived with him in the mountains. It was the first time I had sex with anyone. I cried when he told me that he had a wife because I realized that he could not marry me; I was afraid that no one else would. He told me not to worry because the other marriage was only done by a priest in the church, and he would marry me in a civil ceremony. I was with him for four years during the revolution. There were many other women who had been taken from villages living in the mountains with the Zapatistas. He and I loved each other very much. He used to tell me “Celia I want to put you in my back pocket and take you wherever I go.” After four years he was killed in battle.

In contrast to the government’s focus on individual heroes, Buena Vistans emphasize their link to the Zapatista fighters. They talk of the Zapatistas guarding the mountainside to warn the villagers of approaching government troops and of the attacks they endured because of their support for the Zapatistas. But, the stories of those who *lived* the revolution are less utopian and romantic than those who tell the tales second hand. Doña Angelina remembered being forced to walk the mountains in tattered clothes, “with bugs all over—in my hair, in my clothes, in my eyes.” Another women who had been a little girl recalled her fear when government troops invaded the town,

I was hiding behind a bush and government troops passed right in front of me. The Zapatistas promised to protect us, but when the troops came there was nothing they could do.

In village lore, the Zapatistas won the revolution, and many admire and respect President Obregón for formally ratifying the agrarian reforms that Zapata had already carried out. One women who had sought refuge in Guerrero during the last two years of the revolution explained that when she returned the Zapatistas were in control of the municipal offices. She said, “They redistributed all the land so that everyone had land.” I asked if Zapata expropriated the land of the rich. In accord with Zapata’s image as a friend of both rich and poor, she replied, “Oh no, the government destroyed the land of the rich—not Zapata.”

Stories of the past help to distinguish between insiders and outsiders, between *gente de acá* (insiders) and *gente de afuera* (outsiders). For insiders the physical features of the landscape are teeming with memories of the past, places where people hid not only themselves but also their wealth during the revolution (see Price 1983). One informant refused to tell me a tale until we could ‘walk’ through the story: one had to stand in the very spot where the events took place to experience the story.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, one cannot really claim to know a person unless one knew his or her family’s role in the revolution—were they one of the last of the rich caciques who aligned with the government or were they Zapatistas.

By emphasizing their participation in the Zapatista revolutionary struggle and the connection between their memories and features of local geography, Buena Vistans legitimize their versions of history. In fact, Buena Vistan ‘memories’ of the revolution draw on locally based oral histories as well as images of Zapata borrowed selectively from government propaganda and history books. Nonetheless, Buena Vistans use the notion of authenticity to disguise the borrowing and to distinguish the ‘truth’ of local history from the ‘lies’ of official history.

Gazing at a picture of Emiliano Zapata in the Cortez Museum, a 62-year-old member of the Committee questioned, “Where do you think he borrowed that suit and tie?” The picture, a replica of which hangs in government offices, presents Zapata in a wool suit, with a silk scarf. My informant continued, “Zapata never owned a suit, he was a cowboy—he would not dress like that.” “Why do you think they present him in a suit?” I asked. The reply surprised me, “They want to make fun of him so that everyone will laugh at him. I will show you an authentic picture of Zapata when we get home.”

When we returned to Buena Vista my informant invited me to view a banner hanging on the wall in his house. Zapata mounted upon a white horse looked gently down on a peasant who gazed up at the revolutionary leader with admiration. The revolutionary hero’s hand rested lightly on the campesino’s shoulder. The image is borrowed from a statue of Emiliano Zapata erected in Cautla, Morelos in 1932 when the government was transforming Zapata into a paternalistic apostle of agrarianism. My informant announced proudly, “*This* is the authentic Zapata who cared about the campesinos and listened to their problems. He was with the campesinos.” He had first encountered this image of Zapata when the government paid for him to attend a celebration in honor of Emiliano Zapata in Cautla. He remembered both the celebration and the image. The power of the moment etched into his mind an image of the authentic Zapata which he then drew upon to instruct me about the ‘real’ Zapata.

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<sup>9</sup> Halbwachs (1950/80) defines collective memory as the times past that are retained by a group that shares a common location in space and time. He contrasts collective memory with history in that the former is continuous rather than broken up by the discreet units of time. Furthermore, Halbwach argues that the need to write history is aroused only when a subject is too distant in the past to allow for remembrance.



On my return in 1991 I was shocked to discover that my informant had hung a picture of Emiliano Zapata in suit and tie on the wall adjacent to the 'authentic' Zapata. I could not bring myself to remind him that this was the same picture he had so vehemently rejected two years earlier. I feared that he would view my question as a lack of respect, but I did ask what he liked about the picture. "It has Zapata's handwriting—go look at it closely," he replied. Neither one of us brought up the issue of the suit and tie. Perhaps, he had forgotten how much the image had bothered him two years earlier. At any rate, the picture added to his collection of Zapata memorabilia which now includes a copy of the Zapata's Plan de Ayala.

Like many people whose history depends on memory, Buena Vistans' visions of history reflect an interest in the events themselves; not the passage of time per se. Thus, they do not conceptualize time along a continuum marked by the passage of days, months, years, or centuries, but in relation to human activities some of which warrant remembering while others can be forgotten. Memory is intimately tied to the needs of the present; what has been forgotten may be resurrected or re-remembered as the anxieties of the present call to mind new dimensions of the past. In other ways, however, Buena Vistans' visions of history differ from the view of the past found in primarily oral cultures.

Anthropologists who have studied groups whose knowledge of history depends primarily on memory report that the passage of time is disguised in poetic recitations of place names, genealogies, and concepts. Michelle Rosaldo (1980) describes the exhilaration he experienced when after many months of fieldwork among the Ilongot, he realized that the, to him, tedious discussions of places provided a key to their past. Similarly, Comoroff and Comoroff (1987) almost overlooked the passage of time disguised in the contrast between work and labor among the Tswana of South Africa. These findings strengthen theories about a contrast between memory based on verbal skills and memory influenced by written texts (Ong 1988). Literacy may enhance the possibilities for a type of plot development that allows the reader/listener to experience the passage of linear time (Ricoeur 1984).

The narrative structure of Buena Vistans' historical tales reveals the impact of written history. Unlike Rosaldo and Comoroff and Comoroff, I understood immediately when I was hearing a story about the past. In Committee Meetings an *anciano* would stand and say, "Listen *chamacos* (young people), I remember when..." The structure of the story followed a sequence of events developed around a major crisis in the past that informed the present-day problem. However, unlike the reading of written history, the telling of tales seems to invite the storyteller to play with events in the story. *Ancianos* modified the stories slightly each time they were told. At first, I was frustrated because I thought that they were purposely trying to deceive me about the history of the community; later, I realized that the telling of the tale depended upon the circumstances that inspired the storyteller. Three months into my research, Margarita, a young

single mother with three children, started coming regularly to the Office of Communal Resources to request a plot of land. Although the Commissioner told her that there was no land available, she began assisting the Committee in its inspections. When the Committee took back land, Margarita would ask if she could have that lot. I believe the ensuing discussion was as confusing for her as it was for me. Some members would say that she should take the land immediately while others expressed concern that she and her family might be physically harmed by those who had illegally taken over the land in the first place. Nonetheless, opinion in the Committee was shifting in favor of her request for land. The Vice-Commissioner complained, "How can some have so much, and this poor women does not even have a piece of land on which to build her house?"

One day when Margarita asked if she could have a plot of land the Vice-Commissioner replied,

I remember how we started the Colonia Esperanza. Doña Juanita had been kicked out of the house that she was renting. She went to the Commissioner of Communal Resources and asked for a plot of land; he told her that there was none. Then, she came to me. I told her to get her things together and we would go up on the mountainside and build her a house. She brought all kinds of things: sticks, iron, whatever scraps she could find. We built her a house. Then, we went to the Commissioner and told him to measure the piece of land. There was nothing he could do but give her the land because with her flimsy house she had demonstrated her need. That was the beginning of the Colonia Esperanza. Today there are twenty families living there.

Margarita heard this story several times before she finally understood the significance of the story for her own situation. One day, shortly after the Committee had taken back communal land from a wealthy man, she took her wood and corrugated iron and a few cardboard boxes to the spot. There, she built her house. When I asked the Vice-Commissioner about her actions, he told me the story of the settlement of Colonia Esperanza, concluding, "there is nothing we can do—she has demonstrated her need."<sup>10</sup>

In contrast to the state's view of history which emphasizes that revolutionary leaders have bestowed agrarian reform on the population, the view of history that emerges in local narratives stresses ordinary people who take charge of situations to resolve their problems. These local-level narratives accord significance to the little things that Buena Vistans do in their everyday lives. When Doña Juanita went to Colonia Esperanza to build her house she was only a poor women who had no place to live. Today, in the tales of Buena Vistans she is the founder of a colonia. Told in the context of Margarita's present-day housing problem, the story of Doña Juanita

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<sup>10</sup> I believe that the ambiguities that surround the process of distributing land are a response to the tenuous legal position of the Office of Communal Resources and of the Committee. The state-level Department of Agrarian Reform has the legal power to distribute land, but because of the bureaucratic practices I have described many requests for land are ignored. By providing subtle encouragement to people they believed legitimately needed land, the Committee tried to communicate that they would support their right to the land if their takeover were to be contested.

becomes a reminder of Margarita's connection to past struggles and her potential place in the town's history.

Many local stories highlight the subversion of everyday practices associated with rituals of appeal in the agrarian bureaucracy. The actors in the stories get what they want not by pleading but by taking what they rightfully deserve. The justice implied in the Agrarian Reform law is served only when people act independently of the bureaucracy. Thus, the stories present a way of resolving the contradiction in a state that has incorporated the ideology of agrarian reform but diluted its power with a cumbersome bureaucracy.

Historical narratives of the revolution idealize the power of community unity. One woman explained,

If something happens you need to unite all the people...if the pueblo is united it is never defeated... In the face of a united pueblo the government has no power...when I go [to demonstrations] I go not just for me but for those who need more than me.

This woman's words capture the impact of Buena Vista's revolutionary history on local political ideology. Buena Vistans continue to see themselves as engaged in a struggle against the state in which community unity is essential. They believe that their history as a Zapatista village gives them a special role in defending the principles and morals of the revolution against the present day government.

## CONCLUSION

The struggle of Buena Vistans to retain a distinctive community identity is linked to the problem of boundaries. At the level of everyday practices Buena Vista is intimately tied to the state. Penetrations of the community by the state bureaucracy subvert community identity and integrate Buena Vistans into a network of practices associated with bureaucratic corruption and exchange of favors. Regardless of how central such an idea might be to community identity, to speak of Buena Vista as a bounded culture and community is misleading. Nonetheless, that which cannot be accomplished at the level of structure can be asserted at the level of discourse.

The practice of storytelling is central to boundary creation because it enables Buena Vistans to create an aura of a pure, local authentic history even when storytellers borrow from the state. The performance overpowers the borrowing. Through the narrative form the storyteller draws on deeply embedded cultural knowledge to encourage his or her audience to experience the passage of time. Recognizing history as the creation of actors linked through kinship, shared geographic local and political ideology, *ancianos* allow memory to play with past events so as to

maintain their relevance to present-day struggles.<sup>11</sup> As a result, Buena Vistans differ from those professional historical interpreters who experience history with a sense of the alien (see Gadamer 1979: 155).

The act of telling a story accents the incompatibility of nationalistic ideologies and local community identity. Buena Vistan storytellers draw on local images that connect past and present, images that the state's nationalistic ideology must forsake if it is to appeal to a wider audience. Yet, the practice of storytelling cannot be understood separately from the construction of official history. Ironically, the state's revolutionary ideology has fueled the 'remembering' of history in local stories.

The emphasis Buena Vistans place on the 'auténtico' reflects the problematic relationship between the pure and the impure, the true and the false, that emerges out of the state's appropriation of historical images. In this sense Buena Vistans' discourses of authenticity arise from a boundary problem similar to that which informs other discourses of authenticity. The term 'authentic' is always enclosed in the semiology of the 'inauthentic' because the discourse of authenticity emerges in a world in which economic and political power link a variety of disparate modes of production and political practices. To set some of these practices apart from others involves the construction of a contestable boundary. Thus, the determination of the authenticity of an object or practice is always subject to competing claims so that authenticity cannot be merely asserted. Authenticity must be experienced by an audience moved by the power of a performance.<sup>12</sup>

Performance is the difference that makes the difference between competing claims of authenticity. The term authenticity implies an erasure of the web of connections that link the authentic and the inauthentic but what makes that erasure meaningful is the ability to perform the difference. By paying attention to what is performed we learn as much about the inauthentic as we do about the authentic.

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<sup>11</sup> Analyzing native historical accounts from the US Northwest Coast, Harkin (1988: 101) observes "that the fundamental character of the event is that of a symbol rather than a quasi-physical occurrence... Principles of selection, memory, and narrative clearly place events within rather than outside the realm of culturally constituted reality." Briggs (1988) notes that while Mexican Americans in New Mexico have had their land and water expropriated, the state has not been able to gain control over the talk of the elders. He attributes the resulting counterhegemonic quality of the talk of the elders to the stylistic devices employed in performances and also to the difficulty that those not raised in this context have in understanding the stories.

<sup>12</sup> Cohen (1988) captures the negotiated quality of authenticity when he suggests that "'authenticity,' rather than a given, primitive concept, is more usefully conceived as a negotiable concept whose precise connotation is different for intellectuals, experts and ordinary members of the public..." Similarly, Crew and Sioms (1991: 163) maintain, "Authenticity is not about factuality or reality. It is about authority. Objects have no authority; People do."

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