“The Sad Situation of Civilians and Soldiers”:
The Banditry of Zapatismo in the Mexican Revolution

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Throughout the course of the Mexican Revolution (1910–1920), Emiliano Zapata and his followers—who together formed the most renowned peasant rebellion in Mexican history—were often considered bandits by those who purported to govern Mexico. That was more or less how polite society in Mexico City thought of them when, in March 1911, they rose up from their villages in the south-central state of Morelos and surrounding areas against dictator Porfirio Díaz. Indeed, Díaz had ruled in the name of order and progress for thirty-five years, and during that time he had often defined rural unrest as banditry and punished it accordingly. He had also enacted policies that helped produce that unrest by encouraging and assisting the encroachments of large landholders on village land and water rights.

Zapata’s rebellion against Díaz, then, was primarily motivated by the desire for a land reform that would reverse the alienation of village resources. It occurred when it did largely due to the opportunity provided when Francisco Madero, a member of an elite, hacienda-owning family in the northern state of Coahuila, began the broader revolution by calling the nation to arms in late 1910 in protest of Díaz’s most recent reelection. Surprisingly—given Díaz’s longevity in power—Madero’s insurrection toppled the old regime in May 1911. But, despite the participation of the Zapatistas in this successful uprising, the accusations of banditry against them did not end. The mostly conservative Mexico City press, championing the property rights of the hacendados of Morelos, soon nicknamed Zapata “The Attila of the South” and credited him with the pronouncement, “the only government I recognize is my pistols.”¹ In late August, when Francisco León de la Barra—the conservative interim president that Madero’s revolution had

¹ El imparcial (Mexico City), June 20, 1911. An hacendado is the owner of an hacienda.
placed in power—sought to resolve rising tensions in Morelos by sending federal troops to fight the Zapatistas, it was, rhetorically, bandits that they were hunting.\(^2\)

This posture toward Zapatismo was taken up by Madero, who came to the presidency in his own right in November 1911 but could not talk Zapata into laying down his arms.\(^3\) Thereafter, it was inherited by most of those who claimed power in Mexico City, whether they were revolutionaries or not, for the rest of the tortuous decade. Finally, in 1919, the contention that Zapata was merely a bandit helped justify his assassination by forces loyal to Venustiano Carranza, another revolutionary from northern Mexico who had begun to fight the Zapatistas in 1914 and had ruled from Mexico City since 1915.

The scholarly community, however, has long presumed to know better than the governments that opposed Zapata. If Díaz, de la Barra, Madero, and Carranza considered the Zapatistas bandits, historians have argued, that was hardly an objective description; rather, governments have often charged peasant rebels with banditry as a way of denying them political legitimacy, and that was the case with Zapatismo. According to this line of thought, the Zapatistas were revolutionaries, not bandits. John Womack does not closely analyze the relationship between banditry and Zapatismo in his classic work on the movement, but when he mentions bandits he tends to put them in a separate category from true revolutionaries. Moreover, even when he does acknowledge that tensions within Zapatismo sometimes manifested themselves in banditry and other forms of internal conflict, Womack generally concludes that Zapata was able to resolve those tensions and conflicts, and he chooses to stress their resolution. With regard to banditry that was merely “predatory,” Alan Knight’s recent seminal survey of the revolution largely echoes Womack’s line, adding that banditry constituted a smaller problem on Zapata’s turf than in other parts of Mexico. Knight also asserts that the activities of Zapatista guerrillas that resembled banditry were often, in the revolutionary context, “social” banditry rather than banditry per se: they were directed against hacendados, local officials, and urban merchants; they were redistributive; and the “bandits” who engaged in them had deep connections to peasant communities, which approved of their activities. In sum, the most serious and careful students of the Zapatistas have generally supposed that banditry—at least of the nonsocial variety—was relatively insignificant among them.\(^4\)

Knight’s discussion of social banditry naturally leads us to the origins of the concept in the work of Eric Hobsbawm, which is a logical place to begin seeking a broader theoretical context for an examination of the banditry of Zapatismo. For Hobsbawm, banditry directed against the elite and supported by peasant communities is social in that it can be assumed to have class motives. These motives can generally only be assumed, because social banditry is a “pre-political” form of

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\(^2\) See Victoriano Huerta to Francisco León de la Barra, August 20, 1911, Centro de Estudios Sobre la Universidad, Mexico City, Archivo de Gildardo Magaña (hereafter, AGM), 16: 1: 27.

\(^3\) For Madero calling Zapata a bandit, see Diario del hogar (Mexico City), January 3, 1912.

resistance in which motives are frequently unconscious and well hidden. At best “primitive” reformers, social bandits inevitably give way to more consciously political actors—social revolutionaries, in some cases—as societies evolve. Although Hobsbawm’s work is slippery on this point, his fundamental position is that social bandits and social revolutionaries cannot really be the same people, for they are the products of diverse stages in the development of world capitalism. We might, of course, simply ignore this part of Hobsbawm’s argument for the time being, except that his decision to keep social bandits and social revolutionaries more or less separate may reflect some anticipation of the difficulties that arise from placing social bandits on a revolutionary stage. The intentions and modes of operation of social bandits, after all, are rather indistinguishable from those of peasant revolutionaries engaged in a guerrilla war, with the result that social banditry loses its force as an analytical category in such a context. To consider the existence and meaning of social banditry within Zapatismo in any detail would be pointless.

Another problem with the social-bandit approach has to do with the typology it has spawned. Scholars seeking to revise Hobsbawm have argued that his sources—largely the stories and songs of popular culture—are sometimes not even truly the products of peasants and at best demonstrate only mythical connections between peasants and bandits, not the reality of such ties. At least in Latin America, they claim, bandits are generally more closely linked to landlords than to campesinos, and banditry has usually been motivated by the desires of individuals for economic gain or undertaken in the context of political factionalism that lacks a component of class conflict. In pursuing this argument, these scholars have given us political bandits and guerrilla bandits to add to the several kinds of social bandits that Hobsbawm identifies. As they have made room for their new bandit varieties, there has been some tendency to read Hobsbawm reductively, ignoring his perception that social bandits have always had diverse intentions.

The legacy of this process is a series of somewhat two-dimensional bandit types, none of which seems quite broad enough to encompass Zapatista banditry—though spokespeople for the various models might certainly find material in Zapatismo that would support their arguments. Part of the problem is that the revisionists, like Hobsbawm, are limited by their sources: the police and judicial records on which they often depend naturally reveal little about bandit motives, at least not without being “deconstructed.” The student of Zapatismo, meanwhile, is blessed with an abundance of sources generated by the movement itself and thus need not worry much about either popular mythification or elite bias. The sources for the study of

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7 Hobsbawm, *Bandits*, 15, distinguishes three main forms of social banditry: the noble robber (Robin Hood), the Haiduk, and the avenger.
Zapatista banditry are not perfect; indeed, one might argue that there were certain biases built into the records produced at Zapatista headquarters. But the testimony of headquarters is complemented by documents generated by villagers and by jefes (leaders of guerrillas) in the field. Taken together, these sources reveal how complicated the subject of banditry can be and suggest that we can go deeper than the sometimes constraining debate over the social bandit.

More promising than the social-bandit model is Gilbert M. Joseph’s suggestion that students of banditry consider more carefully what their subject has to say about peasant consciousness, and that they might do that by locating it within the array of methods of peasant resistance James C. Scott has called “weapons of the weak.” In seeking to discover resistance in day-to-day peasant activities, Scott’s seminal study of a Malaysian village does not approach the subject of revolution any more directly than does Hobsbawm. For Scott, however, “everyday forms of resistance” are part of a larger group of peasant options that does include armed rebellion but within which revolution is not conceptualized as superior to or more sophisticated than other methods. There is thus nothing here to rule out the possibility that in specific circumstances peasants might choose to combine banditry and revolution in the pursuit of their goals. More important, by drawing attention to the politics of such activities as feigned ignorance, foot dragging, theft, and arson, Scott’s work challenges us to look for political motives in Zapatista banditry.

This essay, then, will suggest that the issue of Zapatista banditry is more complicated than either the governments that fought Zapata or the scholarly community have made it. It will demonstrate that banditry was far from insignificant among the Zapatistas. Although the Zapatistas were obviously not simply bandits, as their enemies claimed, there were always bandits among them—people whose banditry was problematic not in the eyes of outside observers alone but from the perspective of Zapata and members of his headquarters as well. Moreover, this essay will argue that this banditry has profound implications for our understanding of Zapatismo in that it was at times an expression of political goals that differed from those of Zapata. In doing so, it will test the applicability of Scott’s model to Zapatista banditry as well as explore what that banditry might tell us about peasant revolutions in general.

Because difficulties of definition have plagued the literature on the subject, any discussion of banditry must carefully define its terms. Luckily, most of us know a bandit when we see one. He or she is someone who engages in property theft as part of a group. This theft is sometimes combined with violence against the owners of that property and is generally associated with rural rather than urban areas and with direct confrontation rather than stealth. Gilbert Joseph cautions that such a “traditional legal” definition of banditry runs the risk of embracing the perhaps

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inevitable position of any given regime that such behavior is inherently criminal.\textsuperscript{9} Far from adopting the perspective of the state, my intention is to characterize banditry as objectively and dispassionately as possible. Recognizing the problem that Joseph identifies, however, I would suggest that my definition be qualified by the realization that property owners may have acquired their property by dubious means and that governments that enact laws to protect property are often (or usually) oppressive, which may make their laws illegitimate in the eyes of many of those they purport to rule. Although acts of banditry generally infringe on formal law codes, in other words, they are not necessarily immoral or unjustifiable.

During the early years of the Zapatista insurgency (1911 to mid-1914), many Zapatista activities fit this definition of banditry. When Pablo Torres Burgos (the first official leader of the movement) and Gabriel Tepepa took Jojutla, Morelos, on March 24, 1911, their \textit{campesino} followers opened the jail, drank the wine, destroyed telephone and telegraph lines, and availed themselves of arms, horses, and food. Led by Tepepa, who knew the area well, they burned the local archives to make it harder to identify liberated prisoners and other fugitives. They also sacked and burned the town’s main businesses and public offices and were especially destructive when it came to the property of Spaniards, who were popularly perceived as foreign oppressors.\textsuperscript{10} This behavior fits our definition of banditry, but it was also quite clearly class conflict and had an underlying revolutionary rationale. Beyond certain steps that were merely practical, it demonstrated the fact that the villagers of Morelos had not joined the Madero rebellion only to bring an end to the Díaz regime; rather, many of their goals were local and could be met in part by this immediate redistribution of resources and exacting of revenge.

Zapata apparently found these goals and this behavior acceptable, for he quickly took over the leadership of the movement when Torres Burgos, who had tried to stop the looting, resigned in protest. Indeed, Zapatista forces soon reenacted the events at Jojutla in other places, and often Zapata was present. But in the summer of 1911, after the Treaty of Ciudad Juárez ended the first round of fighting, Zapatista banditry became a political problem for Zapata. On the way to exile in Europe, Porfirio Díaz supposedly remarked, “Madero has unleashed a tiger. Now let’s see if he can control it.”\textsuperscript{11} Zapata, too, had a tiger on his hands, for episodes of banditry did not magically end with Madero’s victory.

That some banditry should continue was not surprising or unusual in such a decentralized rebellion, and Zapata’s troops were probably no more prone to theft and violence than those of other leaders. In fact, the banditry that occurred was generally rather tame and limited: property was appropriated, but there was little


\textsuperscript{10} “Relación de los sucesos en el estado de Morelos,” AGM, 28: 19: 808; AGM, 12: 1: 19; \textit{El imparcial}, March 25 and 28, 1911; Domingo Díez, \textit{Bosquejo histórico geográfico de Morelos} (Cuernavaca, 1967), 144; and Antonio Díaz Soto y Gama, \textit{La revolución agraria del sur y Emiliano Zapata, su caudillo} (Mexico City, 1960), 95.

serious violence against the *hacendados* and their allies. Zapata’s insistence on addressing the issue of land distribution, however, had earned him some powerful enemies, and they were intent on making political capital of the banditry that did take place. Zapata did what he could to defend himself against the charges of banditry that the Morelían elite raised with the new regime. But in the end, Madero, an *hacendado* himself, and the conservative de la Barra rather predictably found the propertied more credible than they did the leader of a peasant rebellion. By the end of the summer, they had become convinced—or at least pretended to believe—that there was serious disorder in Morelos, and they pressed Zapata to discharge his forces. When the distrust of the Zapatistas complicated that process, de la Barra sent troops into the state to settle the question by force of arms.

Thus it was that in the fall of 1911 Zapata suddenly had the responsibility, which he had probably not completely foreseen, of leading his own revolution. The question of political legitimacy now became even more important, and Zapata undoubtedly thought of the Plateados, a group of bandits that had operated in Morelos during the nineteenth-century Reform era—bandits with whom he had been compared and with whom he compared himself. Lacking an explicit program, the Plateados had failed to capture broad support among the villagers and had eventually been hunted down and killed. To avoid a similar fate, Zapata continued to reject accusations of banditry. He understood that the label “bandit” had political motives, and he used this label against his own political foes, especially jefe Ambrosio Figueroa of Guerrero, whose forces were then fighting the Zapatistas. Finally, in December, one of Zapata’s manifestos offered what might be considered a Zapatista definition of banditry: “One cannot call a person a bandit who, weak and helpless, was despoiled of his property by someone strong and powerful, and now that he cannot tolerate more, makes a superhuman effort to regain control over that which used to pertain to him. The despoiler is the bandit, not the despoiled!”

Zapata tried to refute charges that he and his followers were bandits primarily by reaching out to Mexican public opinion, in November 1911, through the Plan of

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13 On the Plateados, see Vanderwood, *Disorder and Progress*, 8–11, 53. Zapata’s charro dress was similar to the clothing worn by members of this bandit group; it may also be significant that both Zapata and the Plateados ultimately chose to establish their headquarters in the village of Tlaltizapán. *El imparcial*, March 20, 1911, notes that, as Zapata began his rebellion, rumors that the Plateados were again up in arms circulated in Morelos. See also Serafín M. Robles, “Semblanza del Plan de Ayala,” *El campesino* (Mexico City), January 1950.

Ayala, which would serve thereafter as his fundamental political statement.\textsuperscript{15} Clearly spelling out Zapatista demands for land and liberty, the Plan of Ayala was precisely the kind of revolutionary program the Plateados had lacked. Still, it could not in itself convince the rest of Mexico that Zapatismo was a politically legitimate revolutionary movement. In pursuit of that elusive goal, Zapata would have to try to limit episodes of banditry.

There was also another, more compelling reason to bring banditry under control. What would gradually build into a steady stream of campesino complaints about forced loans, robbery, murder, rape, and the destruction of village property had evidently already begun to demand Zapata's attention in 1911 and to make it obvious that Zapatista banditry was not only directed against the wealthy.\textsuperscript{16} In some cases, of course, the bandits of whom the villagers complained were only loosely connected to Zapatismo—or perhaps not at all. In other cases, such offenses were carried out by individuals who were prominent in the movement and who at other times served it well.

The reasons that banditry was directed against peasants in this early period are not always clear. The desire of individual \textit{jefes} and their guerrillas to control the resources of their zones was, however, an important factor, as was the general environment of lawlessness and violence bred by the civil war.\textsuperscript{17} Many episodes of banditry had as their underlying causes village feuds that went back for generations and did not diminish in intensity when the feuding villages both joined Zapatismo. One good example is the conflict in northwestern Morelos between Francisco Pacheco's village of Huiztla and Genovevo de la O's Santa María. Both de la O and Pacheco constantly denounced the forces of the other for acts of banditry and more generalized violence against guerrilleros and pacíficos alike. In doing so, they vividly demonstrated that while the villages of Morelos and surrounding areas could unite against common enemies in a way that those of Oaxaca, say, could not, in many cases that unity was highly problematic.\textsuperscript{18}

\textsuperscript{15} For the Plan of Ayala, see Womack, \textit{Zapata}, 400-04.

\textsuperscript{16} For a small sampling of these complaints, see the citizens of San Andrés de la Cal, Morelos to Zapata, October 14, 1913, Archivo General de la Nación, Archivo de Genovevo de la O (hereafter, AO), 13: 9: 33-34; Timoteo Sánchez to Zapata, Tepoztlán, Morelos, March 30, 1914, AO, 14: 4: 28; Francisco Mendoza to Zapata, September 15, 1913, AO, 13: 8: 5; Fortino Ayauquía to Zapata, September 29, 1913, AO, 13: 8: 15, and February 18, 1914, AO, 14: 3: 15; and the citizens of Coatepeco to de la O, October 27, 1912, AO, 1: 3: 87.

\textsuperscript{17} Whether a culture (or cultures) of violence existed in Morelos and surrounding areas before the revolution is uncertain. As the inhabitants of this region became brutalized by civil war, however, such a culture naturally emerged. For discussions of conflict and violence in Morelian villages after the revolution, see Lola Romanucci-Ross, \textit{Conflict, Violence, and Morality in a Mexican Village} ( Palo Alto, Calif., 1973); and Oscar Lewis, \textit{Life in a Mexican Village: Tepoztlán Restudied} (Urbana, Ill., 1951), 428-29. Finally, for revolutionary events contributing to cultures of violence in other regions, see James Greenberg, \textit{Blood Ties: Life and Violence in Rural Mexico} (Tucson, Ariz., 1989), 193; and Frans J. Schryer, \textit{Ethnicity and Class Conflict in Rural Mexico} (Princeton, N.J., 1990), 220.

\textsuperscript{18} For a typical dispute, see Pacheco to de la O, October 28 and 29, 1912, AO, 1: 3: 100, and AO, 1: 3: 102, respectively. Also see Zapata to Pacheco, August 18, 1912, AO, 11: 9: 4-5; Pacheco to de la O, September 1, 1912, September 23, 1912, and December 31, 1913, AO, 1: 3: 71, AO, 1: 3: 54, and AO, 2: 6: 40, respectively; Zapata to de la O, October 24, 1912, AO, 11: 10: 23; Salvador Rueda Smithers, "La zona armada de Genovevo de la O," \textit{Cuiculceo}, 2 (January 1981): 40-41; and Guillermo de la Peña, \textit{A Legacy of Promises: Agriculture, Politics, and Ritual in the Morelos Highlands of Mexico} (Austin, Tex., 1981), 86. On the Oaxacan case, see Ronald Waterbury, "Non-revolutionary Peasants: Oaxaca Compared to Morelos in the Mexican Revolution," \textit{Comparative Studies in Society and History}, 17 (1975): 410-42. A guerrillero was a warrior, and a pacífico a noncombatant.
Aside from the fact that this kind of banditry hurt the very people that Zapatismo was committed to helping, it was clear that such behavior would ultimately undermine the village support on which the guerrillas depended. For that reason, Zapata took action early. On December 20, 1911, he outlined for his forces specific means of dealing with the pueblos: those in arms were not to take more of the tortillas and the fodder that they required than was willingly given; they were to respect civil authorities that had been chosen democratically; they were to protect civilians. “The better we behave,” Zapata argued, “the more supporters and aid we will have among the people, and our triumph will come more quickly.”

But enforcing such dictates was never easy, given the nature of guerrilla warfare. To begin with, it was often difficult to be certain who the perpetrators were in any given case. Jefes whose forces were blamed for infractions often claimed that bandits not under their command were simply using their names, and it was undoubtedly difficult for Zapata, at a distance, to determine who was telling the truth. Furthermore, feuding Zapatistas surely exaggerated each other’s misconduct for political purposes. Zapata also had both to balance the demands of justice against the problems inherent in sending one guerrilla band to rein in another and to consider the repercussions of alienating people who might take their knowledge of the region’s terrain over to the enemy. Finally, if Zapata needed to hold the support of the villages, he also needed the firepower of even those Zapatistas who sometimes raided those villages. He understood that most of these occasionally brutal bands were his followers and, unlike Torres Burgos, had accepted that some degree of conflict within the Zapatista world was inevitable. As a result of all these considerations, Zapata was pragmatic in his desire to use sometime-bandits if the abuses they had committed were not “of an exaggerated nature, impossible to tolerate.”

Rather than punish his followers for their offenses, Zapata generally sought to “moralize” them. Directives regulating behavior and allotting key resources emerged constantly from his headquarters, sometimes elaborating on those issued in the past but often just rehashing them and thus demonstrating the persistence of episodes of banditry. In accord with his desire to keep those who sometimes transgressed within his movement, Zapata carefully avoided calling them bandits—another indication that he accepted the connection governments in Mexico City were making between banditry and political illegitimacy. True, these transgressors had become “strong and powerful” despoilers, but the December 1911 manifesto using that phrase had referred to the hacendados of Morelos—Zapatismo’s class

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19 Zapata’s circular of December 20, 1911, in Octavio Magaña’s “Historia documental de la revolución mexicana,” AGM (unnumbered boxes), document no. 212, pp. 3–7: Pueblo, as it is used in this article, simply means village.

20 Zapata to de la O, September 20, 1912, AO, 11: 10: 15. See also Francisco Mendoza to Zapata, September 15, 1913, AO, 13: 8: 5; and Zapata to de la O, February 28, 1913, AO, 11: 10: 31–34.

21 Zapata to de la O, November 12, 1912, AO, 11: 10: 24; Instrucciones a que Deberán Sugetarse los Jefes y Oficiales del Ejército Libertador del Sur y Centro, July 28, 1913, and Zapata’s circular, October 28, 1913, both in Centro de Estudios Históricos del Agrarismo en México (CEHAM), El ejército campesino del sur (ideología, organización y programa) (Mexico City, 1982), 46–47 and 141–42, respectively; the circulars of February 10 and 11, 1914, in Espejel, Emiliano Zapata, 179–80; Lorenzo Vázquez to Zapata, Jojutla, July 20, 1914, AO, 14: 8: 137; Zapata to de la O, February 28, 1913, AO, 11: 10: 31–34; and Zapata to de la O, April 3, 1913, AO, 11: 10: 44.
enemies—whose political legitimacy Zapata challenged. However much Zapatista bandits despoiled, their class position and political allegiance put them in a different category and demanded a different vocabulary. To characterize the events that troubled his movement, Zapata therefore employed a broad variety of words: abuses (abusos), outrages (atropellos), excesses (desmanes), crimes (delitos), robberies (robos), depredations (depredaciones), scandals (escándalos), assaults (asaltos).  

In at least one case during the early years of the rebellion, banditry was part of a direct threat to Zapata’s power. Among the most prominent of Zapatista chieftains was Felipe Neri, an explosives expert who made bombs in salmon cans. Deaf after being wounded in the May 1911 battle of Cuauhtla, Neri nevertheless took up operations later that same year in northeastern Morelos, southeastern Mexico state, and the Federal District. In June 1913, he was injured for a second time by a bomb of his own making, but still he fought on. Unfortunately, some of the fury that drove Neri to continue pursuing the Zapatista cause despite his injuries was taken out on his fellow Zapatistas and the villagers who supported them. In the spring of 1912, his troops had a shoot-out with those of de la O, and this was not an isolated incident. As one Zapatista veteran put it, Neri’s “manner of thinking was to rob,” and in 1913 his forces went on a spree of plunder, murder, and rape.  

Zapata understood by 1912 that “left to himself this man [Neri] is very disorderly.” Only in November 1913, however, when Neri bluntly responded to a scolding from Zapata concerning an arms dispute with two other jefes, did the full ramifications of his disorderliness become evident. Refusing to send the weapons he was accused of taking from his fellow Zapatistas to headquarters as Zapata demanded, Neri charged Zapata with favoring Camilo Duarte—one of the other jefes involved in the incident—simply because he was Zapata’s compadre. In fact, Neri claimed, Duarte had committed abuses in the area and had begun the present conflict by taking the guns in question from Neri’s soldiers. Zapata could have the weapons, the letter concluded, but if he sent for them, Neri would continue the revolution on his own.  

22 On the rare occasions when Zapata or one of his jefes did sign a document that used words like bandoleros, it was a sure sign that the person or persons in question had never been part of Zapatismo or were being disowned. See Zapata to Magaña, San Pablo, Morelos, February 16, 1919, AGM, 30: 29: 514; and [Génovevo de la O] to the Municipal President of Micatán, Micatán, Morelos, February 21, 1913, in Espejel, Emiliano Zapata, 125.  

23 Interview with José Lora Mirasol, conducted by Laura Espejel, Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, and Instituto de Investigaciones Dr. José María Luis Mora, Mexico City, October 2, 4, 1973, Programa de Historia Oral (hereafter, PHO), Z/14, pp. 49–50. See also AO, 12: 1: 8, and AO, 12: 1: 10; Constancio Falfán to Zapata, November 22, 1913, AO, 13: 10: 63; Ireneo Albarrán Ayala to Zapata, November 10, 1913, AO, 13: 10: 58–59; the Archivo Histórico de la Defensa Nacional, Mexico City (hereafter, ADN), pensionados, de la O, X/III, 19; Zapata to de la O, June 27, 1913, AO, 11: 10: 48; interview with Angel Capistrán, conducted by Rosalind Beinler, Mexico City, PHO/1/199; and interview with Serafin Plasencia Gutiérrez, conducted by Laura Espejel and Salvador Rueda, Mexico City, September 13 and 20, 1974, PHO, Z/15, p. 51.  


25 Compadres were men tied to one another in fictive kinship through one of several rituals of compadrazgo (godparenthood), the most important of which was when one man became godparent of the child of another at baptism. For the significance of fictive kinship relations in establishing a network of Zapatista loyalty and leadership, see Salvador Rueda, “Oposición y subversión: Testimonios zapatistas,” Historias, 3 (1983): 10–11.  

26 Neri to Zapata, Tlayacapan, Morelos, November 11, 1913, AO, 13: 10: 14–16.
In nine years of revolutionary correspondence, no other Zapatista ever dared to confront Zapata so openly. Neri, it seems, had always “wanted to be more than Zapata”: indeed, one goal of his banditry was surely to expand his zone—and his power—at the expense of neighboring Zapatistas. Beyond the likelihood that Neri’s behavior would alienate villages from the cause was the possibility that Neri, who commanded significant loyalty from other Zapatista chieftains, might divide the movement. On January 23, 1914, troops of a Zapatista named Antonio Barona gunned down Neri in or near Tepoztlán, Morelos. Strong circumstantial evidence indicates that Zapata ordered him killed, the only way to stop a guerrillero out of control. Although this order is missing—or, more likely, was never committed to paper—the coincidence that Neri should die at this time and in this way is striking, especially if one considers that Barona was the logical man for the job. As tough a character as Neri, he, too, was Zapata’s compadre and could thus be trusted to keep secret Zapata’s role in Neri’s death. Not surprisingly, Barona was never called to account for his participation in this event.

Despite the case of Felipe Neri, Zapatismo remained relatively cohesive during its early years, and banditry rarely became a serious political threat. Eventually, though, the movement, and the role of banditry within it, began to change. In the words of one witness, from 1911 to 1914, “everyone was more or less in accord with the jefe [Zapata],” but from 1915 to 1920, “the government would come and burn the pueblos, the Zapatistas would come and assault [us], so that when Zapata died the people desired peace more than anything, even if the Plan of Ayala was not fulfilled.” Many of the reasons for this change can be traced to the events of the twelve months after August 1914. During that period, Zapatismo reached its greatest power on the national scene. In alliance with the troops of yet another northern revolutionary, Francisco “Pancho” Villa, the Zapatistas created a nominal national government—the Convention—and held Mexico City for months at a time. Meanwhile, although Villa and Zapata also undertook a war against Venustiano Carranza’s Constitutionalist faction that would last for the remainder of Zapata’s life, the early stages of that war were primarily fought by the Villistas north of Mexico City. Peace prevailed in the Zapatista heartland, enabling Zapata to pursue his revolutionary program.

Unfortunately, many perils threatened this relative peace. Among them was the

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27 Interview with Serafín Plasencia Gutiérrez, PHO, Z/1/59, p. 51. See also Ireneo Albarrán Ayala to Zapata, November 1, 1913, in Mirta Rosovsky, et al., eds., Documentos inéditos sobre Emiliano Zapata (Mexico City, 1979), 35–37.

28 On other, less sensitive occasions, Zapata did issue written hit orders—see, for instance, Zapata to Lorenzo Vázquez, January 31, 1916, AGM, 31: 2: 100. For accounts of Neri’s death, see Juan Solas for Antonio Barona to Zapata, January 23, 1914, AO, 14: 1: 66; Amador Salazar to Zapata, January 23, 1914, AO, 14: 1: 65; Miguel Angel Sedano P., Emiliano Zapata: Revolucionarios surianos y memorias de Quintrín González (Mexico City, 1970), 62; and interview with Carmen Aldana, conducted by Laura Espejel, Tepalcango, Morelos, March 2, 30, 1974, PHO, Z/1/32. Although Barona escaped immediate punishment for Neri’s death, fate eventually caught up with him: he was killed by the troops of de la O in late 1915.

29 Don Leonor of Tepalcango, Morelos, cited in Elena Azaola Garrido, “Tepalcango: La dependencia política de un municipio de Morelos,” in Azaola Garrido and Esteban Krotz, Los campesinos de la tierra de Zapata III: Política y conflicto (Mexico City, 1976), 42.
changing nature of resource competition in the Zapatista world. Much of Zapatismo’s unity and early impetus came from the common desire of Morelian campesinos to stop the expansion of the hacienda system that dominated the economy of their state. Now, in the summer and fall of 1914, the last haciendas passed into Zapatista hands and began to be divided among villages in a formal process of land reform. As respective villages rushed to claim their share of the newly available land and water, it became obvious that neither oral tradition nor the maps and titles that now came out from their hiding places provided the kind of precise data that was needed. Based on these sources, the claims of one community often overlapped those of another. With the common enemy gone, tensions between neighboring villages grew and sometimes burst into open conflict.  

Meanwhile, the relationship between Zapatista troops and the communities they represented underwent a metamorphosis. In 1914, some villages began to claim that they could no longer feed the Zapatistas, and by mid-1915, food was apparently growing scarce in the region. In May of that year, Zapata’s brother Eufemio informed the chief executive of the Convention government that the food situation in southwestern Puebla was “of more urgency than free love”; Zapata himself soon wrote of similar pressures in Morelos. The determination of both individual villages and the movement to maximize their resources probably led to some exaggeration of shortages. Still, the growing size of Zapatismo, combined with poor distribution of foodstuffs, hoarding, and bad harvests in some areas, had created a problem: the villages of Morelos and its neighboring states apparently could not feed as many men as were in the field.

The urban experiences of this period formed yet another source of tension within the movement. When the Zapatistas occupied Mexico City in November 1914, they were well behaved and even humble—some went begging for food from house to house. As they became accustomed to the city, however, many forgot both that initial humility and Zapata’s instructions about conduct. Some jefes now took advantage of the new opportunities for plunder offered by the urban milieu as well as by Zapatista control over the railroads and the remains of the haciendas. Others became involved in various drunken scandals that included shoot-outs with their fellow Zapatistas and their supposed Villista allies. Friction among jefes seems to


have increased, and Zapatista morale declined. Although difficult to prove, it is quite possible that these urban events also contributed to a process in which Zapatista forces—especially the leaders of those forces—grew increasingly apart from the peasant villages they represented. The final factor that burdened Zapatismo during this pivotal year was the failure of the war against the Constitutionalists. In the spring and early summer of 1915, Villa lost the great, decisive battles of Celaya and León in the Bajío region of the Mexican north; and in early August, the Zapatistas were driven from Mexico City. The Convention government fled west to Toluca in Mexico state and then began to scatter. It could no longer offer the intermittent pay that Zapatista soldiers had become accustomed to receiving, pay that had mitigated the strain on local resources in the Zapatista world.

And so, in the twelve months after August 1914, cracks began to show in the system of close cooperation between guerrillas and communities that had worked quite well during the early part of the revolution. As the Constitutionalists nibbled away at Zapatismo's periphery in late 1915 and then invaded Morelos in early 1916, the destruction produced by the renewed warfare left often desperate Zapatistas competing with each other—and with the villages—for basic necessities. While the difficulties of war were not new to Zapatismo, there was no longer any recourse to the wealth of hacendados and merchants, which had already been appropriated.

Given these developments, it is not surprising that theft seems to have increased after mid-1915. In April 1916, Pedro Avilez of Chamilpa, Mexico, informed de la O that the troops of a General Camilo Paredes had taken his horse, arguing that it was best that the Zapatistas took it first, "before the enemy came." Others complained that Zapatista guerrillas demanded such basic foodstuffs as corn by force of arms or simply stole them from village fields. Villagers sometimes added that if the robbery continued, they would have to take to the road begging. Indeed, as the Carrancistas encroached, the scarcity became so great in some areas that many campesinos had to move: Morelians fled to Guerrero, while migrants from Mexico state—where things were worse—streamed down like locusts into Morelos, consuming "even the grass." But Zapatista forces had their own problems. In

32 For one view of the change in Zapatista behavior, see Leon Canova to the Secretary of State, El Paso, Texas, December 30, 1914, U.S. Department of State, Records Relating to the Internal Affairs of Mexico, 1910–1929, 812.00/14131. See also Gildardo Magaña to Zapata, Mexico City, June 3, 1915, AZ, 8: 4: 52; Ireneo Albarrán Ayala to de la O, Miacalán, Morelos, August 11, 1914, AO, 4: 2: 46; Trinidad Paniguata to Zapata, Tlapa, July 1, 1914, AO, 15: 2: 63; Manuel Palafox to Zapata, December 21, 1914, AGM, 28: 19: 820; the "Orden General de la Plaza de Mexico," May 11–12, 1915, AZ, 21: 3: 24; Victoriano Bárcenas to Zapata, Huitzaco, Guerrero, November 9, 1914, AGM, 30: 8: 129; and Samuel Brunk, Emiliano Zapata: Revolution and Betrayal in Mexico (Albuquerque, N. Mex., 1995), 141–43, 156, 166.

33 Brunk, Emiliano Zapata, 178.

November 1915, Guerreran General Encarnación “Chon” Díaz told Zapata that if his troops did not receive their pay, they would have to turn back to the villages for support. Díaz made this option sound like a threat, and soon so many charges of banditry had been lodged against him, some say, that Zapata ordered him killed for his misbehavior.35

As Díaz’s story hints, this banditry often had what might be considered a political dimension. Tired of war and terrified by the Constitutionalist invaders, villagers now often sought to make deals with the more powerful faction in order to avoid being punished as adherents of Zapatismo. Many of Zapata’s jefes responded by demonstrating their understanding that coercion and terror were useful tools in obtaining support when good will no longer sufficed. Accusations of rape became more frequent in the documents that arrived at Zapata’s headquarters, and some Zapatistas allegedly notched the ears of villagers accused of supporting the Carrancistas, as a way of promising greater punishment should their allegiance to Zapata waver again. It all added up to what one important Zapatista called “the sad situation of civilians and soldiers.”36

Zapata naturally took steps to deal with these difficulties. In 1915, he began to recommend the formation of armed patrols to individual villages that complained of banditry, and in a circular of May 1916 he ordered municipal authorities to establish such police forces. Zapatista troops were now required to justify their presence in a given community, and those that had a reason to be stationed in a village were to work with civilian authorities to extract the needed aid. In a compilation of the previous declarations of his headquarters on the subject, Zapata signed in early March 1917 a law that outlined the rights and obligations of villages and troops. “It is urgent that we demonstrate with deeds,” this decree read, “that the era of abuses has ended.”37 To complement these instructions, Zapata also exacted more severe justice, at least upon occasion. After receiving numerous protests about the deportment of a Colonel Miguel Capistrán, for instance, Zapata answered one letter with finality: “we proceeded to execute him in my recent trip [to Tepalcingo, Morelos], and in doing so carried out proper justice.”38 In ordering the death of another bandit, he advised “that the execution be public to satisfy all of the pueblos in which he [the criminal] committed his villainies.”39

Zapata’s indictments of banditry during this period are similar, in many ways, to the pronouncements by conservative proponents of order, early in the revolutionary

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35 Encarnación Díaz to Zapata, Iguala, Guerrero, November 15, 1915, AZ, 10: 8: 22; Trinidad Sánchez Tenorio to Zapata, Amecameca, Mexico, July 17, 1915, AZ, 9: 2: 34; and interview with Victor Valle Lozano, conducted by Laura Espejel, Mexico City, January 30, 1974, PHO, Z/1/27.
38 The citizens of Tepalcingo, Morelos, to Zapata, October 8, 1915, and his reply, AZ, 19: 6: 11–12.
39 Zapata to Francisco Mendoza, Tlaltizapán, September 17, 1917, ADN, pensionados, Mendoza, III.2/1–3m. 88.
decade, against Zapatismo in general. One of his 1917 circulars proclaimed that "robbery is a repugnant crime punished by all civilized peoples, which it is urgent to prevent and energetically repress for the conservation of the society in which we live."40 The wording and tone of such documents vividly demonstrate how completely the problem of order had become Zapata's problem. They also indicate that perhaps Zapata and the urban advisers who surrounded him at his headquarters had become more concerned with the kind of order that would keep Zapatistas together than were many Zapatistas in the field. In fact, Zapata had consciously employed his intellectuals as agents of discipline and centralization at least as early as 1913, when he commissioned Angel Barrios to mediate the Pacheco/de la O feud. Now, in 1917, he again hoped to make them part of the solution by assigning them to his new Consultation Center for Revolutionary Propaganda and Unification, which included among its various responsibilities the resolution of disputes between jefes.41

Implicit in the constant complaints about Zapatista infractions directed to Zapata and other, lesser jefes was the assumption, or at least the hope, that they could do something about them. Something could be done, of course, in specific cases—like that of Miguel Capistrán—but ending banditry in general would prove to be impossible. It was one thing to make pious proclamations against theft, but Zapata understood that his forces had to eat, and eating meant that they had little recourse but banditry in places where the pacificos would no longer cooperate. The old question of whether to punish Zapatistas who stole from villages but were essential to the flagging war effort also came up occasionally. In 1917, one of Zapata's principal urban advisers argued during the trial of members of a Zapatista livestock-theft ring that those implicated could not yet be punished, "because their services in the files of the Revolution are indispensable."42

In sum, the military and economic decay of the movement was the underlying problem Zapata had to face, and it remained fairly constant, although the Zapatistas did recover Morelos for a time in 1917–1918. Since Zapata had no way of ending this decay, he could not stop the banditry it fostered. And banditry, in turn, furthered the disintegration of Zapatismo. As we have seen, political motives fueled the charges of banditry generated by feuds like that between Genovevo de la O and Francisco Pacheco. At least in part, each jefe sought to delegitimize the other in the eyes of Zapatista headquarters and thus to gain an advantage in the local power struggle. Now such struggles over legitimacy deepened: banditry remained a central issue, but to it was added the growing possibility that Zapatistas who were either accusing others or being accused of banditry were about to leave the movement altogether—as Felipe Neri had threatened to do—as a final way of resolving Zapatismo's many tensions. Banditry, in other words, became a fundamental factor in the most obvious manifestation of Zapatista decline: the wave of desertion that swept the movement after mid-1915 as less than fully loyal jefes began to look elsewhere for the winners of the revolution.

40 Zapata's circular, Tlaltizapán, Morelos, February 14, 1917, in Espejel, Emiliano Zapata, 373.
42 For the extensive documentation of this trial, see AZ, 25: 8: 45–131.
Not surprisingly, the first great episode of “betrayal” during this stage of the revolution emerged from the contest between de la O and Pacheco. The Zapatista land-reform process had exacerbated a land dispute between Huitzilac and Santa María, and Pacheco came to believe that Zapatista headquarters favored Santa María’s claims. The recent military failure also upset him, perhaps especially because Pacheco served as minister of war in the Convention government. Using that position as a soapbox, in August 1915 he informed Zapata, “my face burns with the memory of how many times the enemy has driven us from the City [of Mexico], everyone running for Cuernavaca, committing intolerable abuses due to lack of discipline. Who if not you, compañero,” he added, “is in a position to prevent this and to admonish the Jefes who allow it?”

Pacheco’s men were hardly innocent of the “intolerable abuses” of which he wrote, and he surely sometimes condoned their bandit activities: it had not been long since he had threatened, much like Chon Díaz, that if his troops were not paid, they might commit acts “that discredit us.” Over the years, however, he had developed a purifying, anti-bandit discourse as he competed with de la O for Zapata’s favor. Now, while he was surely thinking about de la O in complaining about abuses, he was also appropriating the anti-bandit position for himself, against even Zapata, by questioning Zapata’s commitment to disciplining his followers. It is unlikely that Pacheco hoped to prod Zapata into centralizing the movement more effectively, for he had rejected what he considered intrusions from Zapatista headquarters in the past. Rather, this critique of Zapata’s leadership might best be seen as an exploratory effort on Pacheco’s part to delegitimize Zapata by implying that the banditry was his fault. As such, it would help justify Pacheco’s separation from the movement—to himself, to his troops, and to other Zapatista jefes who might be inclined to join him. In any event, Pacheco soon entered into talks with the Carrancistas, and in March 1916 he defected, opening a path for the invasion of Morelos. Adherents of de la O soon hunted Pacheco down and killed him.

Similar centrifugal forces were at work on the border between Morelos and Guerrero, where Zapatista bands competed for power and resources with each other and with the Carrancistas. Among the jefes operating there were Lorenzo Vázquez and Pedro Saavedra, who had been trading charges of banditry for years—charges that, again, were undoubtedly often well founded in reality. In fact, the accusations against Saavedra—for stealing grain, livestock, arms, and money—became convincing enough that in January 1916 Zapata directed Vázquez to attack and capture him, if possible, for his “constant abuses.” But neither Vázquez nor anyone else succeeded in carrying out what was essentially a hit order, and Zapata


44 Pacheco to Zapata, Huitzilac, March 12, 1915, AZ, 7: 1: 53. Octavio Paz Solórzano, Higuera que fue, Felipe Gálvez, ed. (Mexico City, 1986), 340, argues that Pacheco had a puritanical streak, which might have played into his anti-bandit righteousness. Also germane, perhaps, is Hobsbawn’s contention that social bandits are often restorers of morality; see Bandits, 37.
continued, diplomatically, to deal with Saavedra as if he were a Zapatista in good standing.\textsuperscript{45}

The pacíficos of the area, often defenseless, bore the brunt of the violence and property loss that Saavedra and others occasioned, and they had little reason to hope that Zapata could correct the problem. On the last day of April 1917, the villagers of Buenavista de Cuéllar, Guerrero, just south of the Morelos state line, took things into their own hands by attacking the small Zapatista garrison stationed there. Whether they meant to support Carranza or simply wanted to be left alone is unclear, but they were anti-Saavedra. The uprising posed a sizable threat to Zapata, who quickly ordered more troops—some of questionable loyalty—into Buenavista.\textsuperscript{46}

In the melee that followed, Lorenzo Vázquez was killed. Documents supposedly found in his clothing implicated him in the rebellion, and other evidence pointed to Otilio Montaño—co-author, with Zapata, of the Plan of Ayala—who also often fought in the area. Zapatista headquarters viewed it as another case of betrayal; and, in one of Zapatismo’s tragic moments, Montaño was tried and executed for his part in the uprising. The details of the Buenavista revolt and Montaño’s subsequent trial may never be convincingly explained, for these were tremendously complicated occurrences—full of ambitions and grievances and conspiracy theories. Still, we do know that Vázquez and Zapata had recently had a falling out and that Montaño had become increasingly unhappy with certain Zapatista policies, so it is possible that both planned to defect. Whatever the truth of their intentions and motives, banditry—and especially the reaction to it by the citizens of Buenavista—again seems to have played a central role in events that deeply damaged Zapatismo.\textsuperscript{47}

Although the precise relationship between banditry and betrayal differed from case to case, the two issues became entangled again and again. Zapata’s ally from the state of Tlaxcala, Domingo Arenas, began in 1916 to complain about the indiscipline of his fellow Zapatistas, and to attack and rob the troops of other jefes and, allegedly, their village supporters as well. Like Pacheco, he, too, soon developed a purifying rhetoric that questioned Zapata’s leadership and described his fellow Zapatistas as despoilers in no uncertain terms. In one letter, for example, he suggested that “we try to sanitize the Revolutionary Army,” of those who had “made themselves lords over life and death, who have in their hands the lives and the dignities of the defenseless campesinos.” Having developed such a justification, in December 1916 he signed on with the Carrancistas in the hope of carving out a largely independent political space for himself in and around Tlaxcala. In August of

\textsuperscript{45} For the order against Saavedra, see Zapata to Lorenzo Vázquez, January 31, 1916, AGM, 31: 2: 100. See also Zapata to Vázquez, Tlaltizapán, March 21, 1916, AGM, 31, copybooks, 474; Zapata to Saavedra, April 15, 1916, AGM, 31, copybooks, 142; Saavedra to Zapata, December 9, 1915, AZ, 10: 10: 74–75; Saavedra to Zapata, Taxco, Guerrero, December 1, 1915, AZ, 10: 10: 7: Jesús Sánchez and five others to Zapata, Amacuzac, Morelos, February 28, 1915, AZ, 6: 2: 88; and Saavedra to Zapata, Amacuzac, Morelos, July 19, 1914, AO, 15: 1: 55.


\textsuperscript{47} Brunk, Emilian Zapata, 199–201.
the following year, he was killed in a scuffle with Zapatista agents, who professed to be trying to talk him back into the fold.48

Finally, one of the jefes with whom Arenas frequently clashed was Everardo González, who controlled a zone in eastern Mexico state. In 1916, Zapata praised González’s fighting ability and held him up for emulation to other Zapatista leaders. Unfortunately, González had apparently come to feel that guerrilleros deserved greater rewards from Zapatismo than did pacíficos, and in 1916 his forces began to appropriate those rewards from the villages. Eventually, complaints about González led Zapata to remove him as commander of his zone, and González’s activities largely disappear from our view. When he becomes visible again, in February 1919, he was apparently no longer a functioning Zapatista. Zapata charged that he and another chieftain, Valentín Reyes, were “raiding” near Jumiltepec, “where, as is their custom, they are oppressing the pueblos with looting and costly crimes.” “They have entered fully into the life of bandits,” he continued; and having thus thoroughly delegitimized them, he gave the command to “eliminate” them as well, “in order to purify the Revolution definitively.” Here, it seems, excessive banditry was the betrayal that separated González from the movement; but, because González never joined the Carrancistas, that separation was somewhat provisional. Zapata’s own elimination occurred less than two months after he ordered González killed. Both González and Reyes survived him and continued to be considered at least nominal Zapatistas.49

It was just as well, then, that in January 1918, Zapata had acknowledged his impotence against banditry by informing his main adviser, Gildardo Magaña, that it would henceforth be up to the villages to protect themselves. Though realistic, this policy created further problems in that it permitted the pueblos to decide which Zapatistas were bandits. Zapatista headquarters would not always like the decisions they made. About three months later, for instance, Zapatista troops were ambushed at Amecac, Puebla, when they tried to take corn by force after the villagers refused to feed them. One soldier claimed to have heard a civilian say, “here come just a few, let’s wipe them out.” Zapata responded to this and similar clashes by ordering that pacíficos license their arms with the Zapatistas; he added that those villagers


who turned their weapons against the cause would be considered traitors. Shortly after Zapata’s death, this policy was taken to its logical conclusion: far from being responsible for their own protection, villagers were now forbidden to bear arms. The need to protect the troops from their ostensible supporters was a vivid demonstration of how thoroughly banditry, and the desertion that accompanied it, had weakened Zapatismo by 1919.50

IN CONCLUSION, the Mexico City press was not completely wrong when it proclaimed Zapata and his followers bandits in 1911. As they rose up more or less spontaneously from their myriad villages to undertake a revolution, some Zapatistas did engage in banditry, and Zapatista bandits existed for the duration of the revolutionary decade. While banditry soon became the same kind of problem for Zapata as it was for those who governed Mexico, most Zapatistas who occasionally robbed and terrorized local communities probably did not lose their status within Zapatismo or even have it seriously threatened. Thus to downplay bandit activities among the Zapatistas by arguing that bandits were separate from revolutionaries, that outbreaks of banditry were usually resolved, or that Zapatista banditry was generally “social” would be to risk missing crucial information about this peasant rebellion.

In 1911, when accusations of banditry helped divide Zapata and Madero and force Zapata to seek legitimacy through the Plan of Ayala, Zapata came to understand Zapatista banditry as a significant challenge. Limiting it would make him look better in Mexico City, keep his movement united, and make his forces more effective in military terms; limiting it had become necessary if he hoped to build a national movement with a national program. Banditry became both one of the most important reasons he sought to increase the control of his headquarters over his jefes after 1913 and one of the key stumbling blocks to that process of centralization.

Throughout the revolutionary decade, in other words, to act as a bandit—especially when one’s victims were villagers who supported Zapata—was at minimum to ignore the instructions of Zapatista headquarters. At least at times, it also meant rejecting or confronting the Zapatista political program more directly. Often, the political goals of sometime bandits were rather individual. For Felipe Neri, banditry was a means of gathering resources, as well as a way of expanding the zone he controlled at the expense of neighboring jefes. Ultimately, it became a method of testing Zapata’s resolve and contesting his leadership.

More interesting was the banditry that occurred in the context of the many intervillage feuds that helped shape the movement. Here, banditry represented the pursuit of local political (and economic) goals, as neighboring villages sought to use their guerrillas to gain advantage over one another. Such a struggle meant disobeying injunctions against banditry because those injunctions discounted local

tensions that could not—from the perspective of a Francisco Pacheco or a Genoveve de la O—simply be forgotten in view of the common good. This does not mean that Pacheco and de la O rejected such fundamentals of the Zapatista program as land reform. There is abundant evidence, though, that by 1913 both of these men, and many other jefes as well, resented what Zapatista headquarters had become: the centralizing product of Zapata’s interaction with urban intellectual advisers. They were opposed to the centralizing project, limited though it was, much as Zapata himself opposed the idea of a highly centralized national government. The jefes and their peasant constituencies also feared that the urbanites would appropriate for themselves the benefits of the revolution—as they did, in some respects, after 1920, when they emerged as the Zapatista leaders on the national level. 51

After 1915, the various material and psychological stresses that came with the decline of Zapatismo made such differences within the movement more apparent. Again, banditry played an important part in the political exchange. When villages threatened by Carrancista incursions bargained with the enemy to protect themselves, Zapatista troops often responded with punitive raids, until some pacíficos decided that they “no longer wanted even a handful of the land that the Plan of Ayala has given them, because the ambition they have at the moment is simply to have their lives protected.” 52 As Zapatista soldiers struggled with the loss of village support, some banditry may have been motivated by the feeling that Zapata’s program included insufficient rewards for those who did the fighting. Not surprisingly, banditry eventually became part of the politics of betrayal. For Zapatistas preparing to defect, it was conceivably a way of proving themselves to the Carrancistas, as well as, again, a means of carving out a larger zone of operations for themselves; it was also an issue that could be used to delegitimize Zapata and thus justify and gain support for the decision to leave the movement.

Banditry, then, is a window through which we may scrutinize the internal political processes of Zapatismo. Given Zapata’s heuristic value as one of the most-cited of peasant rebellions, we might also hazard some suggestions, based on those internal political processes, about what we might expect to find within other such broad peasant insurrections. 53 One might argue that there existed within Zapatista banditry what James Scott has called a “hidden transcript” of peasant resistance—or perhaps the transcript is not so much hidden as overlooked, given that the grievances behind this banditry were and are at least partially visible in the documentation of the movement. At any rate, Scott’s appreciation of the resistance embodied in sometimes ambiguous and even individual actions—as opposed to the more conventional notion that resistance must be obvious and collective—might certainly lead us to the contention that multiple forms of resistance were at work

51 On the subject of relations between Pacheco, de la O, and Zapata’s intellectual brood, see Barrios to de la O, May 27, 1913, AO, 1: 8: 27; Barrios to de la O, June 7, 1913, AO, 2: 1: 6; Barrios to Zapata, July 13, 1913, AO, 13: 6: 10; Barrios to de la O, July 13, 1913, AO, 2: 2: 51; Barrios to Zapata, August 3, 1913, AO, 13: 7: 23–24; Angel Barrios to Pacheco, August 23, 1913, AO, 13: 7: 66; de la O to Zapata, September 21, 1913, AO, 17: 5: 2–3; and Pacheco to Zapata, October 3, 1913, AO, 13: 9: 18–20. See also Marte R. Gómez, Las comisiones agrarias del sur (Mexico City, 1961), 133.


53 For Zapata’s heuristic value, see, for instance, Eric R. Wolf’s classic, Peasant Rebellions of the Twentieth Century (New York, 1969), 28–32.
within the larger project of Zapatista rebellion.\textsuperscript{54} This internal resistance, however, was not organized by class: it did not represent peasant unity—rather, it entailed peasant-on-peasant violence—and it was not directed against a clearly identifiable dominant class.

As we pursue this notion of resistance within resistance, a major shortcoming of Scott's work for the study of the internal operations of peasant revolutions becomes apparent: in his struggle with issues of peasant consciousness and resistance, he has taken no serious interest in conflicts among peasants.\textsuperscript{55} As a result, like the social bandit and its typological offspring, his model may be too narrow for Zapatista banditry. In fact, though they recognize the theoretical complexity of the issue, Scott and many other students of peasant politics ultimately insist on separating the methods of resistance on which they focus from methods of peasant adaptation or accommodation—a category that for them seems almost automatically to include intra-peasant strife. Gilbert Joseph summarizes this position when he argues that "resistance is not merely whatever peasants do to survive . . . [W]hen survival comes at the expense of other peasants, appropriation by the dominant classes is aided, not resisted."\textsuperscript{56}

This is an excellent point: peasants raiding other peasants hardly seems like resistance, and Zapatista infighting did undermine the cause and help enable other revolutionary factions to win the revolution. On the other hand, Joseph's concern with the results of peasant actions in terms of elite appropriation tends to lead him away from peasant consciousness. When the forces of de la O attacked the supporters of Pacheco, they were motivated by group aims that they took seriously—those, presumably, of the village of Santa Maria. Furthermore, something more than simple survival drove them; they were engaged in a kind of resistance, against Pacheco and against Zapatista headquarters. To dismiss peasants involved in such events as short-sighted—or perhaps as the victims of false consciousness—simply because they do not appear to act in the best interests of what we have determined to be their "class" may be to deny them the status of subjects of their own history by forcing them into our conceptual frameworks.

In any event, putting such peasants and their behaviors into some nonresistance category and then ignoring them, as Scott's focus on class struggle tends to do, is problematic if we hope fully to comprehend peasant consciousness, because even the most raw and disturbing episodes of intra-peasant conflict may give us important hints about how peasants think about their worlds. Episodes of Zapatista banditry indicate, for instance, that even the participants in this large, class-based rebellion, which was able to generate clear demands on the national level, did not always feel very unified—they had not abandoned their local, familial, and individual aims.\textsuperscript{57} These episodes demonstrate something that should be obvious.

\textsuperscript{54} Scott, \textit{Weapons of the Weak}, 297–98.

\textsuperscript{55} See Scott, \textit{Weapons of the Weak}, 272.


\textsuperscript{57} What I am driving at here is similar to what Daniel Nugent and Ana María Alonso identify, after
but has often been neglected: not all peasants in a given insurrection are likely to agree on goals and strategies or on the way in which power is distributed within their movement. Above all, they reveal the need to dig deeply into the document-
tation in those rare instances when peasant rebellions have generated substantial archives, in order to produce detailed case studies of local political relationships—
both within and between villages. With this kind of research into Zapatismo, we
might ultimately determine, for example, whether Zapatista banditry represented
any sort of divergent ideology, perhaps a stubborn insistence on the decentralizing
popular liberalism that lay at the movement’s roots in the face of the various
radicalisms that had crept into Zapatista headquarters along with the urban
intellectuals.

Finally, interpreting episodes of banditry as resistance also calls attention to that
which is being resisted. Structure, hierarchy, and at times even something we might
identify as government obviously existed within Zapatismo. The existence of
governing structures run by revolutionary faction is, of course, hardly a new
idea—witness the literature on how multiple sovereignty emerges as one step in
revolutionary transformations.58 Probably due to lingering assumptions that peas-
ant movements are relatively simple, homogeneous, egalitarian, and unorganized,
however, such structure may still be somewhat unexpected when the faction in
question is largely led by peasants.59 Certainly, the proposal that the leaders of
peasant rebellions may experience problems of disorder comparable to those faced
by more conventional governments is somewhat surprising.

It is evident, though, that Zapatista leaders were often dismayed by decentralizing
violence in the countryside and sometimes made pronouncements in favor of order
that sounded eerily similar to those that emanated from Mexico City. The dynamics
of resistance within resistance, in other words, may generate leaderships of peasant
movements that are as likely to perpetuate customary attitudes about government
as they are to “turn the world upside down.”60 If this is true, it might help explain
certain postrevolutionary political outcomes: it is clear, at least, that after 1920, the
surviving Zapatista leaders generally cooperated in the reestablishment of order
through a deeper centralization of state power at the expense of the local liberties
that figured so prominently in the Zapatista program.

In illustrating the multiplicity of Zapatismo, Zapatista banditry also illustrates
the need for a model of how resistance works that will take that multiplicity into
account. The solution may be as simple as erasing what remains of the line between
resistance and adaptation or accommodation, envisioning them less as opposites
than as equal and complementary sections of a continuum of options that peasants
might draw from as they struggle to survive, to maintain their dignity, and to shape

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58 Perhaps the best-known proponent of the idea of multiple sovereignty is Charles Tilly, From
Mobilization to Revolution (Reading, Mass., 1978). For a good discussion of this issue, see Wickham-
Crowley, Exploding Revolution, 38–44, 49–51.
59 For discussion of such assumptions, see Brunk, Emiliano Zapata, xiv–xv, 232–33.
60 Ranajit Guha, Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India (Delhi, 1983), 78–79.
their worlds.\textsuperscript{61} In any case, to get to the bottom of peasant consciousness, it is clearly necessary to explore different methods that might—like this study of the banditry of a peasant revolution—facilitate the kind of "deconstruction" of "the popular" that scholars such as Gilbert Joseph and Florencia Mallon have recently advocated.\textsuperscript{62} Certainly, this tack is long overdue with regard to Zapatismo, for until we have undertaken a deeper exploration of its component parts—whether those components initially look like resistance or not—we will not really understand the Zapatista project as a whole.

\textsuperscript{61} This is not to say that such an approach would be completely new. For a fine study that examines peasant activities across this continuum, though without using these analytical terms, see William Taylor, \textit{Drinking, Homicide, and Rebellion in Colonial Mexican Villages} (Stanford, Calif., 1979).


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