

The Taller Tzotzil of Chiapas, Mexico

A Native Language Publishing Project, 1985–2002

Between 1976 and 2002 the Taller Tzotzil (Spanish for “Tzotzil Workshop”) published more than thirty booklets by indigenous authors in Tzotzil-Maya, a language spoken by some four hundred thousand people in Mexico’s southernmost state of Chiapas. The Taller followed the model of the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire (for example, 1969), and the original purpose of the publications was to put on paper the reflections of Tzotzil-speakers as they finished literacy courses in their own language as an exercise in *concientización* (consciousness-raising or empowerment.)¹ Typical themes were the importance of communal labor, the revitalization of local fiestas, and the achievement of indigenous control over schools and town halls—topics that essentially focused inside of indigenous communities and reaffirmed their solidarity and continuity. Beginning in the mid-1980s, however, as Mexico’s economic crisis made life within traditional communities more and more precarious and drove increasing numbers of people into cities and distant labor migrations, the Taller began providing a space in which to examine Tzotzil people’s place in the larger society and economy, to discuss economic and organizational alternatives, to explore alternate indigenous-centered histories, and then to share those discussions with other Tzotzil-speakers. Publications began focusing outward, taking on contract labor on coffee plantations, the struggle for land, organization of artisan and agricultural cooperatives, indigenous rights in the city, undocumented migration to the United States, and reactions to the Zapatista Rebellion.

This essay is a reflection on the course of the Taller in this second period. Most of the questions addressed could be asked of any publishing project: How were topics chosen? How were the texts composed and edited? How

were the publications distributed? Beyond the extraordinary historical circumstances of the 1980s and 1990s, however, the fact that the Taller was in two senses an intercultural project adds additional levels of complication to these questions.

On the first level, because there was no recent precedent for written as opposed to oral communication within the larger community of Tzotzil-speakers, the very fact of publishing raised questions about new versus old culture among Tzotzils themselves.² Who, for example, had the authority to be an author? Although they are increasingly a thing of the past, in the 1980s there were still deeply felt disagreements over the right to write—to express a public opinion—of the young as opposed to the old, women as opposed to men, and people who had not achieved offices within their communities as opposed to people with socially defined status. What dialect and orthography should be used? What formats, themes, and audiences were appropriate? That is, was it better to publish monolingually for an indigenous audience or bilingually so nonindigenous people could listen in? Were there themes too sensitive to share with nonindigenous people or with indigenous political rivals—or to write about at all?

On the second level, questions arose from the fact that the Taller's coordinators—that is, we, the authors of this essay—were nonindigenous participants in what otherwise aspired to be an indigenous project. Just whose culture and politics came into play in making choices about form and content, even when these were made collectively with indigenous colleagues? How much did our presence affect the way in which people participated in the Taller—their comfort with themes, linguistic forms, and processes of production—or even their willingness to participate? How much, finally, was a publishing project, as opposed, for instance, to a project of community discussions without a written record, “our thing,” itself a cultural artifact, not to say an imposition?

By the time we went to work in the Taller we had lived for extended periods in indigenous communities in Puno, Peru, and in highland Chiapas and were not naive about our status as outsiders. At the same time, Rigoberta Menchú's *I, Rigoberta* had appeared only a year and a half before we began our project, and the arguments about *testimonio*, representation, and whether the subaltern could ever speak in a supposedly colonial form such as writing, with all the exquisite self-consciousness these arguments would eventually evoke within the academy, had barely begun.³ During the 1970s we had done extensive oral history and ethnohistory interviewing in

Tzotzil and had also established many personal relationships and alliances with members of Tzotzil communities. Thus we knew that among Tzotzil-speakers speaking in Tzotzil there was an internal, indigenous conversation about history and politics that was not only different from, but also opposed to the ways those same themes were talked about in Spanish, even by the same people. Through stories and gossip, people discussed and analyzed exploitative labor conditions, repressive government, and discrimination against Indians as well as ways to combat these ills. These conversations had always existed and had just as certainly almost always been kept within the community of those who spoke Tzotzil, secret from ladinos (non-Indians). Our proposal, in all its straightforward simplicity, was to help disseminate some of this internal, face-to-face analysis; to encourage communities to talk with each other in their own language across the region, with us acting temporarily as “midwives” for what they had to say.

If our goal was to help Tzotzil-speakers express themselves in print, however, it should also be clear that we had interests and points of view of our own. From the beginning of our time with the Taller, we continued to study and write about the deep economic and political changes occurring in rural Chiapas. We were critical of the inwardly focused community studies characteristic of most Chiapas anthropology through the mid-1980s, and although we appreciated the efforts of others to publish in native languages, we were also impatient with the tendency of many writing and literacy projects to stay at the level of myths and animal stories. To us it seemed obvious that Tzotzil-speaking people were struggling with the same worldwide forces that affected us as well. Virtually all of the books published by the Taller from its inception had been preceded by extensive conversations and seminars within communities about their own history; about the exploitation, repression, and discrimination they had experienced; and about how they had dealt with them. As much as we hoped to continue these local discussions and to connect them to wider conversations involving others who might pick up and read a book in Tzotzil, we also looked forward to participating in them ourselves, to being part of what Andrés Aubry (2005) called the “co-production of knowledge.”

It seems to us that the most natural way to get to these questions is to take them on chronologically, as we came upon them, or tripped over them, in the course of working in the Taller. The following essay thus takes the form of a sort of diary, describing in order the projects created by the Taller during the years of our participation and then probing the evolution of our practice

with each new project—that is, the puzzles that arose, and, as best we can reconstruct them, the discussions and thinking behind the Taller’s solutions.

Chiapas in the Mid-1980s: Beginning Considerations

When we started our collaboration with the Taller in late 1985, it had been eight years since we had finished our long ethnographic fieldwork in Chiapas in the mid-1970s. The first change we discovered, although it took us a few months to recognize it, was that which we had formerly thought of as indigenous communities’ dissenting, critical, often angry private conversations among themselves had become increasingly public. By that point, Chiapas’s indigenous communities were deeply immersed in the economic depression, *la crisis*, which officially dates from the Mexican financial collapse of 1982 but which in fact had begun in the countryside almost a decade earlier. The seasonal, often migrant, agricultural labor on which indigenous communities depended for their livelihoods had stagnated in the mid-1970s, and by the mid-1980s the demand for workers was actually slightly less than it had been in 1975.⁴ For a while Mexico’s borrowing against its oil reserves had underwritten construction projects that took up some of the employment slack, but after 1982 that work also disappeared. Under these circumstances, indigenous people made radical changes in their lives to support themselves. Tens of thousands abandoned their ancestral communities in order to homestead land in the Lacandón jungle. Many tens of thousands more moved into shantytowns around Chiapas’s cities, cities that had never before had sizable indigenous populations. Economic choices also changed life within families. Men began migrating greater distances to find work and staying away for longer periods once they had found it. Given men’s absences and their families’ pressing needs, women, in turn, began looking for ways to make money outside of their homes. For the first time, many women became agricultural wage laborers in regions near their homes. Many others turned their traditional weaving and embroidery into artisan goods they could sell to tourists.

Most of all, indigenous people throughout the state, previously renowned for the insularity of their communal social and cultural lives, increasingly joined new regionwide associations, some of them independent political and economic organizations, others religious groups, both Catholic and Protestant (Harvey 1998; Rus, Hernández Castillo, and Mattiace 2003, 1–26; Collier 1994). Some of these groups helped resettle those who migrated, others

helped with the production and marketing of new kinds of goods, and still others organized protests about injustices and in some regions even led land invasions. The rising reorganization and reorientation of the state's indigenous population are beyond the present discussion, except to the extent that they are a theme of many of the Taller's books. What most interests us here is that by the mid-1980s people all over the state had begun to say publicly things that in the past they had said only among themselves. Without quite understanding the extent of this break or even, at the beginning, that it was a break, we clearly had come into a very different political and cultural environment from the one in which we had lived during the 1970s.

For its part, the Taller Tzotzil had already begun responding to the change even before we arrived. The first history of the Mexican Revolution in the Tzotzil highlands produced by Tzotzil-speakers themselves, with acute, biting commentary about the behavior of landowners and the government during the decades after the Revolution (*K'alal ich'ay mosoal / Cuando dejamos de ser aplastados*; When we were no longer crushed), was coordinated by Andrés Aubry, the Taller's founder, and published in Tzotzil and Spanish in 1982. This was followed in February 1985 by a deeply felt book by the Taller's principal Tzotzil editor and translator, José González Hernández of Zinacantán, and his great-uncle Antonio López Pérez, Zinacantán's first Native municipal secretary. The book (*Ja' k'u x'èlan ta jpojbatik ta ilbajinel yu'un jkaxlanetik / Cómo escapamos del control de los ladinos*; How we escaped the control of the ladinos) was about their community's successful fight at the end of the 1950s to overthrow the state government's custom of imposing nonindigenous municipal secretaries to supervise the community's local council. Neither of these stories, about the Revolution of the 1910s and the fight for local self-government in the 1950s, was a new one, but in retelling them, *publishing* them, in the 1980s the authors of the two books were holding them up for reflection during a new period of doubt and vulnerability.

We did not fully realize the extent of the changes that had already begun when we arrived in the fall of 1985, nor could we have predicted that a new historical period was beginning. In the new configuration, most Tzotzils would no longer be occupied full-time in agriculture, and cultural and political leadership would increasingly swing from local communities to city and even regional organizations. After a couple of months of talking with our Tzotzil friends, however, we did begin to understand the urgency of their economic worries. In the 1970s, as a couple with a small child, we had

studied migrant labor, accompanying Tzotzil workers to coffee plantations, sugar-cane fields, and corn haciendas, staying and working alongside them for brief periods. We knew that mention of such labor had been left out of most ethnographies of the highland Tzotzils. It occurred away from the communities that were the sites of research, and in any case was not, according to most anthropologists, an item of Native culture.⁵ We also knew, however, that among Tzotzils themselves that work had been an important topic of conversation in the 1970s, when it was a mainstay of their families' incomes. If anything, it was an even more important topic in the 1980s, when it was disappearing. We thus decided that our first booklet should be about seasonal migrant labor, specifically, coffee labor, and the ways it was woven into community life.⁶ Everyone had a story about working, and not working, in coffee. As a theme that might spark discussions of work and economic change, it seemed ideal. And so in early 1986 we began interviewing for *Abtel ta Pinka* ("Labor on Coffee Plantations").

1985–1986: "Turning Talk into Paper"

Abtel ta Pinka was published in a monolingual Tzotzil edition in September 1986 and republished in a bilingual Tzotzil–Spanish version in 1991. It consisted of selections from the testimonies of coffee workers from the *municipio* of Chamula, three men and a woman, plus the wives of the men, who had felt the effects of *enganche*, contract labor. In all, the texts spanned the period from the late 1930s to the early 1980s. The sections were organized by theme: the planters, labor contracting, the coffee workers' union, life on the plantation, what it was like to be the wife of a worker who stayed behind in the village, what it was like to be a woman coffee worker, and so forth. After recording and transcribing the open-ended testimonies, several of which were done over several days, the members of the Taller—the two of us and two colleagues, one from the community of Zinacantán and the other from Chamula—edited the texts and then submitted them to the authors for approval. In all but one case, this meant reading the entire manuscript aloud for those who could not read, checking both content and language. Finally, we added photographs, both historical and recent, and provided captions with additional information about the plantations, such as the dates they were founded, the nationalities of the owners, the value of Chiapas's coffee production through the years, and so on. The final booklet was twenty-eight pages long.

Following the precedent of earlier Taller publications, we printed two hundred copies. Most were sold for thirty cents, far less than the cost of printing them, but we felt it was important that the books have a value.⁷ Copies were given to the authors and their families, and many more (some forty) were distributed to Tzotzil schoolteachers and catechists for sharing with their classes or community discussion groups (*grupos de reflexión*). To our surprise, the largest single market, however, consisted of the mostly Protestant settlers in the *colonias* surrounding San Cristóbal, who bought seventy to eighty copies for the full price. Smaller numbers, perhaps twenty-five, were purchased by residents of other rural Tzotzil-speaking communities.

The second edition, published in 1991, was, as noted, bilingual and consisted of four hundred copies. Most of the edition was sold through bookstores, where it was still available at the beginning of the Zapatista Rebellion in 1994. Soon thereafter, as one of the few publications that described indigenous people's lives in their own words, it sold out. Over the next several years, parts of the text were published multiple times in Spanish and English (for example, Paz Paredes, Cobo, and Bartra, 1996; Womack 1999, 111–18; see also Collier 1991).

Practice: Initial Decisions

Voices: From the beginning we set out to counter the homogenizing tendency of typical ethnographies and histories, with their single narrative voice. Beginning with this test publication, all but two of the Taller's publications after 1986 had a variety of voices: men and women, old and young, and, if possible, individuals from more than one community. In the specific case of *Abtel*, we hoped to convey the testimonies' message that the system of migrant labor affected not just the migrants but their entire families, and not only during the months migrants were away at work but throughout the year. Life in coffee workers' communities, hundreds of miles from the plantations, was organized around the calendar of coffee. Scheduling of community work days, planting, fiestas, marriages, and baptisms had to take into account the prolonged seasonal absences of adult men. Everyone's life was affected, even those who never left their home *municipios*. By letting a variety of people speak, *Abtel* tried to demonstrate the variety of ways in which this impact was experienced.

On women's participation: With only two exceptions, we believe, women's voices were not present in native language books in Chiapas before *Abtel*,

either in the state projects, or among Protestant and Catholic missionaries' books, or even in the early Taller Tzotzil publications (1975–85).⁸ Nor, as far as we know, had scholarly writing about coffee work and other migrant labor in Chiapas ever mentioned the impact of such work on the women and children who stayed at home. As it happened, however, including women seemed as natural to our collaborators as it did to us. Men and women both knew that labor migrations affected the entire family, and both understood and accepted that the point was to explore the experiences and hardships of men and women alike. Indeed, one of the former coffee workers encouraged his wife to come forward with the painful story of her fights with her first husband every time he had to depart for the *fincas*. Another woman talked about the economic survival strategies she learned during her husband's long absences. Still a third told of the difficulties of being a single mother and one of the very few women who hired on as a coffee picker.

Monolingual vs. bilingual publication: Because we started with the idea that these were to be indigenous books, we worked solely in Tzotzil on the first two projects only, *Abtel* and *Lo'il yu'un Kuskat* (see below). One unexpected effect of this choice was our almost immediate popularity with urban Protestants. Many adult converts had become literate in order to read the Bible in Tzotzil, and by the early 1980s they were probably the largest single category of Tzotzil readers. Having learned to read, they were continually searching for new material, and when it appeared, word spread quickly through their congregations and colonias. A side effect of this popularity, however—and a paradoxical one, given that we had decided to work in Tzotzil precisely to emphasize traditional language and culture—was that many traditionalists became quite suspicious of us. By the mid-1980s municipios throughout the highlands were riven by bitter and bloody conflicts between traditionalists and Protestants. Many traditionalists, seeing *Abtel* (which most of them could not read), concluded that we must be Protestant missionaries. Were we not gringos, like the missionaries? Were gringo missionaries not the main producers of books in Tzotzil? Were our books not widely read in the Protestant settlements? Given the bitterness of the religious struggle, this assumption could have closed some communities to us, particularly Chamula, where we had hoped to concentrate our efforts. Luckily, two of the families that had contributed to *Abtel* were themselves leading traditionalists. Although at first they were discreet about their participation in the book, eventually they helped dispel suspicions of us. For our part, we attempted to counter gossip against the Taller by giving Chamula's

leaders free copies of *Abtel* as well as copies of some of the book's historic photos. More than that, we made a conscious choice that the Taller's second publication would be an account of a Chamula uprising in the nineteenth century by one of the community's most traditional religious leaders.

Editor-written introductions vs. letting the books speak for themselves: To avoid intruding into the content of the books, we resolved at the beginning to try to keep editorial introductions to a minimum. We limited ourselves to stating the time period, the locations in which the books were set, and perhaps brief descriptions of the authors. The only exception to this rule in all of the books was the second book, *Lo'il yu'un Kuskat*.

Orthography: Spelling and alphabet in Chiapas's indigenous languages are still not settled. Since 1988 government and secular groups have been using conventions chosen in meetings called by the National Institute for Adult Education (Instituto Nacional de Educación Adulta, INEA), in which we participated. Publishers of Protestant materials, on the other hand—successors of the Wycliffe Bible Translators and Summer Institute of Linguistics (WBT/SIL)—who have the overwhelming majority of native language readers, use an orthography developed fifty years ago in consultation with the Instituto Nacional Indigenista of the Ministry of Education. The WBT/SIL orthography is more similar to Spanish and was thus presumed to be more appropriate for literacy programs seeking to use Tzotzil as a transition to Spanish reading. Against our largely Protestant market, we chose to use the simplified government alphabet rather than the Protestant one. Although the actual differences between the orthographies are slight, the symbolic importance of the choice was enormous. In practice, we found that readers who were comfortable with the WBT/SIL orthography had little trouble with the INEA variety. Nor did they seem to care. Choosing the SIL's "missionary writing," on the other hand, would have clinched our association with the Protestants and made it almost impossible to be accepted in other communities.⁹ In the long run, the acceptance of a conventional orthography will be decided by writers and readers.

Dialect choice: There is considerable difference among Tzotzil's still mutually intelligible dialects. As a result, a major concern of some anthropologists and education specialists when we were beginning to work in the Taller was which dialect we would use and whether that would privilege some people over others. Would we pick a central dialect, supposedly accessible to more speakers and readers, participate in the development of a standardized one, or, our preference, transcribe dialects as people spoke? In the INEA meet-

ings on orthography in 1988, Jacinto Arias Sojom, a Tzotzil-speaker from Chenalhó who had studied anthropology at Princeton and is still the most accomplished Tzotzil writer, argued that this would be worked out by the writers themselves as they chose a language in which to write—just as had happened long ago in Spanish and other European languages. In practice, we discovered that sophisticated speakers of all the dialects not only understood, but took great delight in mimicking the others, in the process playing with different communities' stereotypes. Indeed, far from pushing for standardization over the past twenty years, writers appear to have found the differences among dialects to be a real resource: after reading three or four words most readers can tell where the writer or character is from, and often how old they are, whether they are male or female, and even, from the incidence and shaping of words borrowed from Spanish, where they stand with respect to modernization and politics.

Photographs: We set up a darkroom and were able to take new photos as well as copy historical photos to illustrate the Taller's books and to present as gifts to our collaborators. Almost no one had ever seen late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century photographs of Chiapas, many of famous indigenous leaders, so they were a great conversation opener.

Authorship: While we made no secret of who participated in the Taller, our initial decision was not to attribute authorship to particular passages or their translations. Authors, editors, and helpers were all listed alphabetically, by the Tzotzil versions of their names, at the back of the books. In retrospect, we probably were trying to downplay, perhaps even disguise, our roles: we were identified in the lists of names as Xalik Kurus and Tina Kurus, the names by which we have always been known in Chamula.¹⁰ In addition to the two of us, the Taller consisted of a very small permanent team who moved from one project to another. Both of our long-term collaborators, Chep Ernantes (José Hernández) of Zinacantán and Xalik Kusman (Salvador Guzmán) of Chamula, had worked as translators and field assistants for ethnographers before working with us. As for pay, the Taller offered all of us slightly more per day than rural schoolteachers made.

1987–1988: Publishing and Politics

In the months after *Abtel* appeared two reactions were common among those who read it or heard it read. First, many exclaimed, “Yes, that’s the way it was! That’s my story too!” After a little probing, it turned out that they had seen

school texts and other books about “ladino things” and may also have seen religious texts in Tzotzil. But few seem even to have imagined books in their own language about their own lives. Indeed, many proceeded to ask why schoolbooks never told history from their perspective and expressed pleasure that “their own” history might be saved for their descendants. Second, and often almost simultaneously, many went on to say that it was a shame that ladinos and Indians who did not speak Tzotzil could not read the book and learn about the “Tzotzils’ truth.” Perhaps, some suggested, *Abtel* could be printed again, in Spanish. Even better, said others, would be a bilingual edition so that while others could read it, it would still be clear to them that it was the Tzotzils’ history.

Our next project began in early 1987 with a suggestion from colleagues in our umbrella nongovernmental organization (NGO) who wondered if we would be willing to undertake a collaborative history with the members of the *ejido* (landholding collective) of Los Chorros in the municipio of Chenalhó, north of San Cristóbal, as a way to help heal what had become a bitter factional fight. Perhaps the process of recalling what they had in common might draw the two factions back together. We agreed to initiate the project, and late in the spring of 1987 we made several overnight trips to the community. After the first trip, we took along historical documents, agrarian reform files, and maps as well as our tape recorder and began talking about the past with small groups of elders on both sides of the split. But the factionalism was brutal: people on one side would see us talking with members of the other and either grill us about what they had said or angrily refuse to speak to us. There seemed no way to get the leaders of the two sides together, but because they were leaders, it was also hard to work very long with anyone else without their help.¹¹ After many visits and some initially very fruitful recorded conversations over the course of four months, we reluctantly gave up on any hope of finishing a history as a community project.

Earlier in the 1980s one of the factions, looking for support against its rivals, who ruled the community in the name of the state party, the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), had affiliated for a time with the Partido Socialista de los Trabajadores (PST). Following the Zapatista Rebellion in 1994, young men from the dominant faction used their connections to the state government and security forces to expel many of these formerly PST, now presumably pro-Zapatista, neighbors. Trained by the army as paramilitary forces, some of these same young men participated in the massacre in

the neighboring community of Acteal in December 1997 (see Arias 1984; Aubry and Inda, 1998, 2003).

The first group of urban Tzotzil to approach us on their own, in the summer of 1987, were representatives of San Cristóbal's mostly Protestant Tzotzil colonias. Expelled from their native communities by their traditionalist neighbors beginning in the mid-1970s, often following beatings and destruction of their property, the first of these migrants had by the end of that decade begun to establish themselves on rocky hillsides and former pastures on San Cristóbal's periphery (see J. Rus 2005). Following Mexico's financial collapse in 1982, these original settlers were joined by surging numbers of other indigenous people displaced by the economic crisis. At the end of the 1970s, there were perhaps two thousand indigenous "exiles" in San Cristóbal, people who were accepted as refugees by most of the city's Spanish-speaking residents. By the second half of the 1980s, however, there were as many as twenty thousand, and Cristobalenses had begun to react xenophobically to the so-called invasion. In newspapers, through political campaigns, and even to the migrants' faces, ladinos told them they should go "home" to their own municipios and leave the ladinos with "theirs." Invited to a meeting of urban Tzotzil activists, Jan took along copies of *Abtel ta Pinka*, which most had already seen, as well as historical photographs from as early as the 1880s of indigenous men doing the construction work on the city's most important buildings. In response to questions, he mentioned that not only had the valley land been part of Mayan states when the Spaniards arrived, but also that in the colonial period indigenous people had built and paid for the city's many churches as well as providing the workers, tribute, and food that made the city's existence possible. Several of those in attendance became quite enthusiastic about the pictures and asked if a book could be made to show this history and justify their presence in the city today. And so *Buch'u Lasmeltzan Jobel? / ¿Quién Hizo San Cristóbal?* (Who Made San Cristóbal?) was born. Unlike any of the Taller's other productions, this one was composed by the members of the Taller in consultation with the council of urban migrants. Published in May 1988, it was a brief, illustrated account, in Tzotzil and Spanish, of indigenous people's contributions to the history of San Cristóbal. Three hundred copies were printed, and, at thirty cents each, more than one hundred were quickly sold in San Cristóbal's colonias. Most of the rest went to the city's two bookstores and by the end of 1988 were sold out. For a brief period there was intense interest in the city about who had been

responsible for *tal provocación* (such a provocation.) As in other Taller publications, the contributors' names, including our own, were listed in the back in Tzotzil.

During the preparation of *Buch'u Lasmeltzan Jobel* close questioning about the book and about the pattern of distribution of *Abtel* by friends in Chamula finally led us to realize that we were becoming identified with Protestant activists in the city and that this might jeopardize our ability to continue working in the more traditionalist countryside. By this time the expulsion of Protestant converts had spread from Chamula to indigenous municipios throughout the highlands, and as the Protestant urban colonies became more established and successful and their attractiveness to unemployed rural families grew stronger, animosity deepened (Rus and Vigil, 2007; Rus and Morquecho, 2008). Since one of our goals at the Taller was to encourage reconciliation within communities by getting them to think about their common histories, we began looking for a way to keep the doors open to both sides.

The solution we hit upon was another book, to appear at the same time as *Buch'u*. Entitled *Lo'il yu'un Kuskat: Sk'op mol Marian Koyaso Panchin* (Kuskat's Story: The Words of Marian Koyaso Panchin; in Spanish, Mariano Collazo Panchín), it was an account of the Chamulas' brief, rebellious attempt to found an autonomous market and political center in the late 1860s and the ensuing massacre of its participants by the state militia (Bricker 1981, 260–72). In succeeding years, ladino histories and folklore had turned these events on their head and sensationalized them as an *indigenous* bloodletting, with fanatical, crazed Tzotzils killing innocent ladinos. By publishing Koyaso Panchin's very accurate oral history of these events, we hoped to counter the inflammatory version that was still current in state textbooks, serving as an implied warning about the dangers of indigenous government. At the same time, mol Marian ("elder Marian") was a respected, conciliatory figure among Chamula's traditional leaders. By doing a little book with him, to be published concurrently with *Buch'u Lasmeltzan Jobel*, we hoped to establish that the Taller welcomed traditionalists; that it was not a Protestant activity and we were not missionaries. We printed one hundred copies, and most were distributed with Koyaso Panchin's help in the head town of Chamula—often as part of a two-book set with *Buch'u*. The Tzotzils who had built San Cristóbal over the course of several centuries and who had struggled for autonomy in the 1860s were, after all, the ancestors of traditionalists and Protestants alike.

Practice: Refinements

Bilingual Editions: Both of the communities where we worked through most of 1987 specifically requested books with bilingual or Spanish texts. In the case of the urban Protestants, the reason for this was precisely that they wanted ladinos to read their history and recognize their legitimate claim to a share of the city. In making *Buch'u Lasmeltzan Jobel* our first bilingual publication, we determined that if we were going to use two (or more) languages, they were going to be on facing pages and strictly parallel, sentence-by-sentence, paragraph-by-paragraph.

Meanwhile, for those in Los Chorros who would participate in our conversations, the text was going to have to be Spanish alone because one of the rifts in the ejido (although not the only one) was between Tzotzil-speakers and Tzeltal-speakers who had been forced to live together decades earlier. In fact, both groups understood both languages, and after their long coexistence had even intermarried. But if we could not publish in both Tzotzil and Tzeltal as well as Spanish, they preferred that neither indigenous language be used.

Practices and politics: If *Buch'u* was, in its bilingualism, more like later publications, the simultaneously published *Lo'il yu'un Kuskat* was in several ways an anomaly. Because an important reason for publishing it was to broach the idea of books in Tzotzil to the Chamula traditionalists, it was monolingual, like *Abtel ta Pinka*. At the same time, unlike *Abtel* and *Buch'u* but like the later books, it credited mol Marian as the author and even included a photo of him on the title page. In part, this was the result of a changing view of authorship within the Taller (a point to which we shall return below). However, it was also a political decision, to make as public as possible that we and mol Marian had worked together. Finally, unlike the books that came before and after, we composed an introduction in Tzotzil to enumerate the ways in which Koyaso Panchin's oral history of the events of the late 1860s—like those of other Chamula elders—differed from the dominant, ladino version and was more true to the latest historical reconstructions (J. Rus, 1983, 1989).

1988–1990: Community Collaborations

By the spring of 1988 we had begun to understand more fully the extent of Tzotzil communities' adaptation to the post-1982 crisis. Beyond colonizing the jungle and moving into cities, beyond developing new ways of making a

living, from flower growing to producing textiles for tourists, highland Tzotzils were also experimenting with new forms of organization. Most visible were the independent regional organizations and urban councils mentioned earlier. However, even within apparently settled municipios still considered traditional, the structure and orientation of extended families and local hamlets were shifting, challenging age and gender hierarchies, and eventually entrenched political power.

Many of these local changes were not apparent from outside. By the time *Buch'u* and *Kuskat* were published in the spring of 1988, however, we had been drawn into a series of new projects that would place the Taller at the center of the conversations about these changes. Diane had begun to interview women in Chamula about their responses to the economic crisis, eventually completing a survey of household economics in a Chamula hamlet in collaboration with the women of the hamlet (D. Rus 1990). At the same time, she undertook in-depth conversations with the women about how their lives and families had been changed by the fact that their husbands and fathers had trouble finding work. This led to a book on the life history of one of the women, Maruch Komes (María Gómez), and her role in building a local, independent artisan cooperative, *Ta jlok'ta chobtik ta ku'il / Bordando Milpas* ("Embroidering Cornfields," a beautiful wordplay on the fact that since she and her husband had stopped planting corn she had begun embroidering stylized corn plants on blouses for tourists).

As Maruch's story revealed, the cooperative had begun in the mid-1980s, as women began gathering to watch their children collectively as they wove and embroidered. Within a few months they were purchasing thread together and soon thereafter were starting to take turns carrying products made by the group to the city to sell. By the time they came to the attention of artisan organizations run by state and national governments in 1988, they were a functioning, independent cooperative (for comparison, see Nash 1993; Eber and Rosenbaum 1993; Eber and Tansky 2001). Unlike other texts about indigenous women artisans, in *Bordando Milpas* Maruch talked not only about her art and its meaning, but also about the difficulties indigenous women encountered in working with external organizations and traveling to distant markets without knowing Spanish or being literate. She also discussed the profound changes in household dynamics when women took leading, entrepreneurial roles. Finally, she described the dire economic circumstances that forced her to sell her goods to *coyotes*, intermediaries, fully aware that by doing so she was underselling her own products in the cooperative store.

This was the history captured by *Ta jlok'ta chobtik ta ku'il*, which was published in 1990 with a print run of four hundred copies. One hundred of these were distributed immediately to other artisans through Maruch and her cooperative. Almost simultaneously the book also came to the attention of the Fondo Nacional de Artesanías (FONART), the federal government's agency for promoting folk art, which informed us that Maruch's testimony was the first they had seen of a native artisan in all of Mexico. Somewhat contrary to our intentions for the book, FONART bought fifty copies to distribute to its employees and member cooperatives and invited Maruch, Diane, and our Chamula collaborator, Xalik Kusman, to Mexico City to present the book in the national artisan store. To promote indigenous art and also FONART, they arranged for Maruch to be interviewed on the morning culture program of the national network Radio Educación. Within a short time, *Ta jlok'ta chobtik ta ku'il* was republished in Spain, France, and Italy.

Jan, meanwhile, at the suggestion of the agronomist of the Instituto de Asesoría Antropológica para la Región Maya, A.C. (INAREMAC), Alain Retière, began a two-year collaboration with five constituent communities of the Unión de Uniones (UDU), an independent peasant organization concentrated in the Lacandón jungle and adjacent lowlands. The UDU had a history of aggressively confronting ladino planters for control of the land and of farming and marketing collectively on the lands they acquired (Harvey 1998; Legorreta 1998; Leyva 2003). Taking advantage of a government loan-guarantee program that enabled peasants to buy ladino haciendas (a program which, not incidentally, bailed out wealthy owners whose failing farms no one else would buy), the five communities had bought, in 1986, the combined coffee and cattle plantation on which their families had served for generations as indebted workers. By 1988 they wanted to produce a memoir of their passage from debt servitude to co-ownership of the plantation, from suffering forced labor to dreams of starting a cheese factory and founding a peasant university (*universidad campesina*) to teach agricultural science and humanities to the next generation of the UDU. At the same time, they also wanted a step-by-step account of the process of labor organization and strategic land invasion by which they had finally convinced the owner to sell. They felt that the UDU could use it to proselytize other indigenous rural laborers. The result was *Kipaltik: K'u cha'al lajmankutik jpinkakutik / Cómo compramos nuestra finca* ("Kipaltik: How we bought our plantation"), published in 1990. An eighty-page book based on the testimonies of men and women members of the cooperative, with photographs of collective labor

and governance, half of *Kipaltik*'s four hundred copies went to the members of the collective and the UDU. One hundred of these were for the members themselves, so that someday, as one of them put it, "our grandchildren's children could read about how we got our families out of poverty." Several dozen more were distributed through the Taller itself and San Cristóbal bookstores. The rest were for internal promotion in other UDU communities and to use in organizing campaigns, often clandestine, on other plantations.

Practice

Authorship: After 1988 we decided to attribute authorship and editorship more overtly, namely, on title pages. The problem with not naming those responsible for texts was that, in the absence of obvious attribution, journalists had several times commissioned translations of passages from *Abtel* and then cited them without mentioning the source. Unfortunately, even when authors' names were given, as in *Ta jlok'ta chobtik*, such pirating continued. In the most egregious case, a self-described proindigenous solidarity group in Europe republished the entire text and included the photo of the author, Maruch Komes, without mentioning either her name or where the text had come from. It seemed to us that indigenous "artifacts," including stories and testimonies, were viewed as "naturally occurring objects" that, like rocks or flowers or birds, could belong to whoever "found" them. When we complained about the failure to attribute authorship, we and the author received a formal apology. But we also heard from mutual friends that the reason no credit was given was that "indigenous people aren't contaminated by ideas of individualism and property" and that the preoccupation with naming authors was ours alone.

More on translation: Publishing *testimonio* bilingually also led to questions about what level and tone of Spanish should be used. In the past, representations of indigenous speech in Chiapas, whether in fiction or translations of testimonies, had often used a rural, backwoods Spanish, suggesting an equivalence between rural indigenous people and poor, rural ladinos. Some texts even mimicked the grammatical errors Tzotzil-speakers commonly commit in Spanish, suggesting a sort of minstrel-speak. We decided that since our Tzotzil texts were in perfectly proper and sometimes elegant Tzotzil, the Spanish translations should be straightforward and correct.

Beyond these concerns, each of the two new projects, *Ta jlok'ta chobtik* and *Kipaltik*, brought its own demands. From the beginning of our publishing project the editing we did was aimed primarily at cutting repetition.

Tzotzil language, particularly prayers and formal or ritual speech, frequently coupled words and phrases, and occasionally repeated whole passages in different words. To make the texts read smoothly and to achieve economies in the printing process we had to edit out such duplication before the translations were made. We always read the edited texts with the authors, many of whom were unlettered, and never considered them finished until they had agreed to the changes. But we did cut.

An amusing result of such editing was that during the national radio interview about *Ta jlok'ta chobtik*, the interviewer asked Maruch Komes to say the weaver's prayer that appeared at the end of her book so the radio audience could hear Tzotzil being spoken. When praying, Maruch always closes her eyes and chants, composing the phrases as she goes along, and they often last fifteen to thirty minutes. The prayer in the book, however, had been abbreviated to thirty-six short lines. When Maruch's prayer on the radio began to run beyond two minutes, then three heading for four with no sign of ending, the interviewer began to panic. How to make it stop? Eventually, Maruch understood why the interviewer was nervous and brought the prayer to an end. With the help of Diane and Xalik Kusman, she then explained that there was no set prayer, that what she did was enumerate and repeat in different ways the help she would need with her work and ask for guidance and patience from God and the saints. Although on this occasion everyone finally understood what had happened, in some sense the original prayer had been violated by being shortened for publication, truncating what the author might have thought the most important part of her book. Given the expense of making books and the need to be concise, we were unable to find an alternative that would meet everyone's ideas of what mattered.

Soon after work began on *Ta jlok'ta chobtik*, the women's artisan cooperative described in the book began to receive offers of loans and grants from the government. Although they had not sought these funds, the women of the co-op, including Maruch Komes, were more than willing to accept them. Traditionally, such government resources would have been brokered through the regional indigenous caciques (political bosses) in the head town of Chamula rather than contracted directly by community members, much less women community members (Rus and Collier 2003). Although the production of a book was an entirely separate project from the organization of the cooperative that was attracting government funds (in fact, when we were asked our opinion, we advised caution in accepting government help), by the

time the caciques became aware of the cooperative's funding the book had appeared, and the women were able to use the book as a calling card to maintain their independence from cacique control.

After 1990 Maruch and her group also used the book as an entry point to make contact with NGOs, ever hopeful that such contacts would broaden their support and perhaps help them establish their own store. At the same time, Maruch's published and therefore public explanation of why her group sold items outside the cooperative stores, in the process driving prices downward, could have endangered her ties to the government agencies and NGOs that sponsored those stores. As it turned out, however, they found her analysis instructive.

Finally, outside of their immediate families women had rarely expressed themselves about how their insertion into the market economy had affected their relationships with their husbands. Maruch's admission that at first her husband and other women's husbands had tried to destroy the women's work and end their participation in organizations that brought them into relationships with mestizos in town potentially made her subject to marital problems. What actually happened was that the appearance of the book and her subsequent invitation to visit Mexico City helped legitimate her and the women's new roles in their husbands' eyes.

Our work on *Kipaltik* brought up other questions, most notably in regard to editing. Previously, editing had been done for reasons of style and economy of expression. In the case of *Kipaltik* we were faced for the first time with the problem of editing as censorship. The story of *Kipaltik* is one not only of the triumph of a group of Tzotzils in buying the plantation on which they had been virtual slaves, but also of their families' century-long fight to recover their land, expropriated in the late nineteenth century. After the Mexican Revolution, from the 1920s to the 1970s the struggle was rarely an open one. Debt-laborers sabotaged production and resisted work when they could, but the landowner had overwhelming force on his side and with impunity could beat, expel, and even kill those who defied him. The balance of power between the two sides began to change in the 1970s, when declining agricultural prices led landowners to expel resident workers and turn cropland into pasturage for cattle. Simultaneously—and not by chance— independent peasant and indigenous organizations arose and became increasingly militant as they pushed back against the landowners' attempts to expel them from land that had belonged to their ancestors (see Harvey 1998; Toledo 2002; Bobrow-Strain 2007; Garza and Toledo 2008). Violence between the

two sides escalated throughout northern Chiapas, with indigenous workers cutting fences, killing cattle, and invading land, while owners responded by getting the state police and army to repress their former workers and hiring private gunmen, *guardias blancas*, to do the job when the state would not. Some of the passages we transcribed in preparing *Kipaltik* described the first real attack on landowners and their ladino employees in this isolated region in 1974.

After they had invaded a neighboring finca, men from the communities that eventually bought Kipaltik beat the overseer, who had cheated them of wages and treated them brutally for two decades, and then assaulted his particularly cruel, arrogant wife. The description is a raw one. Those of us in the Taller and others working in the region who we consulted did not know what to do with it. The acts it described were ugly and certainly illegal. Yet the men who had participated were quite open about their deeds as justified vengeance for decades of mistreatment. It was an example of the kind of revolutionary violence described by Frantz Fanon. As editors and sympathizers, we were especially concerned about preserving the anonymity of those involved—of the perpetrators but also of the victim, who still lived in a small town nearby. During a long, at times contentious discussion, Jan finally convinced the men that the story should be cut on the grounds that it described the details of a crime, and it was impossible to predict what would happen if we committed evidence of it to paper. Caution prevailed, but we still wonder whether we denatured history in the process. Could, or should, a different decision have been made?

Elsewhere in *Kipaltik*, as in the Taller's other books, individuals and places were identified: landowners, politicians, settlements, and plantations. The risk, faced more often by journalists than by academic writers, was not only that many of those who were named or were identifiable from their landholdings were still alive (certainly their families were), but also that they were still likely to be in powerful positions in the region. Publishing accounts of their deeds might have had negative economic, political, or personal repercussions for the actors themselves, for community members, or for the Taller should they take offense. Nevertheless, the Taller's purpose was to try to present for analysis history as people had lived and remembered it, and if such details had been omitted discussion would have been impossible. Only in the case in which someone could be hurt gratuitously was a name suppressed.¹²

At the beginning of the *Kipaltik* collaboration, the community made it

clear in an assembly that it was to be a collective product, none of which could be published until it had been read and approved in subsequent assemblies. Nor were we to interview anyone separately and represent them as spokespeople for the group. Accordingly, all the interviews were conducted with groups of at least four or five and on occasion as many as fifteen or twenty. Jan and Xalik Kusman interviewed the men over the course of half a year, often during rest periods on communal workdays. Diane interviewed the women in the schoolyard. In fact, a handful of senior men and women did most of the talking but never apart from the group.

This sharing, or diffusion, of authorship—and, in a sense, of responsibility—seemed to us another expression of the *UDU* customs of collective, consensual decision making and of protecting the identities of leaders, practices that have become well known through the Zapatistas. During demonstrations, scores and even hundreds of demonstrators would huddle tightly when they had to make a decision so that no one from outside could see who was talking or identify the leaders. Given the assassinations of some 195 indigenous and campesino activists in rural Chiapas between the mid-1970s and late 1980s, this precaution was well warranted (Burguete and Montero, nd.).

1991–1994: Transitions

As publishing ventures and even as political projects *Ta jlok'ta chobtik* and *Kipaltik* were successes: widely read by the measure used in indigenous Chiapas, where print runs number in the low hundreds, and useful as representations of their authors' projects. Even as they were being printed, however, Mexico and rural Chiapas alike were entering a new political and economic environment, one that would eventually undo the successes of both Maruch Komes's cooperative and the collective farm of *Kipaltik*.

At the end of 1988 Carlos Salinas de Gortari became president of Mexico and immediately accelerated the pace of the neoliberal economic reforms that had begun in the early 1980s. Over the next six years he would privatize most of the remaining state enterprises, remove controls on foreign investment, and dismantle the laws on communal landholding that had been one of the triumphs of the Mexican Revolution. Almost unremembered among these sweeping reforms is that during the first weeks of his term Salinas undermined the International Coffee Agreement, the cartel that maintained the stability of world coffee prices. One of Salinas's overall goals was to help

the administration of George H. W. Bush convince the U.S. Congress and public opinion in the United States of Mexico's worthiness as a partner in the North American Free Trade Agreement. From Salinas's perspective his act was little more than a token of his commitment to free markets. For producers around the world, however, including those in Mexico, it was a disaster. By spring 1989 the international coffee market had collapsed, plunging millions into poverty. Among those whose plans for the future were dashed were the members of the Kipaltik collective, who lost the coffee income they had counted on to make their mortgage payments. For the next two and a half years, the collective managed to survive by obtaining emergency credit from various government agencies. The condition for securing the last of these loans, in early 1992, was that the elderly president of the collective, a former debt-laborer who had fought all of his life for the land, had to stand behind President Salinas with two other historic peasant leaders, in native dress, as Salinas signed the end of agrarian reform. When the news photos of the event appeared, Kipaltik fractured, and even some of the leader's sons refused to speak to him or face him. With no credit forthcoming for the fall harvest of 1992, Kipaltik's members and the *UDU*'s officers divided the land among themselves before the bank could foreclose. The collective was dissolved.

Although the mechanism was different, the impact of Salinas's reforms on the artisan cooperative was no less destructive. Concerned with the independence and the increasingly oppositional stance of the grass-roots organizations that had taken up much of the burden of sustaining the poor during the years of government neglect after the financial crisis of 1982, the Salinas government came into office with a plan to buy back their loyalty: the Programa Nacional de Solidaridad (National Solidarity Program — PRONASOL) (Dresser 1991). In return for affiliating with government organizations and confederations of organizations, PRONASOL funneled to so-called popular groups a share of the profits from the privatization of state-owned businesses. In the case of Maruch Komes's cooperative, this aid came in the form of a large loan composed of inferior materials and a complicated scheme tying repayment to government participation in the commercialization of the group's products. To cement the relationship, women in the cooperative were also compelled to participate in PRI electoral campaigns in 1988 and 1991, for which purpose they were bused around Chiapas with other brightly costumed indigenous groups so that they could take a prominent place in the front row of televised events. Unfortunately, the women's production was not

sufficient to pay back the loans that had been foisted on them, and in mid-1992 the state held back both the pay they were due for products they had turned over on consignment and the fees they had paid to incorporate as an official cooperative. The two losses added up to far more than they had ever received in loans. Their protection as members of a favored cooperative now removed, the PRI bosses of their municipio, who resented them for having made contracts with the state over the heads of the municipio's supposedly legitimate representatives, prevented them from sharing in any of the local PRONASOL funds to which they were entitled. As a result of what they considered a swindle, many of the women and their families became staunchly anti-PRI after 1992. But their group, which had come together out of common need and grown into a powerful force in the women's lives through the 1980s, broke into factions that blamed each other for their losses (Rus and Collier 2003).

If the Salinas government's goal had been to rein in the organizations of the poor, by the end of 1992 it had succeeded in the cases of the Kipaltik collective and Maruch Komes's cooperative: both had ceased to exist. Although every case is different, similar fates befell independent organizations across Chiapas. If this was "success," however, the eventual cost to the government was a high one. Those whose painfully organized projects failed often became bitter opponents of the government and the PRI, and those whose organizations survived were usually more determined than ever to maintain their independence.

At the beginning of this period of renewed government intervention, in the fall of 1988, our family moved back to California. We still had projects and grants, so through 1992 Jan spent half of each year in Chiapas over two or three visits, and Diane two and a half months during the summers. *Jlok'ta chobtik*, *Kipaltik*, and a third book, *Slo'il cha'vo' kumpareil / Cuento de los dos compadres* (Story of the two compadres), were finished under these conditions and published in 1990.¹³ While we did begin two new publishing projects between 1990 and 1993, the increasing distress of the communities and organizations with which we had collaborated led us to spend much of our time with them, talking about the rapidly changing conditions and discussing alternatives. Before any of us could act on them, however, these conversations, like almost everything else in Chiapas, were overtaken by the Zapatistas' invasion of San Cristóbal on New Year's Day, 1994.

Post-1994: Zapatismo

After the economic depression and official neglect of the 1980s, and then the assault on indigenous organizations of the early 1990s — not to mention the centuries of exploitation and humiliation that had gone before — the armed rebellion of 1994 was almost overdetermined. Following an initial period of confusion on the part of those who were not Zapatistas, within a few weeks of January 1 indigenous people throughout Chiapas, indeed, throughout Mexico, remember feeling a surge of pride that others like them had occupied a mestizo city and defeated the Mexican army in initial encounters. Friends of ours say that for months afterward upon encountering other indigenous people on the sidewalk they smiled knowingly at each other, proud of their identity.

Although they pale next to the other effects of the Zapatista Rebellion, the impacts of the revolt on independent projects like ours were also profound. While there was more than enough to learn, talk, and write about, for several years working on publishing projects within communities became problematic. By the summer of 1994, as the state's reaction to the Zapatistas became organized, there began to be paramilitary patrols, assassinations, and random shootings throughout rural Chiapas. As a result, whereas formerly it had been our practice to stay overnight in people's houses and participate in local discussions, now we worried about bringing unwanted attention to those with whom we collaborated. Aside from any danger to ourselves — which we actually judged to be slight¹⁴ — we worried about how this surveillance and violence and the reaction to them might affect our friends and hosts. Would someone mistake us for government representatives or *subversivos* and take it out on our collaborators?¹⁵ As for native language publishing itself, in the highly polarized atmosphere of the second half of the 1990s everyone was forced to choose sides. In the summer of 1994 the government held meetings of native language writers and publishers and soon after began subsidizing many as a way of promoting the idea that the state was “with” indigenous people. The Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN) and the generally pro-Zapatista independent political organizations, meanwhile, also published manifestos and newsletters in indigenous languages — both sides demonstrating, parenthetically, that in just a few years writing in native language had become a well-established means of communicating across entire regions.¹⁶ There was no question of which side our NGO, INAREMAC, was on in this division. At great personal risk, those members of INAREMAC

who were resident in Chiapas traveled to the most conflictive parts of the state and documented human rights abuses.¹⁷ As summer visitors, however, the two of us were not in a position either to sustain a contestatory publishing project or to encourage indigenous communities whose dangers we did not share to do so. Instead, over the first several years after 1994 we continued to make open, public visits to places where we were known, concentrating less on publishing than on documenting economic deterioration and political change (see Rus and Rus 2004).¹⁸

Nevertheless, two Taller Tzotzil productions did appear during this period. The first was a pair of translations for nonindigenous audiences of Tzotzil-language accounts of the rebellion of 1994 and its aftermath: “Los primeros meses de los zapatistas” (“The first months of the Zapatistas”) (1995) and “Conversaciones interrumpidas” (“Interrupted conversations,” 2000), by Mariano Peres Tsu (the pseudonym our partner Xalik Kusman had chosen for himself). The two translations present vignettes of indigenous life in Chiapas after 1994. The first told of the emotions and reactions of different groups immediately following the rebellion, and the second of events in an urban colony in the late 1990s as the state tried to reassert control and the inhabitants tried to evade it. Both chronicles have been published several times in four countries and in 2002 were published together as “A Tzotzil Chronicle of the Zapatista Uprising” in Gilbert Joseph’s and Timothy Henderson’s *Mexico Reader* (Duke, 2002.) Unlike earlier publications of the Taller, most of which were transcribed oral histories, these essays were written in Tzotzil by a native writer; we provided only the translation and editing.

The second publication, *Jchi’iltak ta Shumal Kalifornya* (“Chamulas in California”), which appeared in 1996, originated from one of the two projects we had begun between 1990 and 1993 and grew out of our contact with some of the first undocumented Tzotzil workers to arrive in California. Four hundred copies of the testimonies of the brothers Manuel, Salvador, and Pedro Pérez were printed, and they were distributed largely through NGOs and churches working in the Tzotzil region. “Going north” was still almost unheard of in rural Chiapas in the 1990s, and in addition to telling a story the book attempted to offer counsel to those planning to make the trip. In addition to the brothers’ adventures getting to and crossing the border and learning to survive in the United States, woven into the story was advice about obtaining and safely using false identification, avoiding being cheated by employers or caught by the *migra* (border patrol), and getting help after

being detained and dumped back on the Mexican side of the border without money or documents. In appendices which were later copied separately as flyers, *Jchi'iltak* also provided information in Tzotzil and Spanish about groups along both sides of the border that offered aid to migrants and about the rights of undocumented workers.

The biggest difference between the projects undertaken after 1994 and those before is that in the later projects authors' identities were sometimes hidden. In the case of *Jchi'iltak* we had conducted the interviews in California, and neither we nor the interviewees were sure what pressures the brothers' families might experience in Chiapas if their absence and dollar income were publicized. To be safe, we all agreed to mask their identities. When the brothers returned to Chiapas after the book's appearance, however, and realized that it was circulating in the shantytowns and that Xalik Kusman of the Taller had been interviewed about it on a Tzotzil-language radio program, they were proud to claim authorship. One brother later used it in his campaign to be the first indigenous member of San Cristóbal's city council, and in radio interviews elaborated on the book's account of his experiences. In the case of Xalik Kusman's own vignettes of the Zapatista Rebellion, on the other hand, the disguise has been maintained for years because of Xalik's well-founded fear of reprisals from the ladino authorities he so humorously portrayed.¹⁹

In general, our practice had been to keep from intruding in the texts with introductions and explanatory footnotes. In the case of *Jchi'iltak*, however, where the purpose was in part to warn readers about the hardships of undocumented migration, we felt it was necessary to say something about why people migrated and to elaborate on the conditions migrants faced. We also wanted to explain that most U.S. citizens were the descendants of migrants. A brief socio-politico-historical section was added. In the case of the translated chronicles, introductions were provided to explain the unusual origin of the documents.

This brings the story of the Taller up to the present. Although the Taller never formally closed, its activity waned after the 1990s. One project is still in progress: a Tzotzil-language history of San Cristóbal's shantytowns. Undertaken in collaboration with the Tzotzil writer Xalik Kusman in 1990, it had, by the summer of 2009, generated more than thirty-eight hundred handwritten pages of testimony and stories. All that remains to be done is editing and organization.²⁰

Final Reflections

As economic and then social and political conditions deteriorated during the 1970s and 1980s, the tradition of critical historical narrative and analysis that had always existed within Tzotzil and other indigenous communities increasingly transcended social and cultural borders and spread across Chiapas. What native speakers talking to each other in their own languages had formerly said only among themselves was now increasingly expressed to indigenous people beyond their local groups as well as to Spanish-speakers. Information traveled the other way as well, deepening Tzotzil-speakers' knowledge of the changes affecting all Mexicans, not just themselves. By the second half of the 1980s all of indigenous Chiapas was engaged in an earnest intellectual and political debate, as within every family different members tried new ways of making a living, organizing themselves, and even thinking about life. What was the news from those who had moved to the city; had they found work and places to live? What of homesteading in the jungle, did clearing land and planting coffee seem to offer a safe future? What about the many independent organizations and cooperatives, what did they offer? Were Protestantism, in its many varieties, or liberation Catholicism better ways of organizing and thinking about life than traditional communities and religion?

Native language writing and the birth of media controlled by indigenous people were among the by-products of this effervescence. The plantation economy and the community structures bound to it were swept away so quickly that people who spoke Tzotzil and Chiapas's other native languages had little choice but to talk about the change and discuss alternatives in their own tongues. In the process, they made Tzotzil—including written Tzotzil—not only a means of communication, but also a basis of solidarity in the new urban and national environments they were entering. If we and others helping with communications projects found receptive audiences, in turn, the reason was not so much our own persuasiveness as this changed context. By the early 2000s, in a region where only thirty years earlier native language speakers were only beginning to write, university theses are now being completed in indigenous languages; the international and national news are translated daily into Tzotzil and circulated in xeroxed "newspapers" in the market; unregulated, low-power FM radio stations broadcast in Tzotzil from San Cristóbal's shantytowns; and the number of government institutions, churches, NGOs, independent organizations, and private presses that publish in Tzotzil and other indigenous languages continues to multiply.

Thinking about indigenous people in developing societies from the comfortable, urbanized North, it is possible to despair. “Our” world is systematically squeezing theirs out of its environmental and economic niches, in the process unraveling their societies and ways of life. Seeing how one-sided this change is and always has been, one might well believe that the people of small cultures and languages do not see what is happening to them, and that even if they do, whether through our fault or theirs, they cannot make themselves heard. Those of us who have had the opportunity to be in direct contact with people in places like Chiapas, however—to have experienced both their eagerness to communicate and the power of their ideas—are probably more hopeful. Writing and publishing in native languages cannot roll back the current global order. But by giving as many people as possible the means and the confidence to express their views, they do make it possible for ever more voices to join our common conversation, for the subaltern to speak.

Notes

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1. The Instituto de Asesoría Antropológica para la Región Maya, A.C. (INAREMAC) was founded by Andrés Aubry in 1973 with the sponsorship of Bishop Samuel Ruiz, who felt Chiapas’s liberationist Catholic Church needed independent anthropological advice. Following the Congreso Indígena of 1974 (Morales 1992), in which it played a role, INAREMAC acted as host for experimental, community-directed projects in organic agriculture, health education, a furniture cooperative, and the Taller Tzotzil. In its first years the Taller organized language classes for clergy and social workers. Under the direction of the anthropologist John Burstein, however, it soon turned to providing literacy courses in Tzotzil communities. The first booklet to follow these courses was published in the fall of 1976 (Aubry 1988). During our own time in the Taller, funds have been provided by the French Comité Catholique Contre la Faim et Pour le Développement, the European Community, INAREMAC’s French support group, INAREMAC’s Chiapas board of directors, headed by Amado Avendaño and Carlos Rodríguez, and the Jacobs Research Fund of Bellingham, Washington.

2. There are no known documents written in Tzotzil by native speakers to be read by other native speakers from the arrival of Europeans (1524) through the 1940s. During the 1940s writing was reintroduced in Tzotzil, as in Chiapas's other Maya languages, by the missionary linguists of the Summer Institute of Linguistics/Wycliffe Bible Translators (SIL/WBT). After 1951 SIL/WBT linguists produced the materials for the bilingual education programs of the Instituto Nacional Indigenista (INI), which became the source of Chiapas's new indigenous literacy. The first publishing by native writers appeared after the mid-1970s. Among those who produced this material in addition to the Taller Tzotzil were Taller Leñateros (1979–) (see note 8); Sna Jtz'ibajom (1982–), founded by former language assistants to anthropologists with help from Robert M. Laughlin; the writers' project of the state government (1982–88), led by Dr. Jacinto Arias Sojom; La Castalia, advised by Gudrun and Carlos Lenkersdorf, which published in Tojolabal from the mid-1970s through the 1980s; the Instituto de Estudios Indígenas of the Universidad Autónoma de Chiapas, which has published occasionally in native languages since 1985; and various irregular projects of independent organizations, churches, and Mexican universities with programs in Chiapas. Since the mid-1990s, the native writers' own organization, CELALI, has also published native language texts or placed them with other publishers. (For more, see Laughlin 1993; Benjamin 2000; and Past 2005.)

3. Menchú (1984 [1983]), in reaction, see Stoll (1999), J. Rus, ed. (1999); Chakravorty-Spivak (1988), Gugelberger (1996).

4. Chiapas's commercial agriculture required some 125,000 seasonal workers in the early 1970s, and only a few thousand more in the mid-1980s. Meanwhile, the number of indigenous men looking for such work almost doubled between 1970 and 1990, from 150,000 to more than 300,000 (see Collier 1994; J. Rus 1995).

5. This was true of virtually all studies published before the 1980s. The exception was Ricardo Pozas (1952; 1962), whose *Juan, the Chamula*, although classified as a novel when it first appeared in 1948, was arguably the Maya region's first *testimonio*. See J. Rus (2004).

6. Originally we intended to produce both booklets and tape cassettes of sound documentaries blending the interviews with music. Thinking about all the time people spent in minibuses and *colectivos*, with their omnipresent tapes of ranchero music, we thought tapes would broaden our audience. After a first experiment, however, we realized that recording, mixing, producing, and distributing tapes was beyond our capacity.

7. At a panel entitled the "Current State and Future Prospects of Maya Language Literature" at the Congreso Internacional de Mayistas in 1989, there was an energetic discussion about the distribution and sale of native language materials. Minimum wage in Chiapas is regularly adjusted to remain at approximately three dollars per day, with agricultural workers typically making half to two-thirds of that wage, often paid in kind. Potential readers' ability to pay is severely limited. INI has historically

given away its materials, while the SIL/WBT and most of the writing projects charged low, highly subsidized prices. For example, both editions of *Abtel* sold for the equivalent of twenty cents in indigenous communities, and the second edition for five dollars in bookstores.

8. The exceptions both involved Ámbar Past (1989; 1980), and in Burstein, Past, and Wassestrom (1979). Past began collecting women's stories and lore in 1975 and has helped indigenous women publish continuously since 1979 through Taller Leñateros. Since the late 1980s there have been a number of other writing, theater, and media projects managed by women and dedicated to women's themes, among them Fortaleza de la Mujer Maya (FOMMA) (1992-), inspired and advised by Miriam Laughlin; and the Proyecto Fotográfico Maya, founded by Carlota Duarte.

9. The principal differences between the orthographies is INEA's use of "k" versus SIL/WBT's use of "c" and "qu" for the same sound, and slight differences in conventions about glottal stops. Ironically, in discussions with Maya writers from Guatemala at the Congreso Mayista of 1989, it turned out that the Academia de Lenguas Mayas de Guatemala chose to use "c/qu" over "k" because in Guatemala the latter was associated with the despised national government. In Chiapas, the SIL/WBT orthography received a boost as a universal convention at the end of the 1990s when Bible translations in Tzotzil and Tzeltal, originally undertaken by the Protestants, were approved by the progressive Catholic diocese of San Cristóbal (e.g., Sociedad Bíblica 1997).

10. Our Tzotzil names since our first summer in Chiapas were Xalik for Jan, and Tina for Diane. When we added "Rus," Jan's name sounded to Tzotzil-speakers like "Xalik Kurus," Tzotzil for "Salvador Cruz." Kurus thus became our last name.

11. Most of those on one side were descendants of the ejido's original Tzotzil-speaking community, dispossessed by a ladino planter in the mid-nineteenth century. Most of the members of the other were Tzeltal speakers whose ancestors had been brought to Los Chorros as debt laborers after the 1890s. In all the years of inhabiting the same space, many on each side spoke the other side's language, and there were even intermarriages. But since the 1970s they had joined rival political parties and by the mid-1980s were locked in conflict (see Arias 1984; Aubry and Inda 1998; Hernández Castillo 2001).

12. In the United States, whether to use names or not is still debated among oral historians and the university and government officials charged with protection of research subjects. See the website of *Perspectives* of the American Historical Association for the range of views: www.historians.org/Perspectives (accessed 30 January 2006).

13. *Slo'il cha'vo' kumpareil / Cuento de los dos compadres* was a Zinacanteco folk-tale transcribed by our colleague Chep Ernantes. Edited as a bilingual children's story by Chep and Diane, with illustrations by Elizabeth Ross, it was later translated into French by Isabelle Duquesne of INAREMAC for distribution to Taller supporters in France. A fourth book from this period was *Historia de un pueblo evangelista: Triunfo*

Agrarista (1993), by Ricardo Pérez. A ladino campesino from Chiapas's Central Valley, Pérez read the Taller's books and then wrote his own history of his Protestant refugee colony, illustrated it with his own snapshots, and presented it to the Taller for publication.

14. Aside from expulsion for interfering in Mexican politics, occasional heavy-handed surveillance and interrogation, and a handful of cases of official assault, foreigners were largely immune to the repression after 1994. The hope that this would be so was the basis for stationing foreign citizens in Peace Camps in the midst of threatened communities. That none have been killed does not in any way diminish the courage of peace campers, who still, as this is written in 2006, face the prospect of violence.

15. This did not apply to our "home" hamlet in Chamula, where our sons' godparents resided and everyone knew us. Even there, however, although it had nothing to do with us, a paramilitary patrol surrounded and menaced a primary school graduation we attended in 1997 until local men calmed them down.

16. For the larger context of this shift, see Benjamin (2000).

17. Angélica Inda, one of INAREMAC's six members, was the EZLN's secretary at the San Andrés Peace Talks. Andrés Aubry worked full-time writing and editing the summaries and communiqués of Bishop Samuel Ruiz and the mediators at the talks. At great personal risk and eventually cost to their health, they also documented and spoke out about human rights abuses throughout the period after 1994 (see Aubry and Inda, 2003). Still a third associate, Michel Chanteaux, a resident of Chiapas for more than thirty-five years, was expelled from Mexico two days after the Acteal massacre in December 1997 for having been the source of the first news reports that the army was nearby and did not intervene (Chanteaux 1999).

18. Outside of Mexico we felt freer and lectured and were interviewed frequently. We also helped organize an international campaign in 1998 to keep Chiapas open to scholars and human rights observers and to free a Mexican scholar who had been swept up in a military raid.

19. In confirmation of the continuing power of Xalik's words, in Subcomandante Marcos's speech celebrating the fifteenth anniversary of the Zapatistas' rebellion of 1994, he quoted directly and at length from "Los primeros meses de los zapatistas" (Subcomandante Marcos, "Siete vientos en los calendarios y geografías de abajo," reprinted in *La Jornada*, Mexico City, 4 January 2009).

20. Meanwhile, beginning soon after the San Andrés Peace Accords of 1996, Andrés Aubry supervised the translation of the accords and related documents, more than one hundred pages, into ten indigenous languages spoken in Chiapas, including Tzotzil (*Los Acuerdos de San Andrés* 2003).