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MARKETING MAYAS

Ethnic Tourism Promotion in Mexico

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Abstract: The role of the federal and state-level government, of the national intelligentsia, and of the local entrepreneurial bourgeoisie in the development of ethnic tourism in Mexico has been complex. This study focuses on the Maya culture area in the Chiapas highlands, in and around the mestizo-dominated city of San Cristóbal de las Casas. Locally, the government has acted as a general modernizing agent and thus prepared the ground for ethnic tourism. But the development of a specific tourist infrastructure and the marketing of Mayas has been largely a response of the local mestizo bourgeoisie to a burgeoning new economic niche. **Keywords:** ethnic tourism, government, tourism influence, Mexico.

Résumé: Mayas à vendre: stratégies mexicaines de promotion du tourisme ethnique. Le rôle du gouvernement fédéral et régional, de l'intelligentsia nationale et de la bourgeoisie d'affaires locale dans le développement du tourisme au Mexique a été complexe. Cette étude porte sur la zone Maya de la région montagneuse de Chiapas, et plus spécialement sur la ville de San Cristóbal de las Casas, dominée par les métis. Au niveau local, le gouvernement a été un agent de modernisation, et, en tant que tel, a préparé le terrain pour le tourisme ethnique. Mais le développement d'une infrastructure spécifiquement destinée au tourisme et à la "mise en vente" des Mayas a été largement le résultat d'initiatives privées par la bourgeoisie métisse locale en réponse à la création de nouveaux créneaux économiques. **Mots-clés:** tourisme ethnique, gouvernement, influence du tourisme au Mexique.

INTRODUCTION

Mexico is a uniquely interesting case for the study of ethnic tourism and especially for an analysis of the role of the state in marketing its indigenous population. First, Mexico is a major tourist destination. Some 6 million foreigners visit Mexico annually, and bring into the country approximately \$1.5 billion more than Mexicans spend abroad. The hospitality industry generates some 3% of the Gross Domestic Product and employs close to one-tenth of the labor force, including both direct and indirect tourism-generated jobs (Hiernaux and Rodríguez 1990). However, at most 10% of Mexican tourism, both domestic and international, could be described as cultural and ethnic. The remaining 90% are of the sun-sand-and-sea variety and concentrated in a dozen or so major coastal resorts aptly nicknamed "Club Mex" by Casagrande (1988).

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Second, the Mexican government is extremely tourism-conscious. It has made enormous investments, with extensive participation of foreign capital, in the development (some would say, the despoliation) of vast coastal resorts, complete with a modern infrastructure of jet airports, multilane roads, and public services. The Secretariat of Tourism is a cabinet-level unit of the federal government and publishes a vast amount of literature, and several state-level governments have their own tourism offices. Numerous schools train personnel in the hospitality industry. A recent encyclopedia of Mexican tourism runs to 20 volumes (Romero 1988). In the past, relatively little investment and attention have been devoted to ethnic tourism. However, official and private concern for the development of ethnic and cultural tourism has markedly increased in the last decade, particularly in connection with the international project of the Ruta Maya, which involves a joint attempt by Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, and Honduras to promote ecotourism and salvage the few remaining patches of the Meso-American tropical rain forests in the Maya cultural area.

Third, Mexico has a long-standing tradition, extending back to the 1910-1917 revolution, of defining its nationhood in terms of *mestizaje* (with the double meaning of the genetic blending of European, American and African populations, and the cultural blending of indigenous and imported traditions into a new synthesis of Mexican culture). Some trace the Mexican tradition of *indigenismo*, or idealization of the indigenous cultures, back to the pronouncements of Bartolomé de las Casas, who was briefly bishop in San Cristóbal in the 16th century. Certainly, *mestizaje* as a dual process of biological interbreeding and acculturation to the language and culture of the Spanish conquerors began at the instant of contact. Favre (1984:347-355) discusses a conservative, paternalist form of *indigenismo* in the 19th century San Cristóbal elites. However, *mestizaje* and *indigenismo* as principal components of a self-conscious ideology to define Mexican nationhood are largely outgrowths of the Revolution (1910-1917). At the time of independence, Mexico was a racial caste society with Indians at the bottom of the hierarchy. By the mid-19th century, it had a president of Zapotec Indian descent (Benito Juárez), and it was moving toward a society stratified more by class than by race. In the aftermath of the revolution (1910-1917), a new concept of *indigenismo* was taking shape as a well-defined ideology, largely as the result of the work of Manuel Gamio in the Valley of Teotihuacan (Gamio 1922). The indigenous civilizations of Meso-America were idealized and accepted as a central component of contemporary Mexican culture, while the Spanish contributions to the hybrid culture were now often de-emphasized or even denied and denigrated. This new consciousness of things Indian culminated in the formation of a Department of Indian Affairs in 1936, and of the Instituto Nacional Indigenista (INI) in 1948 (Favre 1984:356; Riding 1985:202).

According to what became the quasi-official ideology of the educated, urban intelligentsia that both elaborated *indigenismo* and controls the state, Mexico is a nation of bronze. (The double symbolism of the simile refers to the fact that bronze is an alloy of copper and tin — a yellow and a white metal — and to the brown color of the alloy.) Official

indigenismo is evident everywhere in Mexico: in history school books; in museums, (especially in the stunning Museo Nacional de Antropología e Historia in Mexico City) (Kaplan 1993; Ramírez Vázquez 1968); in the national passion for archeology; in the hordes of Mexican visitors to the great archeological sites; in the statuary of the Paseo de la Reforma and Chapultepec, and in reconstructed architectural complexes such as the Plaza de las Tres Culturas in Mexico City; in the adulation of Benito Juárez; in the numerous frescoes in public edifices by Orozco, Rivera, Siqueiros, and other famous muralists; in the performances of the Ballet Folclórico de México, and in countless other elite cultural products (Riding 1985).

Fourth, while Mexico today is overwhelmingly a Spanish-speaking country with a dominant culture that is about as neo-European as that of the United States, some 7.9% of its 81.2 million total population in 1990 are still native speakers of indigenous languages. Nearly four fifths (79%) of the 6.4 million Indians in Mexico are bilingual in Spanish, but they represent about one fourth of indigenous language speakers in the Western Hemisphere (Estados Unidos mexicanos 1992). (The corresponding figure in Canada and the United States combined is probably well under a million.) Other countries, notably Guatemala, Peru, Bolivia, and Ecuador, have much larger proportions of indigenous speakers, but their total populations are much smaller than Mexico's.

The Mexican definition of who is Indian as distinguished from mestizo is cultural and linguistic, not racial. Perhaps 80% to 85% of the Mexican population are of partly or predominantly Amerindian origin. But, unless they speak an indigenous language, they generally call themselves mestizos, and are classified as nonindigenes in the census. The government recognizes over 50 "indígena" groups, heavily concentrated in the Central Valley, the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, the Yucatán Peninsula, and the highlands of Chiapas. The term *indio* is scarcely ever used in Mexico, except in a pejorative sense. Accepted Mexican usage for at least three or four decades has been to refer to speakers of aboriginal languages as *indigenas*. The alternatives to "Indian" in English are rather stilted (e.g., "indigene"), used in a different geographical setting (e.g., "aborigene" in Australia), or equally inappropriate (e.g., "native," since most Mexicans who are not Indians also regard themselves, and indeed *are* native to their country). Therefore, the clear misnomer "Indian" will be used here, albeit reluctantly, since the term is not pejorative in English.

ETHNIC TOURISM PROMOTION IN MEXICO

It might seem from the above that Mexican Indians occupy a respected and enviable place in the Mexican nation. In fact, they are the most politically, economically, and culturally marginalized sector of the population (Riding 1985). This marginalization has a triple component. First, in *class* terms, Indians are almost all peasants, often nearly or totally landless. Politically, power is monopolized by the urban elite, and, economically, the rural areas always stand far behind the cities in development and income. Thus, Indians are marginal because of their overwhelming class position as poor peasants (Favre 1984; Pozas and

Pozas 1971; Wasserstrom 1983). Second, Indians are *culturally* marginal because of their unfamiliarity with Spanish, the formal educational system, and all the dominant institutions of Mexican culture. Indians are not simply peasants; they are a Lumpen-peasantry, outside the cultural mainstream of Mexico. This is not to say that Indians constitute an undifferentiated poor peasantry. There are substantial wealth differences between Indians, and a small minority of them have become successful small and even medium-scale entrepreneurs. However, many of those who do gradually become assimilated to mestizos. There are also many factors in the organization of indigenous communities which are conducive to the dissipation and redistribution of wealth, notably the *cargo* system (Cancian 1965; Favre 1984; Gossen 1974; Pozas 1959; Pozas and Pozas 1971; Wasserstrom 1983; Vogt 1966).

The third component of Indian marginality is *ecological*. Indians are heavily concentrated in what Aguirre Beltrán (1979) has called "regions of refuge" (i.e., the more isolated, high-elevation, agriculturally destitute areas, where they were able to retain their culture because their habitat was sufficiently devoid of resources to minimize Spanish and later mestizo encroachments). Ironically, it is this extreme marginalization that now makes Indians a prime tourism attraction for affluent First World travelers in search of the primitive, authentic other. The backwaters of Mexico have become a prime venue for the encounter between what MacCannell (1992) has called the postmoderns and the ex-primitives.

Notwithstanding the *indigenismo* of the urban elite, and the Marxist rhetoric of *indiginophilia*, which is *de rigueur* in the Mexican intelligentsia, many Mexicans at all class levels have, in fact, highly ambivalent attitudes towards Indians. Admiration for the greatness of the Indian past is fully compatible with disgust and contempt for the abject Indian present (Colby and van den Berghe 1961; Favre 1984; Riding 1985). In the world view of many Mexicans, contemporary Indians are degenerate remnants of great civilizations shattered by the Spanish Conquest (from which most politically correct Mexicans emphatically disassociate themselves, thus avoiding any sense of responsibility for the Indian predicament). Most mestizos have traditionally looked down on Indians as ignorant, superstitious, backward, alcoholic wretches who impede the progress of the country. Mestizo attitudes have been more of paternalistic condescension tainted with fatalistic pessimism than one of competitive, aggressive dislike or hatred, because Indians are too poor, too powerless, and too invisible to constitute a threat. To a lesser degree, many urbanites exhibit the same kind of prejudice towards peasants in general, whether Indian or not, and the syndrome is not very different from the attitudes of many North Americans towards Mexicans in general. The Indian, in a sense, is seen by all those "above" him as a kind of hyper-peasant, hyper-Mexican stereotype. The stereotype is always projected downward in the global hierarchy of power, wealth, and prestige. The Indian is merely the bottom rung in that ladder, a Fourth World denizen of a Third World country whose elite live in a First World enclave of Miami bank accounts, Visa credit cards, and Zona Rosa restaurants.

At the local level of state action, the relationship between the govern-

ment and Indians has been a complex one, with a number of ideological components. Perhaps the dominant stance of successive Mexican governments towards Indians has been to ignore them. First, official government ideology has always been antiracist. Thus, the Mexican government, unlike, and perhaps in reaction against, its colonial predecessor, has usually resisted official recognition of Indians (or anyone else for that matter) as a special, ascribed, descent group. Census definitions of Indians, for instance, have always been based on current cultural characteristics of individuals, not of communities, such as knowledge of an indigenous language or type of footwear worn (shoes versus sandals or barefoot).

Second, the liberal, individualistic, universalistic legacy of the *Leyes de Reforma* of the mid-19th century remains dominant. Benito Juárez was of pure Zapotec descent, however, intellectually, he was as much a child of the French Enlightenment as Thomas Jefferson. In fact, the *Leyes de Reforma* were the Mexican counterpart of the US "termination policy" *vis à vis* Indian land rights. Juárez's liberal reforms established private property in land and abolished any residual special status that Indians still had. Henceforth, all Mexicans were proclaimed equal before the law.

Third, the Mexican Revolution of 1910–1917 and the subsequent land redistribution and communalization (*ejidos*) all followed a class model that took little account of the special position of Indians. Some Indians were incorporated into *ejidos*, but most were not, and most *ejidos* were made up of mestizo peasants.

Only after the Second World War, did the Mexican government, under the impetus of a number of distinguished anthropologists like Alfonso Caso, Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán, Alfonso Villa Rojas, Julio de la Fuente, and others, begin to take cognizance of the fact that Indians faced some special problems, especially of political exclusion and economic exploitation by regional mestizo elites. An Instituto Nacional Indígenista (INI) was established in 1948 by the federal government, and largely run by reformist anthropologists who redefined Indian policy in terms that might be best characterized as benign, voluntary assimilationism (Colby and van den Berghe 1961). INI established a dozen regional centers that served essentially as community development agencies, the first and largest in San Cristóbal in 1950 for the Tzotzil-Tzeltal zone (Favre 1984: 357). They built access roads to Indian villages; opened schools staffed by specially trained Indian teachers and community *promotores*; published school primers in Indian languages and taught basic literacy in the mother tongue; promoted cooperatives to help Indians escape exploitation by mestizos; organized Indian communities to vote for the official party (the Partido Revolucionario Institucional or PRI) and to elect Indians to municipal offices; intervened to protect Indians against illegal acts of ethnic discrimination by mestizos, and so on. In effect, INI was a vast modernization and empowerment program for Indians, intended to equip them with the cultural and linguistic skills of the dominant mestizos so that they could effectively deal with mestizos as equals, and facilitating Indian access to markets, to economic resources, and to political power, at least at the local level.

All this, however, was done within a legal and constitutional framework that gave Indians no special juridical status, either as individuals or as communities. Furthermore, the explicit assumption of the INI program was that, while Indians had a perfect right to retain their own language and culture, the reality of the dynamics of modernization would lead to gradual absorption into the dominant culture. While nothing was done explicitly to accelerate acculturation or to discourage Indian practices, INI gave Indians greater access to literacy, Spanish-medium schools, and other forms of "human capital," which were overwhelmingly expressed in the medium of the dominant, "national" culture. Similarly, very little active support was given to the retention of Indian culture, e.g., by giving official recognition to Indian customary law or to Indian languages as media of instruction in schools. (Mother-tongue literacy programs were instituted, lasting two years in special schools, but only to facilitate the transition to mainstream Spanish-medium schools.) The aim of INI programs was clearly the harmonious incorporation of Indians into the mainstream of the Mexican nation, as equal citizens. INI was certainly not hostile to Indian culture, but it was not operating within an ideological model that envisaged a structure of permanent, institutionalized multiculturalism. INI programs were squarely in the Mexican tradition of political centralism and Jacobinism, identifying the nation with the dominant, Spanish-medium, mestizo culture.

In the 1980s, the political and ideological climate changed again, and led to a reexamination of the relationship of the Mexican government to its Indian minorities. It is always difficult to ascribe causation to ideological shifts, but at least three possible factors might be suggested. One was the increasing popular challenge to the official ruling party (the PRI) as the hegemonic political force in Mexico. For the first time, the Indian vote might conceivably make a difference at the state and federal level.

Another influence on the process of ideological change was probably external, namely the resurgence of ethnic nationalism throughout the world; the emergence of pan-Indian movements, such as the American Indian Movement (AIM) in the United States; and the increasing official, legal recognition of multiculturalism, ethnic affirmative action, and special ethnic group rights in North America. Mexicans are always reluctant to admit influences from the North. But, at a "Congress of Indigenous Peoples" held under PRI auspices in San Cristóbal de las Casas in 1990, many ideas were floated that sounded much like the initial phase of North American multiculturalism one or two decades earlier. One of the slogans, for instance, was "It is unjust to treat as equals people who are unequal," a frontal attack on the fundamental legal basis of the Mexican Constitution that all citizens are equal before the law. There were now demands for special recognition of Indian communities as legal entities with special communal land rights, and rights to exclude nonIndians from access to some resources.

The latest political event to shake the foundations of the Mexican government's relationship to its indigenous population was the January 1994 insurrection of thousands of Chiapas peasants, overwhelmingly Indians, an account of which will appear at the end of this paper.

Restructuring Influence of Tourism in San Cristóbal

A third factor in changing attitudes of both the government and private individuals toward Indians is unquestionably tourism, the principal focus of this paper. Most of the first-hand evidence comes from the fieldwork area, the highlands of Chiapas, in and around the regional market city of San Cristóbal de las Casas, which over the last quarter century, has become a thriving center of ethnic tourism (Colby 1966; Colby and van den Berghe 1961; van den Berghe 1992, 1994) (see Figure 1).

At the governmental level, the main project involving specifically ethnic tourism is the Ruta Maya, an attempt to promote ecologically friendly tourism in the Maya cultural area (which covers the states of Yucatán, Campeche, Quintana Roo, Tabasco, and Chiapas in Mexico, and the republics of Belize, Guatemala and Honduras), to halt the

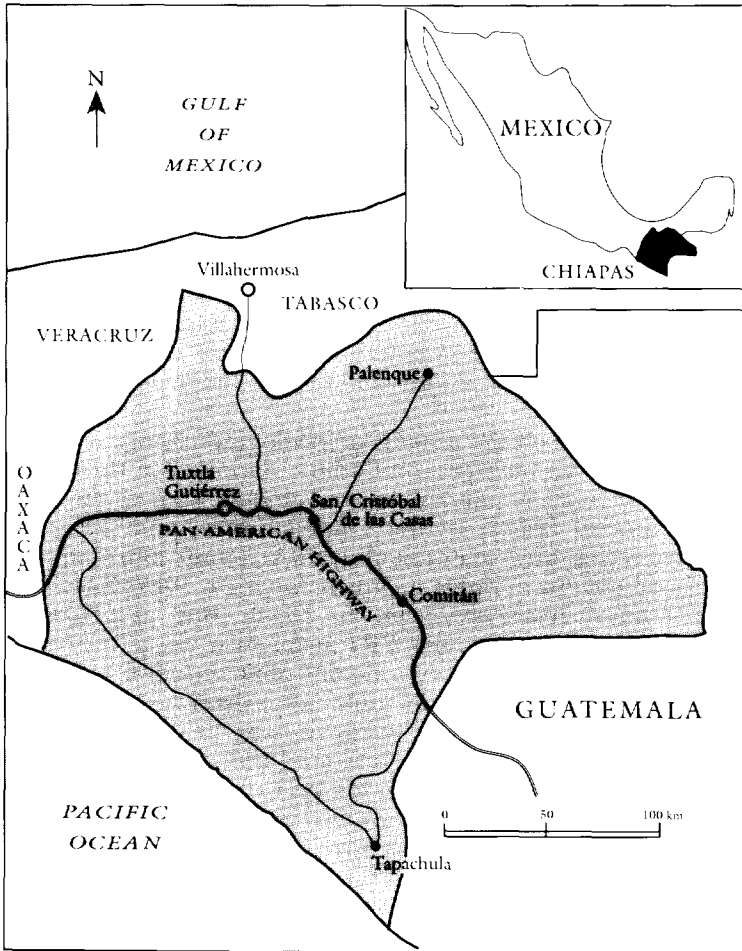


Figure 1

pillage of archeological sites by grave robbers, and to save the remaining patches of tropical rain forest from being converted into cattle pastures. The vast area contains spectacular forest and mountain scenery; a multiplicity of Maya ruins, some well-known and accessible (Tikal, Copán, Uxmal, Chichén Itzá, Tulum, Palenque), but most still unexcavated and difficult to reach; and some seven to eight million speakers of more than a score of Maya languages who still live in culturally distinct village communities often located in idyllic mountain settings. The Ruta Maya project was featured in the *National Geographic* (Garrett and Garrett 1989), and is now a title in the famous Australian backpack tourism series, *Lonely Planet*.

All governments concerned are in principle agreed that the region can benefit more from the renewable resource of ecotourism and ethnic tourism than from logging and ranching, especially now that perhaps 85% of the area has already been ecologically devastated. It remains to be seen whether the development of a tourism infrastructure of access roads, hotels, and so on, in such ecologically fragile regions as the Petén area of Guatemala and the Usumacinta River on the Guatemala-Mexico border can be accomplished without further accelerating the environmental destruction or disrupting the Indian communities. The project has become even more problematic since the 1994 uprising, which centered on that area. Preserving the remaining patches of forest means preventing land-hungry peasants from repeating the disastrous cycle of slash-and-burn agriculture followed by cattle ranching. As the richest and largest of the countries involved, Mexico will obviously play the key role in the success or failure of the project. The task is also most urgent in Mexico where the destruction of rain forest has been even more extensive than in the smaller Central American countries. Little can be expected from Guatemala which has the largest Maya-speaking population, but which has been plagued by repressive military governments and civil wars for the last four decades.

At the level of the Chiapas state government, a Comisión de Fomento Turístico (Tourist Development Commission) publishes and distributes maps and other literature, organizes some bus tours, mostly for Mexicans, and staffs a number of offices in tourist locations. The office in San Cristóbal has two employees, one English-speaking, who give out information. The walls of the office are covered with attractive posters that feature archeological sites (especially Palenque), Indian artifacts (mostly textiles), Spanish colonial architecture (mostly churches), and Maya Indians in traditional clothes. The emphasis on living Indians is relatively recent, however. A tourism map of Chiapas published jointly by the Chiapas State government and the nationalized bank Bancomer and dated 1981, for example, features two archeological motifs from Palenque on the front and back covers, and 15 smaller photographs inside. Of these, only one features living Indians (in a market scene in San Cristóbal), while two represent modern wooden sculptures of Indians made by nonIndians.

Consciousness of "living Mayas" as a marketable resource is most developed among local mestizos in San Cristóbal, and in the small resident expatriate community (mostly Europeans and North Ameri-

cans, many of whom are former tourists who stayed longer than they initially intended). In fact, the first "Maya-marketer" in San Cristóbal is the town's late grande dame, the Swiss widow of a Danish anthropologist, Trudy Blom, whose large 19th-century house on the fringe of town has served as a combination library, museum, stylish hostelry, and prime tourism attraction for nearly half-a-century (van den Berghe 1994). Starting in the 1950s, she organized mule-pack expeditions for well-heeled adventure tourists to the then highly inaccessible ruins of Bonampak and the Lacandón rain forest. She introduced the 300-or-so Lacandonese as the "purest" descendants of the classical Mayas, an isolated population unspoiled by Western civilization. In fact, the Lacandonese were an impoverished group of slash-and-burn horticulturalists, extensively missionized by Protestants. With their long, unbraided hair, their loose, white cotton gowns, and their simple subsistence technology, they made picturesque noble savages, with nice aquiline noses that could be convincingly juxtaposed to the bas-reliefs and paintings of Palenque and Bonampak. This mystique of living Indians as pure authentic descendants of an indigenous tradition appeals enormously to the tourist quest for authenticity, although many anthropologists have long documented that virtually every aspect of contemporary Indian culture is a complex blend of preHispanic and Hispanic elements, and that the present situation of Mexican Indians can only be understood in the context of five centuries of incorporation in capitalist world system, first under colonial rule and then under local elites (Aguirre Beltrán 1979; Colby and van den Berghe 1961; Favre 1984; Wasserstrom 1983).

Now that the Lacandonese sold "stone-age" bows and arrows to tourists in Palenque, San Cristóbal and elsewhere, the person who did most to put them on the tourism map pleaded to "leave them in peace." Her husband, Franz Blom, once predicted that the day would come when tourists would dress as Indians and Indians would dress in Western clothes. He added that he hoped he would not see that day. His wish was granted. He died in the early 60s, long before the first great tourist wave of the 1970s, but his prophecy came to pass. At least four women in San Cristóbal, two of them expatriates and two Mexican, commission hundreds of Indian weavers to produce panels of traditional design which they incorporate in fashionable designer gowns sold in boutiques in Mexico, the United States, and Canada. Conversely, poor Chamula women, who sell their weaving to tourists in San Cristóbal, dress their children in cheap, second-hand Western clothes imported in large bales from North America.

Before 1970, visitors to San Cristóbal were a mere trickle of well-heeled adventure tourists, North American motorists on their way to Central America, Mexicans from nearby lowland cities (especially Tuxtla Gutiérrez) in search of mountain scenery and a cool climate (San Cristóbal is at 2,200 meters of elevation), and, of course, linguists, historians, anthropologists, archeologists, and other scholars with a professional interest in the region. Starting in the late 1950s, an increasing number of Mexican, North American, French and other scholars began to turn San Cristóbal into a major center of research, making the Chiapas Highlands one of the best studied regions of Mex-

ico (Aguirre Beltrán 1979; Favre 1984; Gossen 1974; Pozas 1959; Siverts 1969; Wasserstrom 1983). Among the most visible and long-lasting of the research projects was the Harvard Chiapas Project (Cancian 1965; Colby 1966; Collier 1975; Colby and van den Berghe 1961; Vogt 1966, 1978). All these activities slowly stimulated a wider knowledge of, and interest in, the region, as well as contributed to the nucleus of a local intelligentsia interested in indigenous cultures. Conventional tourism, however, was still in its infancy until the 1960s. In a town of about 20 to 30,000 people, there were only three hotels, half-a-dozen restaurants, a small daily produce market occupying a small plaza, a single curio shop selling Indian artifacts on the central square, and a daily tourist flow of perhaps 10 to 20 persons.

Ethnic tourism barely existed locally, and was clearly in the "off-beat" phase, as characterized by Smith (1989:12). The few outsiders who came were mostly passing through, or interested in a cool highland vacation in a colorful, pleasant, quiet little colonial town. Interest in Indians was largely confined to anthropologists, linguists, and the Catholic and Protestant clergy. Local mestizos (known in Chiapas and Guatemala as *ladinos*) looked on Indians as a source of food products and of cheap agricultural labor; as backward, primitive, impoverished, inebriated, dirty, degenerate aliens, who came to town to trade but lived in outside villages; and generally as a nuisance and embarrassment to the civilized townspeople. A rigid etiquette of inequality and discrimination regulated ladino-Indian interaction (Colby and van den Berghe 1961; Favre 1984; Wasserstrom 1983). Certainly, the notion that Indians could become a marketable asset to the town was far from most mestizos' minds.

The 1970s changed all this in the space of a few years, and the change was externally induced. San Cristóbal was being "discovered" by "long-term-low-budget" travelers (Harron and Weiler 1992), mostly young backpackers and "alternative tourists," who passed the word that the town was cheap, pleasant, and interesting. The phase of "incipient mass tourism" (Smith 1989) had begun. Various "counter-culture" types became engrossed in local crafts, mostly pottery and weaving. This incipient mass tourism also coincided with several attempts, both public and private, to organize the production, distribution, and promotion of indigenous crafts, especially pottery and weaving. INI held its first weaving fair in 1972 and founded its first potters' cooperative in Amatenango in 1973, and the Fondo Nacional de Artesanías (FONART) opened a purchasing office in San Cristóbal in 1974, indirectly leading in 1977 to the formation of a large weaving cooperative, Sna Jolobil (Eber and Rosenbaum 1993:166-167; Nash 1993:147). Several other cooperatives with sales outlets were subsequently established both in San Cristóbal and in neighboring Indian communities, such as Tenejapa and Chenalhó, under the initiative of INI, the Catholic Archdiocese, and a number of private individuals, some of them foreigners (Morris 1984, 1987). Nash on a return visit to Amatenango, the main potters' town in the hinterland of San Cristóbal, noted the large increase in production of nontraditional items for the tourism trade, and the sprouting of stands along the Pan-American Highway for direct sale to tourists (1993:143-144). Clearly, by the 1970s, arti-

sanal production in Chiapas had joined other more central areas of Mexico in becoming integrated in a world capitalist market (García Canclini 1982; Novelo 1976).

An American anthropologist, a Belgian historian, and several Mexican intellectuals became involved in projects of adult literacy in Maya languages, in the production of plays by Indians, in organizing displays of Indian crafts and history in the local state museum, and in collecting and displaying for public viewing both archeological and contemporary Maya objects. Publications on local history, archeology, ethnography, textiles, and so on began to diffuse beyond specialists, and to be stocked, in both English and Spanish, by half-a-dozen little local bookstores (e.g., de Vos 1986; Morris 1984, 1987). Ethnographic films, slide shows, concerts of indigenous music, and talks became increasingly frequent events at the INI headquarters, the state museum, the house of Trudy Blom (Na Bolom), and various other locations.

In short, an interest in things Mayan, both ancient and modern, spread among the local intelligentsia, and the town's intellectual and cultural life became much more Indian-oriented than it had ever been. The town itself quintupled in size to a current population well in excess of 100,000, and the intelligentsia grew apace as research institutes and a Law and Social Science faculty of the Chiapas State University were established. Indians were now clearly fashionable among the town's intellectual elite.

Another factor in the change was the increasing influx of Indians, principally Chamulas, into San Cristóbal. Previously, Indians were frequent visitors to town, several thousand coming to the produce market every day. Over the last 15 years or so, tens of thousands of Indians (mostly Chamula converts to Protestantism who had been expelled from their communities for their unwillingness to continue participating in traditional ceremonial life) began to settle in town, largely as squatters in mushrooming peripheral slums. Several thousand Chamula women began to produce nontraditional weavings for sale to tourists. Several hundreds of these women became hawkers of Indian crafts in town and started a thriving new craft market for tourists near two outstanding colonial churches, next to the state museum and one of the cooperative stores.

Furthermore, the produce market of town was also moved north of town, not far from the craft market, and exploded in size to occupy much of the Northern edge of town. More and more Indians came to town as better roads cut down travel time and expenses from the outlying Indian communities. Thousands of Indians now came daily to San Cristóbal on scores of minibuses, shuttling between town and the Indian villages all around it. San Cristóbal, in short, was becoming rapidly indianized. It presented a bustling daily spectacle of ethnic diversity, a vast street theater of Maya culture.

Concurrent with all these changes, the flow of tourists kept increasing, now reaching daily arrivals of 400 to 800, depending on the season, and the types of tourists became increasingly diverse. The thrifty young backpackers were gradually followed by growing numbers of older, free-spending independent travelers and finally by organized

bus tours, originating in Mexico City or Cancún. Naturally, local entrepreneurs quickly seized economic opportunities opened by tourist demand for services. Hotels, restaurants, and tourist shops proliferated, nearly all owned and operated by the local mestizo middle and upper class or by resident expatriates, often married to Mexicans. These local mestizos were in the best position to fill the new economic niche. They often owned the old colonial houses, which they easily converted to attractive little hotels (now over 20 of them) or restaurants (over 50); they had access to bank credit; they had the know-how to operate in a capitalist system; they were fluent in a language which is not only the dominant one in Mexico, but cognate to that of most tourists; they were often educated professionals at ease in a cosmopolitan environment and with some knowledge of English or French; and, significantly they collectively already dominated the local economy and polity. With these advantages, they tended to become the middlemen in the tourist-Indian encounter.

By contrast, Indians had none of these advantages, and were thus principally confined to the role of "touree"; that is, as direct targets of the tourist quest who, voluntarily or not, were making a spectacle of themselves. Some groups, notably the Zinacantecos, did so with great reluctance, and sought to control access to their communities— e.g., by forbidding all photography throughout their villages, and by avoiding interaction with tourists. Others, such as the Chamulas, were more willing participants in the tourism scene, and took advantage of some of the opportunities offered, such as producing and selling textiles. But even Chamulas engaged in trade with tourists on a smaller and more precarious scale than the mestizo curio-shop owners. Nearly all Chamula vendors sell on the street, either in stationary locations in the craft market, or as hawkers. Their profit margin and total earnings are often quite small (under \$2 a day).

Initially, local mestizos had some difficulty in understanding the nature of ethnic tourism, and many of them still do. First, the interests of most tourists in San Cristóbal are generally alien to those of the Mexican middle class. To be sure, some Mexicans are also ethnic tourists, but most are not, and cultural tourism describes the orientation of the Mexican elite best. This includes an interest in Mexican history, in colonial art and architecture, in pre-Colombian archeology, and to some extent in contemporary crafts (mostly pottery and weaving), but not so much in the ethnography of living Indians.

Therefore, the local elite has no trouble in understanding that tourists are attracted to the unspoiled colonial setting of San Cristóbal, to its pleasant climate, and to the natural beauty of the mountainous region around town. These are the assets of which the local elite itself is proud. Furthermore, the Spanish colonial culture of the town is the one that the local elite see itself as heir to. These people are probably more conservative and Eurocentric than their class counterparts in many other parts of Mexico. While the town is named after the famous "defender of the Indians," Bartolomé de las Casas (who was bishop of Chiapas), the upper class is very regionalist, and sees itself as being closer to the more traditional and conservative Guatemala than to the rest of Mexico.

It took some time for local mestizos to realize that foreign tourists had come to see "living Mayas" rather than the colonial town, and to understand why tourists should find Indians interesting. To mestizos, Indians were part of the familiar daily scene and not exotic at all. Their attitudes towards Indians were condescendingly paternalistic at best, and sometimes even tinged with resentment and colored by the memory of bloody Indian revolts as late as the 19th century. Indeed, there was much about the behavior and attitudes of the young "hippie"-style tourists of the 1970s that local mestizos did not understand. Still today, backpackers are characterized as *turismo pobre* (poor tourism), not realizing that the frugal, parsimonious travel style of young Europeans and North Americans reflects much more an ideology of anticonsumerism, a search for authenticity, a return to nature, and a desire to stretch their budget over several months of leisurely *dolce far niente* in communion with the natives, than any real poverty. (Relatively few Mexicans travel in that style, at least not in their own country, though some Brazilians and other Latin Americans do.)

Once local mestizos, especially the entrepreneurial elite, started to understand the nature of ethnic tourism, they began to capitalize on it, and to market "their Indians" in a number of ways. First, an explicit linkage was made between living and dead Mayas. Accessible Maya ruins of any size are all several hours away by car or bus, but San Cristóbal now labels itself as a "gateway to Palenque" (some 200 km away), in competition with Villahermosa, and to other smaller Chiapas sites such as Bonampak, Altar de Sacrificios, and Toniná. Many hotels, restaurants, and travel agencies display archeological posters or photographs of Maya sites, use Maya names, or even grace their walls with full scale replicas of Maya murals. These archeological themes are frequently juxtaposed to ethnographic photos and posters of Indians from the region in full traditional dress, and to Indian artifacts (Lacandon bows and arrows, pottery, and textiles). A popular theme is the juxtaposition on the same picture of a living man with the characteristic "Maya profile" to a bas-relief or painting, from Palenque or Bonampak. One restaurant even dresses up its mestizo waiters in Chamula and Zinacantán clothes and has set up an Indian house altar in its patio. The message to tourists is clear: before or after you see the archeological treasures of the past, come and see the living descendants of those who created that civilization. The same "living Maya" theme is also evident in the treatment of specific culture traits of contemporary Indians, especially textiles (Morris 1984, 1987), but also in the interpretation of the famous Chamula carnival which attracts hundreds of tourists, and of various manifestations of religious life, curing ceremonies and witchcraft.

Second, there has been a reevaluation of the contribution of Indians to the town's life and economy. As local mestizos noticed that Indians were the object of respectful curiosity on the part of well-heeled, high-status foreigners, mestizos began to modify their attitudes and behavior towards Indians. Previously Indians in town were seen as a nuisance and an embarrassment; now they are an asset. The huge produce market is now more than a source of food; it attracts tourists because it is the best place to see large numbers of Indians from a score of neigh-

boring communities. Most San Cristóbal hotels are within convenient walking distance (1 km or less) from the produce market, and the market is also the terminal for minibuses to a number of Indian villages. The craft market, which attracts almost exclusively tourists, is even closer to the center of town and to most hotels and restaurants, and has given economic vitality to the entire barrio. Two of the textile cooperatives have their shops there, and two of San Cristóbal's most attractive and recently restored colonial churches are on the large market square.

In short, it is hard for a mestizo in town not to recognize that San Cristóbal owes much of its economic life to the presence of Indians, and mestizo attitudes towards Indians have become more tolerant, or at least less disrespectful, than in the past. Mestizos are beginning to think that if tourists from prestigious developed countries find Indians interesting, maybe they had been missing something. There is a developing pride in the Indian heritage, a local version of the national indigenismo ideology. For example, the original Tzotzil name for the area of San Cristóbal, Jovel (meaning "grass"), is now proudly appropriated by mestizos as the town's nickname.

Third, thousands of mestizos in town now benefit, directly or indirectly from ethnic tourism (as also do a score or so resident expatriates, some of them former tourists who "went native"). Apart from the owners and managers of hotels, restaurants, shops, travel agencies, taxis and buses, and their numerous personnel, a whole artisan class benefits from the construction and remodeling that accompanied the expansion of tourism facilities. Hundreds of bricklayers, stone masons, painters, carpenters, cabinet makers, electricians, plumbers, and others, who are mostly local mestizos, work in tourism-related establishments. In the middle of the class spectrum, a few educated mestizos have parlayed their cultural capital into positions of specialized tourist guides. One young woman, for example, takes small groups of English-speaking tourists on walking tours of the neighboring villages of Zinacantán and San Juan Chamula, while a middle-aged ex-teacher specializes in French-speaking tourists. Both present themselves as experts on Maya cultures, and clearly act as cultural brokers between tourists and tourees. As for Trudy Blom, she retired from active participation long before her death at age 92 in 1993, but Na Bolom is still a thriving tourist Mecca, with a staff of student volunteers who take tourists through the museum and cater to the resident guests.

CONCLUSIONS

Clearly, all tourism is a form of ethnic relations since it brings together people from different cultural traditions. But, ethnic tourism, where the cultural exoticism of the touree is the principal tourist attractant, constitutes a definable special case. Ethnic tourism often superimposes itself onto a preexisting system of ethnic relations between the locally or nationally dominant group and one or more marginalized, nonmainstream groups. The latter become tourees, and the former become middlemen in the tourist trade. The locally dominant group is better connected to the global village and possesses the cultural

capital useful in managing, and marketing the tourist-touree encounter.

Generally, the development of ethnic tourism brings in its wake a transformation of the earlier system of ethnic relations. In the case of Mexico, while it is true that the mestizos have been the main beneficiaries of ethnic tourism and have seen the latter as an opportunity to market "their Indians," Indians have nevertheless benefited as well. First their relations to mestizos have become less inegalitarian than they were before, and both prejudice and discrimination against them declined. Second, some of them, especially Chamula women, have become directly involved in the tourism trade; thereby, incidentally, also transforming gender roles within Indian cultures (Eber and Rosenbaum 1993; Nash 1993). There are two principal reasons why Indians have not become more involved in tourism in a proactive way (as distinct from merely being tourees). One is that many of the entrepreneurial niches were preempted by mestizos for reasons mentioned earlier. But the other is that some Indian groups, notably the Zinacantecos, have until quite recently, actively opted not to participate and have successfully controlled and minimized tourist access to their communities by forbidding photography and treating tourists very coolly. They have, in short, been "actively nonparticipating."

However, this situation has not prevented Zinacantecos from being actively engaged in outside market transactions. When they were producing a surplus of maize, they organized the transport and marketing of maize on a large scale to San Cristóbal. More recently, they are heavily involved in the hothouse production of flowers for the national market. Thus, Zinacantecos clearly do not opt for a strategy of withdrawal from outside contact. Rather, they seek to *control* their outside contacts to best advantage, while preserving their sphere of autonomy and privacy from outside intrusions. On an April 1994 revisit of San Lorenzo Zinacantán, however, the author found that the situation had visibly changed. The center of the municipality had been transformed by the construction of a large two-story town hall, a sizable brick community hall, two cement basketball courts and a row of concrete tourist shops similar to the older one in Chamula. All this public construction, made possible by the relative economic success of the community, had given Zinacantán a much more urbanized appearance, but also seemingly rendered control of tourist behavior more difficult. By now, Zinacantecos are no longer successful in preventing tourists from taking photographs or videotapes in town, though they still forbid it inside the church.

As for the role of the Mexican-state in ethnic tourism, we have seen that the state, through INI, has been a major actor in transforming ethnic relations before the onset of tourism, and undertook a number of projects (such as road construction, literacy, schooling and marketing initiatives) which facilitated access of outsiders to Indian communities and of Indians to mestizo urban areas. The state, in short, unwittingly prepared the ground for the subsequent tourism penetration, but more as a general modernizing agent than as a conscious promoter of tourism. To be sure, the Mexican government has actively promoted tourism, but mostly of the coastal, sun-sand-and-sea type, and

to a lesser extent of the archeological sites. The Mexican government also spends a great deal on the development of museums and the clearing, upkeep and restoration of archeological sites and colonial monuments, but much of that effort falls under the aegis of the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia rather than the Secretaría de Turismo, and is regarded more as a task of preserving and teaching the national heritage for and to Mexicans, rather than of promoting foreign tourism. This philosophy is clearly reflected, for instance in the fact that virtually all textual explanations on sites and in museums are monolingual in Spanish. Many tourists complain about this, and attribute it to Mexican provincialism rather than nationalism. Only belatedly is the Federal Government getting involved in ethnic tourism, in the Ruta Maya project. In San Cristóbal, however, ethnic tourism development was overwhelmingly a response of the local entrepreneurial middle- and upper-class to new economic opportunities.

The case of San Cristóbal is rather similar to a number of other situations of ethnic tourism in remote parts of Third World countries, where local entrepreneurial elites have interposed themselves as middlemen between First World tourists and Fourth World tourees. Cuzco, Peru (van den Berghe 1980) and Chiang Mai, Thailand (Cohen 1989) come to mind as analogous cases. The tourist quest for the authentic other enables the local elite to use its political, economic, locational, and linguistic advantages to capitalize on the otherness of indigenous groups. That otherness, hitherto seen as a liability and obstacle on the path to progress and modernity, suddenly becomes a marketable commodity. Thus, tourism inevitably affects ethnic relations. Cultural differences are accentuated, reinterpreted, in extreme cases, even invented. The exotic is cultivated; new crafts that are neither traditional nor modern are produced; cultural boundaries that were in the process of becoming blurred are redefined, reasserted, or even recreated (Keyes and van den Berghe 1984).

At the local level, one effect of marketing Mayas has been to stress the continuity between contemporary Indians and their ancestral civilizations. These continuities are real enough, but so are the discontinuities. Contemporary Mexican Indians live in a real world of political, economic, and cultural relations that integrate them, albeit in a marginal and subordinate position, in the much larger world of modern Mexico and beyond. Paradoxically, then, tourism, which represents an intrusion of that larger world on local Indian communities, cultivates the myth of a pristine, exotic backwater existing on the edge of the mainstream.

However, the real world has a way of rudely awakening the dream world, as happened with the Chiapas insurrection of January 1, 1994. Timed to coincide with Mexico's entry into the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), and thus to embarrass the Salinas administration basking in the triumph of its neo-liberalism, the self-styled Zapatistas and their armed wing, the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN), briefly occupied San Cristóbal and a few other municipalities, destroyed government archives, trashed various town halls, demanded the resignation of several municipal councils, liberated prisoners from a jail, emptied a pharmacy, kidnapped, and later

released unharmed, a former governor of Chiapas, issued some pronouncements, including a declaration of war against the Salinas regime, and then withdrew back to the Chiapas lowlands whence they came. As they were withdrawing, the Mexican army attacked them; skirmishes lasted some 12 days, after which the government issued restraining orders against further hostilities, and promptly started a lengthy negotiation process. According to the report of a government-appointed human rights commission, some 145 people were killed, mostly by the Mexican army and police (Madrado Cuellar 1994). Perhaps 2,000 people actively participated in the EZLN raid, some 90% undisciplined, virtually unarmed teen-agers brandishing wooden guns with affixed machete blades, and the rest a better disciplined cadre of older men (and a few women) hooded in black ski-masks and carrying a heterogeneous assortment of firearms of multiple provenance.

All evidence points to a home grown movement rooted in five lowland municipios of the State of Chiapas (Ocosingo, Las Margaritas, Altamirano, Oxchuc, and Chanal) with a total, largely Indian, population of 267,000 (Estados Unidos Mexicanos 1992). The rank and file of the movement is overwhelmingly Maya Indian, but does not seem to extend significantly to the much larger Indian population of the highland municipios. Some of the leadership is non-Indian, notably the mysterious and charismatic subcomandante Marcos who has become an instantaneous cult figure in Mexico, and is the most articulate spokesman (in Spanish) for the movement. The hard social base of the Zapatistas is thus a minority of a minority. While the original Zapata represented the 80% to 90% of Mexicans who were peasants in the second decade of the 20th century, in 1990, only 40% of Mexicans were rural (by the broad definition of people living in communities of less than 2500 people). But the Zapatistas seem to speak mostly for *Indian* peasants, a bare 7% of the Mexican population; for Chiapas Indians, a bare seventh of these 7%, and for *lowland* Chiapas Indians, a fifth or so of the state total. This amounts to two tenths of 1% of the Mexican population.

Considering this narrow social base, the resonance of Zapatistas in Mexico and abroad was nothing short of astonishing. As a public relations coup, the Zapatistas achieved amazing visibility, thanks to what the Mexican press called the "third army" of journalists. However, the Mexican government was also extraordinarily successful in mustering its enormous expertise in cooptation, compromise, and patronage. Both negotiating parties wrapped themselves in the symbolism of the institutionalized revolution that gave its very name to the ruling party of Mexico.

The root causes of the revolt are multiple and intertwined. They include severe social dislocation and conflicts produced by falling wages and rising prices brought by the "lost decade" of the 1980s (oil bust and foreign debt crisis); the social turmoil resulting from conversion to Protestantism and expulsion of highland Indians from their communities; internal political conflicts, corruption, and despotism within Indian communities; competition from even cheaper labor from Guatemalan migrant workers and political refugees; a run-away population explosion making Indian *minifundios* ever less economically via-

ble; sometimes bloody clashes with mestizo owners of cattle ranches that have in many cases been illegally occupied by Indians; and, perhaps most fundamentally and intractably of all, widespread ecological devastation caused by unsustainable slash-and-burn agriculture in what was once the Lacandón rain forest.

Ideologically, the Zapatistas are neither standard Latin American, Marxist guerrilleros with an agenda borrowed from a mestizo, urban intelligentsia, nor an Indian nationalist and separatist movement wanting to free themselves of mestizo rule, as were a number of historical Indian revolts, in Chiapas in 1712 and 1869 and in mid-19th-century Yucatán (Favre 1984:303-345; Riding 1985:37). Rather, they are a very moderate, reformist movement with the following main ingredients. First, there is a large mainstream component to the Zapatista program, which attracts a great deal of verbal and emotional support to their cause and elicits a favorable response and readiness to make concessions from the government. The Zapatistas want less corruption, honest elections, more democracy, more equality, more freedom. Second, the Zapatistas echo many left-wing intellectuals' revulsion against the neo-liberalism of the Salinas administration, which culminated in the passage of NAFTA, the reprivatization of banks and industries, and other free-market measures that are seen as subjecting Mexico more firmly than ever to North American capitalism. Third, the Zapatistas are opposed to the lifting of some provisions of article 27 of the federal constitution concerning the freedom to sell communal *ejido* lands, for fear that Indians would quickly lose control of the little land they still hold. Fourth, Zapatistas demand the institutionalization of the principle of proportional ethnic representation in the form of Indian communities electing Indian delegates to various levels of representative government. Finally, Zapatistas want negotiations between themselves and the government to expand to a great national debate on reinventing the Mexican government, an aim at once sweepingly grandiose and reassuringly vague and innocuous.

So far, the Zapatistas seem to have succeeded in awakening the guilt and conscience of the country to the plight of its Indian population in its economic backwaters, and to have shaken the Salinas administration from its euphoria of *laissez-faire* capitalism. While the Zapatistas have elicited a groundswell of emotional support from the traditional "progressive" forces of Mexican society, firm political alliances have proven elusive. Most Mexicans simply want peace and fear instability. They are cynical and disabused about their government, but they are also pragmatic about the power of the PRI and its control over the distribution of resources. Even the more radical presidential candidate, Coahuilmoc Cárdenas of the Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD), has clearly distanced himself from the Zapatistas by supporting NAFTA.

What is the impact of these events on tourism in Chiapas? For the first two months of 1994, tourism in San Cristóbal was reduced by at least 90% below the 1993 level. The tourists caught by surprise on January 1 were all evacuated peacefully by bus without any panic. There was no shooting in San Cristóbal, and, by all accounts, the Zapatistas behaved unthreateningly and even courteously to townspeople-

ple and tourists alike. Tour operators, however, temporarily suspended San Cristóbal from their itineraries; hotels received numerous cancellations (with some of the slack being picked up by journalists covering the peace talks in the San Cristóbal cathedral); many tour guides suffered temporary unemployment. Nevertheless, by April, when this author revisited San Cristóbal, the tour buses were slowly reappearing at perhaps 40% to 50% of their 1993 levels, but they were still almost entirely limited to French tourists, seemingly the least timorous. A trickle of independent tourists of various European nationalities were also beginning to come back.

One of the important, albeit indirect, linkages of the Zapatista uprising to tourism was the Mexican government's greatly heightened concern for nature conservation, especially in connection with the development of the Ruta Maya. The 15% to 20% of the Lacandón rain forest that are still standing lie at the southern end of the zone of Zapatista control, and form, together with the chain of Maya ruins along the Usumacinta River (especially Bonampak, Yaxchilán, and Altar de los Sacrificios) a key link in the Ruta Maya. This area is currently under siege by land-starved horticulturalists whose unsustainable slash-and-burn methods of cultivation condemn them to repeat the cycle of ecological devastation. The government's attempts to preserve a natural park under United Nations protection was one of the grievances of the affected peasants whose slogan is: "People too, are part of the environment. Protect them!"

The Zapatistas thus have the potential of ruining a lucrative source of income for Chiapas, whether indirectly by destroying what is left of a fragile rain forest environment, or directly by scaring tourists away. It is true that, so far, the benefits of tourism to lowland Indians have been quite marginal, and, hence, that tourism promotion does not loom large in their concerns. Nonetheless, tourism in that area is a more sustainable source of revenue than slash-and-burn agriculture or livestock raising. The challenge is how to empower local communities to control tourism development and to garner a greater share of its bounty. That, in turn, is contingent on a peaceful resolution of present conflicts in the region, especially those now arising over land occupations. The hopeful sign is that the overwhelmingly majority of all Mexicans, Zapatistas included, devoutly desire a peaceable outcome. Signs proclaiming: *México rechaza la violencia* (Mexico repudiates violence) mushroom everywhere. If the Zapatistas reinstitute a violent uprising, they are sure to alienate the sympathies they have awakened. The general message of Mexicans to their Zapatista compatriots seems to be: "you have made your point; let us talk, not fight."

Without a peaceful resolution of the regional conflicts in Chiapas, tourism cannot prosper, and tourism constitutes the region's best hope for development. Perhaps the insurgents' efforts should focus more on how to make the benefits of tourism reach better the Indian communities whose very presence creates the demand for ethnic tourism. Rather than stress the redistribution of scarce and limited resources (notably land), or access to, and exploitation of nonrenewable resources (such as rain forest), the Zapatistas should endeavor to garner a greater share of a renewable and growing resource, namely tourism, for instance

through a tax on tourism services earmarked for rural community development. Tourism, in short, should be regarded as part of the solution for the region's underdevelopment and inequalities, rather than as part of the problem. □ □

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