

PREFACE TO THE THIRD EDITION

In January 1991, Zinacanteco Indians in Chiapas questioned me about the Persian Gulf War. Why had Saddam Hussein and George Bush brought countries on opposite sides of the world into war? Would burning Kuwait oil fields truly pollute the world's skies and seas? Might warfare come to Chiapas?

A different kind of war arose in Chiapas on January 1, 1994, when the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) rebelled against the Mexican government in a region that seems remote and exotic to many. But Chiapas and the Persian Gulf are closer than one might think, drawn together by the geopolitics of petroleum that have transformed Mexico's agrarian economy since the OPEC crisis stunned the world in 1972.

Mexico began to produce oil for export in the 1970s, pouring borrowed petrodollars into development that drew people out of the countryside and confronted the country with shortfalls in basic foods and a crisis in agriculture. Subsidies and agrarian reform helped stave off the setbacks in agriculture until 1982, when dropping world oil prices plunged Mexico into a crisis of debt. Austerity and economic restructuring cut support for agrarian programs, and the problems in the countryside worsened. The Zapatista rebellion responds to this crisis.

The Mexican crisis was one that has been felt around the globe in various ways, by people whose jobs have moved offshore in the "free market" economy, by those whose states have cut support for health, welfare, and social services, and by those whose lost livelihoods have forced them into international migration as undocumented and poorly paid workers.

I began studying peasant agriculture in the highlands of Chiapas in the early 1960s and have witnessed many of the changes that oil-led development has brought to the lives and livelihoods of Zinacantecos and other indigenous peasants of the region. This book about the

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beginnings of the Zapatista rebellion draws on the unusual privilege of my having been able to return to Chiapas repeatedly through more than three decades of dramatic change.

About myself and the perspectives that I bring to this writing, I have the following to say. My values have been shaped by a family firmly committed to New Deal Democratic politics, probably inclining me to sympathy for national states such as Mexico that have embraced responsibilities for popular welfare. Nonetheless, born in 1942, I matured after World War II in the era of cold war that erased much of our consciousness of class and politics. It was when I began to read about Latin American and Iberian history that I decided to study agrarian politics and change.

At the time of Lázaro Cárdenas' 1934–1940 presidency in Mexico, my grandfather, John Collier, Sr., was the commissioner of Indian affairs in the Roosevelt administration and an activist for Indianism (national programs on behalf of indigenous people) in the Americas. I knew him in his elder years as a somewhat eccentric, introspective, yet visionary person whose love of wilderness and solitude, I later realized, stemmed from how he had come to grips with adolescent depression after the suicide and death of his parents. As an anthropologist, I have always been intrigued by, yet distanced from, Indianism, which I understand in historical perspective as partaking of what Renato Rosaldo describes in his *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis* as “imperialist nostalgia.” It is not for lack of interest in the contemporary Maya that I take this position; I have mastered Tzotzil as a way of learning from Zinacanteco and other indigenous people of central highland Chiapas about their history, politics, and views of the world. My experience with and understanding of the Maya contribute to my skepticism of those who interpret the Zapatista movement solely as a Maya movement when it has so much in common with the shared concerns of the class of rural poor and the basic rights of all citizens. Since 1994, the Zapatistas have protagonized the cause of indigenous autonomy, but land, health, housing, education, work, and fair prices have always been central to their goals.

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I am also wary of idealizations of peasant and indigenous communities. I see such communities as much less egalitarian and more differentiated by class and politics than do many analysts. The appeal to collective sentiments is often combined with maneuvering for personal power. Many of the Mexican indigenous and other peasants I shall talk about have protagonized activism for land, or have challenged the ruling party on behalf of their fellows at one stage of their political careers while taking the side of the national state and exercising its power at another stage. Their rise to power and their exercise of power have as much to do with striving for advantage over one another as with the ways in which the regional or national bourgeoisie gain advantage over them.

My wariness extends to what I sometimes feel has been romantic fetishization of the Zapatista rebellion and of its charismatic spokesperson, Subcomandante Marcos. Indigenous Chiapas involves many who are not part of the rebellion, but whose lives have been caught up in the same forces that precipitated the uprising and have flowed from it. These people all deserve our consideration in understanding what Chiapas means for our world.

I have learned a great deal about Chiapas from the work and insight of colleagues in what began as the Harvard Chiapas Project, led by Evon Z. Vogt, who introduced me and dozens of other students to research in highland Chiapas. Frank and Francesca Cancian, Jane Collier, John Haviland, Lourdes de León, Robert and Mimi Laughlin, Jan and Diane Rus, and Evon and Catherine Vogt have shared their lives and work with me in more ways than I can credit.

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Elizabeth Quaratiello and I have collaborated in writing this book, which is based on my research and other scholarly writing. We wish to thank our families for their patience and forbearance in allowing us to bring the work to fruition.

George A. Collier

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