

Rowdy Cowboys and Masked Indígenas:
Citizenship and Autonomy in Contemporary Social Movements

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Introduction

What entails the personal responsibilities of modern-day citizens within the context of the contemporary globalized world order? What constitutes a citizen? What rights should be expected? What is the best strategy to initiate change? Many diverse groups have recently encountered these questions and have fiercely formulated an answer. In the case of the Zapatistas in Southern Mexico and the Minutemen along the US/Mexican border, these answers have been strangely analogous, yet inherently dissimilar.

The Zapatistas and the Minutemen represent citizens' voices and specific demands placed on the nation-state in the aftermath of economic restructuring and neoliberal interdependence. In this paper, I strive to conduct a comparative study of these two groups. I will use their unique interpretations and utilization of the concepts citizenship and autonomy to develop theoretical ideologies inherent to both groups and to fully explore converging and diverging factors. Furthermore, I will examine their ideology and methods to establish a more complete understanding of these distinctive movements. To do this, I will use scholarly articles and books in order to formulate a theoretical foundation. In addition, I will use excerpts from documents, speeches, and communiqués released by both the Zapatistas and the Minutemen to illustrate their respective ideologies and adherence to certain standards.

The New Citizenship

Beginning in the eighties and continuing on today, the world has experienced a drastic change in economic and political thinking. Neoliberalism has become the new global model; it has restructured the state and the traditional concept of the nation-state.

In theory and in its purest form, Neoliberalism requires that all forms of trade barriers are eliminated in order to facilitate free trade between countries and regions. It is thought that each country should exploit its comparative advantage in manufacturing and should orient their economies around those specific goods. With the reduction of tariffs, goods and services are free to flow across borders and expand trade, creating an increased interdependence among nations.

The underlying dogma of neoliberalism lies in the fact that the “invisible hand” of the market is the ultimate determining factor, thereby reducing the official role of the state. Deregulation and privatization go hand in hand with neoliberal restructuring, which diminishes both the duties and the budget of the state, especially states that have most recently been overtly protectionist economically. Therefore, the welfare state, which largely relies on large budgets and nationalized industries, can no longer provide a multitude of social programs and must recognize diminished responsibilities.

This recognition has quickly transformed into the idea of what Evelina Dagnina refers to as the new citizenship.¹ Essentially, the new citizenship calls upon citizens to expand responsibilities to include programs and duties that the state has traditionally provided. From a top-down approach, the state apparatus has used the new citizenship as political rhetoric to garner support for neoliberal strategies and to legitimately shun certain responsibilities.

From a bottom-up perspective, this new concept has been utilized from popular movements as an “appropriation of citizenship” and empowerment of the people.²

¹ Evelina Dagnino, “Culture, Citizenship, and Democracy: Changing Discourses and Practices of the Latin American Left” in *Cultures of Politics, Politics of Cultures: Re-Envisioning Latin American Social Movements* ed. Sonia Alvarez

² Ibid, 48.

Although there is still public concern of the role of the state and the abandonment of responsibility and a call for increased government accountability, there is still room to take advantage of the new citizenship in order to mobilize and organize a movement. An expanded and globalized civil society has additionally emerged as a result of this popular discourse and in the wake of increased political and economic liberalization and decentralization.³ A more inclusive political arena and the idea of the new citizenship provides incentive for challenging the state,

“...the struggle for the right to equality and to difference found clear support in the redefined notion of citizenship. A significant part of this common experience was the elaboration of new identities as subjects, as bearers of rights, as equal citizens.”⁴

Accordingly, certain groups either find justification for their cause while others find a political space for contestation within the new citizenship.

One of the most important characteristics of the new citizenship is the construction and pursuit of rights. Citizens are no longer satisfied with the antiquated structure of conventional rights typically upheld by the elitist state structure. An empowerment of the public has resulted in the development of creative ideas concerning what inherently constitutes the notion of citizenship and citizenship rights.⁵ Furthermore, the new citizenship can only be implemented from a bottom up approach. Although elitists might utilize the new citizenship rhetoric, it is only the public that can transform their status and organize as a group.

According to Dagnino, the new citizenship also has a transformative effect on state and societal structures. The new rights include the power to inherently change the

³ George Yúdice, “The globalization of Culture and the New Civil Society” in *Cultures of Politics, Politics of Cultures: Re-Envisioning Latin American Social movements*” ed. Sonia Alvarez, 353-379.

⁴ Ibid, 48.

⁵ Dagnino, 50-51.

concept and design of the system. New political venues and relationships can be forged to facilitate the inclusion of the expanded civil society. However, the new citizenship goes beyond formal political structures. It encompasses more than political insertion, it also calls for a more egalitarian social hierarchy, or a “new sociability.”⁶ New social relationships and mutual respect are constructed in the formation of the new citizenship. People from all classes must find a way to work together in order to further renovate the idea of citizenship and to formulate a new set of rules, both social and political, in order to live every day life. The relationship between state and citizen also changes as the interaction that develops is no longer based on the individual. A group mentality emerges which solidifies unity and solidarity in the face of government inefficiencies. The idea of citizenship is no longer a responsibility of the state or the function of an individualistic relationship; it is determined by and thrives within civil society.

Different manifestations of the new citizenship have evolved which are largely dependent on the surrounding political context and socioeconomic positioning of members of popular groups within the citizenry. An example of differing strategies and conceptualizations can be seen with the development of the Minuteman Civil Defense Corps in the Southwestern United States, and the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN) in Mexico. As noted, these differences can be found in contrary approaches and the respective relationships with the state. Throughout the remainder of this paper, I will delineate the distinctive tactics outlined by each group and how they have uniquely interpreted and outlined their own concepts of the new citizenship in relation to the state and varying degrees of autonomy. First, I will provide a brief description and overview of each.

⁶ Ibid.

The EZLN

The Zapatistas officially emerged in 1994 on New Year's Day. This day was symbolic because it coincided with the implemented of NAFTA in Mexico. The demands of the EZLN were largely provoked and established due to injustices committed against the indigenous population that were seen as direct consequences of the new neoliberal economic strategy in Mexico. Many of Salinas's economic policies in the early nineties precipitated the mobilization of the EZLN; however, the most salient issue was the retraction of Article 27 of the 1917 Constitution, which privatized all the communal ejido land that many indigenous people lived on and used for subsistence farming.⁷ The lack of official titles prior to this constitutional change further aggravated hopes of legally obtaining the land that some had occupied for decades. In addition to Article 27, Salinas further privatized other economic national companies, revoked subsidies, and made cutbacks on government programming and spending. Moreover, environmental degradation increased in the Lacandón Jungle as the indigenous were pushed off communal lands and had to resort to deforestation measures to survive.⁸

Under the direction of the charismatic Subcomandante Marcos, the EZLN began as an armed revolutionary movement. The EZLN is essentially against neoliberalism due to its detrimental effects on the indigenous and the poor as a result of the displacement of rural farmers and decreased social programs. In addition, the EZLN initially fought for

⁷ Shannan L. Mattiace, *To See with Two Eyes: Peasant Activism and Indian Autonomy in Chiapas, Mexico* (Albuquerque, University of New Mexico Press: 2003): 79.

⁸ June Nash, "The Reassertion of Indigenous Identity: Mayan responses to State Intervention in Chiapas" *Latin American Research Review* (1995): 26.

further political liberalization and democratization of the Mexican government, striving for local autonomy and ultimate political inclusion.⁹

Although violence has been used as a tactic of the Zapatistas, international and national media have also been an extremely important outlet. Marcos has continuously sought out support through intellectual communiqués and interviews. The Zapatistas have recognized the importance of seeking legitimate support without the coercive use of violence. Furthermore, they do not seek to overthrow the government or secede from the Mexican state. They instead strive to correct the corruption inherent in the political order and extend inclusion to all sectors of Mexican society; an inclusion which incorporates economic, political, and cultural rights.¹⁰

The marginalized poor of Chiapas have utilized the new citizenship in order to expand the meaning and scope of citizenship and basic citizen rights. In addition, an expanded civil society in the aftermath of government inadequacies and a recent trend of political liberalization has furthered the dialogue of the new citizenship.¹¹ The Zapatistas have increased the realm of citizen responsibility which has resulted in an increased demand for more government accountability. Their calls for local autonomy is an attempt to provide services the state is no longer capable of in addition to finding a voice within the state apparatus to inherently change and further democratize the system.

⁹ Ibid, 7-8.

¹⁰ Mattiace, 20.

¹¹ The 1985 earthquake in Mexico City was handled poorly by the Mexican government, costing many lives and forcing the people to organize separately to provide search and rescue teams. This led to a new awareness and common cause against government inefficiency and lack of transparency.

The Minutemen Civil Defense Corps

In 2003, Chris Simcox moved to Arizona, bought the newspaper *The Tombstone Tumbleweed*, and issued a public call to arms on the front page. Simcox decided that enough was enough; the United States government was not doing its job in protecting American citizens and defending national sovereignty. Therefore, Simcox organized a volunteer militia to patrol the border in order to detain immigrants until the Border Patrol can apprehend them.¹²

The Minuteman Organization consists of a group of volunteers, mainly located in Arizona, New Mexico, and most recently Texas, whom are frustrated with the apparent inability of the federal government to inhibit illegal immigration flows predominantly from Mexico. They have decided to instill the rule of law by taking the law into their own hands. The Minutemen identify themselves as an Internal Vigilance Operation. Essentially, its function is to place volunteers at the border where official observation is sparse and restrict the access of illegal immigrants attempting to cross the border. Many of these volunteers are armed and are not authorized to perform the duties of the Border Patrol.¹³

This increased flow of immigration to the United States can be seen as a direct consequence of restructuring along neoliberal lines. It is well known that labor follows capital, and as Mexico and the US become more economically integrated and dependent upon each other, these flows are only going to increase. At the core of the capitalist world system, the US will continue experiencing a boom in service and agricultural jobs, whereas rural farmers in Mexico will continuously be displaced as a result of

¹² Official Minuteman Website, www.minutemanhq.com/project

¹³ Ibid.

industrialization.¹⁴ Therefore, an excess in the employment sector in the North automatically complements the labor surplus in the South.

However, despite the fact that the US is at the supposed vanguard of neoliberal thinking, there are many politicians who fear the porous borders required by an uninhibited system of free trade. The contradiction between the economic requirements of neoliberalism and this protectionist political rhetoric concerning porous borders has led to ineffective immigration policy.¹⁵ The US government has attempted to play the dual role of protector of national sovereignty with the militarization of the border while at the same time promoting greater interdependence with Mexico through NAFTA.¹⁶

The Minutemen have recognized the weakness of US policy and its inability to deter immigration. Accordingly, the Minutemen see the waves of undocumented immigration as a threat to national security and also view immigrants as subversive groups that destroy American culture and disregard values. Therefore, the Minutemen have utilized the concept of the new citizenship as a way to take responsibility in areas that the state is presumably deficient. The Minuteman project is framed as a vehicle through which to criticize government immigration policy, protect American values and sovereignty, and uphold the laws of the country.¹⁷

¹⁴ Douglass S. Massey. "Closed-Door Policy: Mexico Vividly Illustrates how U.S. Treatment of Immigrant Workers Backfires" in *American Prospect* (2003): 27.

¹⁵ Ibid. For other assessments of the inefficiencies of US immigration policy, see Andreas (2000); Nevins (2002); and Cornelius (2001).

¹⁶ This stalemate in policy is reminiscent of the debate concerning the perception of the modern nation-state as territorialized or deterritorialized.

¹⁷ Official Minuteman Website: www.minutemanhq.com/project/

Notions of Traditional Citizenship through the New Citizenship Discourse¹⁸

Contemporary concepts of traditional citizenship have been transformed due to the idea of global citizenship in an increasingly globalized world. Global citizenship denotes a universal character of citizenship that will be applied to all.¹⁹ However, as noted earlier, there still exists rhetoric of national sovereignty and security in many political circles. Although citizenship is considered to be a universal quality, it can also be exclusive and withheld according to origin, ethnicity, and documentation. The dichotomy of local versus transnational and universal versus discerning citizenship has been a prominent factor in the formation of the Minutemen and the EZLN. These changing concepts of traditional citizenship are reinforced through strategies of groups mobilizing under the influence of the new citizenship.

Thus, in addition to understanding the new citizenship and resulting responsibilities as utilized by the EZLN and the Minutemen, it is also important to understand their respective interpretations of traditional citizenship in relation to the nation-state. These ideas of belonging and identity are of crucial importance to the cause of their movements, although they are oppositional in ideological foundations. Concepts of belonging to the nation-state fuel the underpinnings of these two groups, as they are advocating rights that are central to their established ideas of traditional citizenship.

Although the EZLN and the Minutemen differ in political leanings and goals, their concepts of traditional citizenship are inherently territorialized and extremely

¹⁸ The term traditional citizenship refers to the established membership of a particular nation-state and the corresponding beneficiaries of citizenship rights. The term new citizenship refers to the expanded responsibilities of the citizenry due to the contemporary downsizing of the state.

¹⁹ Alvarez, Sonia E. "Latin American Feminisms 'Go Global': Trends of the 1990s and Challenges for the New Millennium." in *Cultures of Politics, Politics of Cultures: Re-Envisioning Latin American Social movements* ed. Sonia Alvarez, 295.

localized within the physical boundaries of their countries. This localization is also within the context of a transnational struggle and the globalized geopolitical positioning of fundamentally deterritorialized nation-states. This combination of the inner and outer can be referred to as the “globalization from below.”²⁰

However, the discourse of traditional citizenship of the EZLN and the Minutemen are drastically diverse; the former repeatedly refers to a citizenship of inclusion whereas the mission statement of the latter depends on the rhetoric of an exclusive citizenship. The Zapatistas are fighting for political inclusion on the basis of a renovated concept of Mexican citizenship while the Minutemen are attempting to deter immigration and abdicate citizenship rights for immigrants based on a politics of exclusion and the other.

Their varying perceptions of traditional citizenship also help situate the movements within and against the state. These two contrasting concepts aid in constructing their demands and the realm of rights that should be anticipated and protected. Ideas of traditional citizenship also contribute to strategies utilized by the EZLN and the Minutemen in addition to the concepts of autonomy illustrated by each movement.

The Zapatistas: México Profundo

Due to a tradition of regionalism under various caudillos and diverse ethnicities, Mexico traditionally lacked a unified national identity. However, popular and hegemonic rhetoric quickly began to hail mestizaje as the unifying and identifying factor of Mexican

²⁰ David Slater, “Rethinking the Spatialities of Social Movements: Questions of Borders, Culture, and Politics in Global Times” in *Cultures of Politics, Politics of Cultures: Re-Envisioning Latin American Social movements*” ed. Sonia Alvarez, 381.

citizens. The concept of *lo mexicano*²¹ became a bulwark of Mexican nationalism, which has been a constant in Mexican economic and political policy, ranging from the protectionist model of Import Substitution Industrialization and anti-US sentiments. The emphasis on miscegenation inherently marginalized the indigenous population and created an idea of national citizenship that excluded certain sectors.

“Using miscegenation as a paradigm of national identity is only a way of arguing for the ideal of a unified nation and a homogenous state, but it is in open contradiction to the plurality and structural inequality of Mexican society.”²² Guillermo Bonfil recognizes the dominant culture of mestizos as *México imaginario* and the non-Western indigenous population as *México profundo* (deep Mexico), acknowledging the disenfranchisement of the indigenous in the construction of a national identity and the resulting access to political representation.²³

Political consolidation and centralization occurred under the auspices of this exclusionary nationalism, leaving no room for contestation until the recent political liberalization. Democratization and neoliberal streamlining has produced a political opportunity for movements in Latin America.

“Transitions to civilian rule in Latin America today thus involve a reconfiguration of state-civil society relations along the lines of the neoliberal modernizing project, with powerful cultural effects. Central to this modernizing project is the redefinition of citizenship as the active exercise of responsibilities, including economic self-reliance and political participation.”²⁴ The Zapatistas have utilized this opening in order to take advantage of political decentralization and the newfound role for civil society.

²¹ Lo Mexicano is a popular term that refers to those characteristics which essentially constitute being Mexican.

²² Gustavo Esteva and Perez, Carlos. “The Meaning and Scope of the Struggle for Autonomy” *Latin American Perspectives*. (2001): 121.

²³ Ibid, 120.

²⁴ Veronica Schild, “New Subjects of Rights? Women’s Movements and the Construction of Citizenship in the ‘New Democracies’” in *Cultures of Politics, Politics of Cultures: Re-Envisioning Latin American Social movements*” ed. Sonia Alvarez, 94.

Since their emergence, the Zapatistas have fought to change the traditional concept of national citizenship as it is based in the practice of mestizaje. In addition to spreading citizenship rights to the indigenous, the EZLN also extend their cause to the disenfranchised poor. The Zapatistas have made their claims on the state firmly based in the idea that as citizens of Mexico, they should receive all benefits granted to other sectors. This belief and inclusive idea of citizenship and ownership of rights can be found in the very first EZLN communiqué, released on January 1, 1994:

“We have been denied the most elemental preparation so they can use us as cannon fodder and pillage the wealth of our country. They don't care that we have nothing, absolutely nothing, not even a roof over our heads, no land, no work, no health care, no food nor education. Nor are we able to freely and democratically elect our political representatives, nor is there independence from foreigners, nor is there peace nor justice for ourselves and our children. But today, we say ENOUGH IS ENOUGH. We are the inheritors of the true builders of our nation. The dispossessed, we are millions and we thereby call upon our brothers and sisters to join this struggle as the only path, so that we will not die of hunger due to the insatiable ambition of a 70 year dictatorship led by a clique of traitors that represent the most conservative and sell-out groups.”²⁵

The Zapatistas seek basic rights within the nation-state based on their standing as Mexican citizens. By invoking the “dispossessed millions,” the EZLN is transforming the traditional ideal of national citizenship and *lo mexicano*, while also maintaining a definition firmly established within the territorial nation-state. They are utilizing the new citizenship in constructing a new concept of national identity and influencing the structure of the state and the distribution of wealth and services.

The fifteen basic demands of the EZLN include: shelter, health, independence, democracy, work, land, food, education, freedom, justice and peace, anti-corruption,

²⁵ First Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle, January 1, 1994. Available Online: <http://www.ezln.org/documentos/1994/199312xx.en.htm>.

information and environmental protection, and security.²⁶ In addition to expanding the administration of citizenship rights to more diverse groups, the Zapatistas have demanded the inclusion of previously dismissed rights, thereby advancing the construction and meaning of rights. The EZLN demands political, economic, cultural, and social rights.²⁷ The realm of cultural rights is especially an innovative concept in contrast to traditional rights, as Yúdice notes,

“It could be argued that the transition of the welfare to the neoliberal state has generated, in the process, a new dimension of citizenship rights. I am thinking here of cultural citizenship, a by product, so to speak, of the confluence of civil rights legislation, increases in immigration...the permeation of the social by foundations and third-sector institution specializing in welfare services, the electronic media, and the post-mass market.”²⁸

By using the neoliberal model and the concept of the new citizenship in addition to reinterpreting traditional citizenship, the Zapatistas have carved a political space from which to demand inclusion by the state. Furthermore, they have developed a unique system of citizenship rights to be recognized and respected throughout civil society and the state apparatus.

The Minutemen: Whiteness and Exclusion

The Minutemen seek to establish a concept of citizenship based on exclusive membership according to race and nativist sentiments. The Minutemen view themselves as the rightful stewards of American citizenship based on their essential American being, while simultaneously positing that illegal immigrants are fundamentally lawbreakers and

²⁶ Bill Weinberg, *Homage to Chiapas: The New Indigenous Struggles in Mexico*. (New York, NY: Verso, 2000): 201.

²⁷ Mattiace, 20.

²⁸ George Yúdice, *The Expediency of Culture: Uses of Culture in the Global Era* (Durham and London, Duke University Press: 2003): 164.

not worthy of American citizenship. They view immigrants as outsiders that violate America's laws and unjustly reap citizen benefits. In order to promote this platform, the Minutemen resort to a racist dialogue that inherently otherizes, racializes and criminalizes immigrants with the ultimate goal of denying basic citizenship rights and entry to undocumented immigrants. This racist dialogue has foundations in ideas of whiteness, xenophobia, hyper-patriotism, and racialization that all result in the otherization of the immigrant, thereby denying citizenship.

Whiteness is a difficult concept to isolate due to its enveloping nature. However, whiteness is an existing quality in many aspects in modern American society. It expands into the moral values and social norms held by many native citizens. Whiteness is described by Catherine Nash as an unmarked norm as opposed to a racial category.²⁹ Rather than being a distinct quality, whiteness is seen as the rule; it can never be the exception. "Blackness" and "brownness" are seen as a variation of the norm, as they are distinct from the whiteness that falsely characterizes American society. The recognition of whiteness is imperative to the further understanding of the place of race in academia and society, as Kobayashi and Peake illustrate:

"This understanding of racism as an active process diffused throughout a very wide range of social action requires, therefore, a way of viewing the wider processes that influence the microenvironment for those expressions. This wider environment we refer to as one of 'whiteness,' which occurs as the normative, ordinary power to enjoy social privilege by controlling dominant values and institutions and, in particular *occupying space* within a segregated social landscape."³⁰

²⁹ Catherine Nash 2003, pg 640. "Cultural Geography: Anti-Racist Geographies" in *Progress in Human Geography* 27,5 (2003) pg. 637-638.

³⁰ Audrey Kobayashi and Linda Peake 2000, pg 393 "Racism out of place: Thoughts on Whiteness and an Antiracist Geography in the New Millennium" in *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*. (2000): 393.

Not only is whiteness conceived of as the norm, but it also implies a certain stature of privilege and prestige.

This idea of whiteness can be shown through the lens of the Minuteman Organization. Without the belief in the normalcy of whiteness, the Minutemen would not have a mobilizing ideology. The Minutemen would not exist if immigrants were not viewed as somehow innately different and the embodiment of irreconcilable differences in culture. The Minutemen personify the idea of whiteness as the norm and the perceived value of obtaining an ethnically homogenous culture. Their platform is based on maintaining and preserving American culture, in its purest form. “Future generations will inherit a tangle of *rancorous, unassimilated, squabbling cultures* with no common bond to hold them together, and a certain guarantee of the death of this nation as a harmonious ‘melting pot’.”(emphasis mine)³¹ They view immigration and diversity as a threat to national cohesion and security, because it dilutes the whiteness of American society.

Through the eyes of the Minutemen, immigrants are viewed as a terrifying threat to life in America. They have upheld the myth of a harmonious melting pot in the protection of the whiteness that upholds their position in the traditional racial hierarchy. Whiteness is equivalent to the traditional view of American society. “...it (whiteness) carries with it a set of ways of being in the world, a set of cultural practices, often not named as ‘white’ by white folks, but looked upon instead as ‘American’ or ‘normal’.”³² The Minutemen sustain this American ideal and utilize it in their political rhetoric to place the immigrant outside of American society and restrict access to citizenship rights.

³¹ Minuteman Website, originally a quote by President Theodore Roosevelt

³² Kobayashi and Peake, 394.

Language repeatedly utilized by the Minutemen reinforces the fact that illegal immigrants are seen as a threat. It is thus perceived due to a fear of the other and the aspiration to preserve a false sense of cultural cohesion and homogeneity in the US. This racist view is then translated into patriotic rhetoric in order to frame the issue as it might relate to a larger sector of the public and generate more support. Patriotism is accordingly equated to the maintenance of a social and racial hierarchy which stems from the belief in whiteness as superior.

The racialization of immigrants according to skin is in direct contrast with the principles associated with the values of whiteness. “Dominant discussions of immigration are dependent on antagonistic dualisms; whiteness becomes individuated, ordered and disciplined while brownness becomes generalized, undefinable and threatening.”³³ This leads to increased racial profiling, criminalization, and derogatory stereotyping of immigrants, all of which are attributable characteristics of the Minutemen.

The Minutemen ascribe to the practice of racialization as it is the most convenient way to justify their generalization of illegal immigrants as criminals and thieves. The basic element of vocabulary utilized on their website is sufficient to observe the blatant racialization of immigrants. A caption underneath a picture of two immigrants posted on the Minuteman website reads, “Just a couple of poor tired drug dealers.” This is just one of the ways the Minuteman Organization objectifies illegal immigrants to the adversities of racism in the United States.

³³ Mains, Susan. “An anatomy of race and immigration politics in California” in *Social and Cultural Geography*. Vol. 1, No. 2.(2000): 150.

This strategy of racism and nativism has allowed the Minutemen to appropriate rights to those who belong to American society according to their own standards. Therefore, their idea of citizenship is inseparable from the territorial boundaries of the United States, especially due to their sensitivities towards the porous nature of the Mexican-American border. Those that constitute the category of the other are not welcome and are cast away as unworthy of American citizenship.

Instead of modernizing and advancing the concept of citizenship as the Zapatistas have done, the Minutemen have made citizenship an increasingly more exclusive concept. Citizenship through their eyes is now more reminiscent of traditional standards, as it is strictly bounded by the physical boundaries of the state. Although both concepts of citizenship are based in a nativist discourse, one group stresses the inclusive aspect while the other emphasizes the exclusive characteristic. Using these ideas, the Minutemen and the Zapatistas have developed divergent strategies of autonomy that best adhere to their fundamental platforms and the citizenship rights they wish to pursue or deny.

Autonomy

The concept of autonomy is inextricably linked to the concepts of citizenship, both traditional and new. The manifestation of the new citizenship in the name of traditional citizenship by both the Zapatistas and the Minutemen would be impossible without the application of autonomy. Autonomy provides agency and purpose to each group by simultaneously providing a strategy and serving as an ultimate goal.

The Zapatistas and Autonomy: The San Andrés Accords

One of the most revolutionary aspects of the Zapatista movement lies within their demand for local autonomy while at the same time seeking national inclusion and recognition. As Mattiace notes several times, autonomy has become an umbrella demand in negotiations between the Mexican state and various indigenous groups.³⁴

Traditionally, autonomy has been utilized as a sort of resistance to foreign domination and also a mode of survival in the absence of government services. In the current debate, these uses of autonomy are conflated with concepts of new citizenship in light of the decreased role of the state under neoliberalism and the lack of political liberalization in Mexico.

For the EZLN, autonomy represents both the protection of indigenous culture and a strategy for survival.³⁵ They demand that the government recognize the right of the indigenous people to continue to govern within their own cultural realm. This demand of autonomy does not include secession from the state; rather, further inclusion into the state, as a dually indigenous and Mexican population.

“This notion of autonomy implies recognition of and respect for *what the indigenous peoples already possess*. It is not an ideological proposal or a Promised Land. The issue is not to obtain or conquer autonomy but to incorporate what already exists into the juridical-political design of the society.”³⁶ Autonomy is seen as the ultimate goal of the Zapatistas and is utilized as an expanded right under the definition of the new citizenship.

Demands for indigenous autonomy include first and foremost an emphasis on cultural autonomy, which, “...is a powerful resource in providing the ideological context

³⁴ Mattiace, 87.

³⁵ Weinberg, 143.

³⁶ Esteva and Perez, 10-11.

in which indígenas are framing their new world.”³⁷ Indigenous autonomy seeks greater control over natural resources, self determination, and territory. Even though this concept of autonomy reinforces indigenous self rule through *usos y costumbres* (traditions and customs), it also calls for greater political inclusion, albeit without official participation in traditional political parties.³⁸

In order to promote dialogue, the Commission for Dialogue, Conciliation and Peace (COCOPA) was formed to begin negotiations. COCOPA was comprised of members of the EZLN in addition to all officially represented political parties in Congress. Under COCOPA, the San Andrés Accords were negotiated, which were mainly concerned with the ideas and the implementation of indigenous autonomy. Excerpts from the actual Accords demonstrate the concept of autonomy as advocated by the EZLN, which can be seen in Appendix 1. The San Andrés Accords clearly demarcate the ideal concept of autonomy that is advocated by the Zapatistas.

This concept of autonomy that is put forth as a goal for the EZLN situates the movement in an oppositional role against the state. The Zapatistas are pushing the government to greater accountability in providing services and granting recognition while at the same time expanding their own realm of duties and responsibilities. When confronted by political adversaries concerning their seemingly separatist platform, “The EZLN quickly responded that they were simply asking that the promises of the constitution and the Mexican Revolution be fulfilled for all Mexicans.”³⁹ Therefore, the concepts of the new citizenship and autonomy are best understood by the EZLN as a

³⁷ June Nash, 33.

³⁸ Mattiace, 87-97.

³⁹ Mattiace, 97.

demand for greater accountability and increasing citizen empowerment in political, economic, and cultural realms.

The Minutemen and Autonomy: Vigilantism

The Minutemen have used the discourse of autonomy in a contrasting manner. Their concept of autonomy defines their position in relation to the state; they are autonomous from the state and act independently from state influence. According to the Minutemen, their purpose lies within providing protection where the state falls short and upholding the law. This coincides with the new citizenship and the effects of neoliberalism, as it has caused boundaries to become increasingly fluid with the augmented need of cheap labor flows in addition to the weakening of a more decentralized state.

These combined ideas of the new citizenship and autonomy have resulted in the practice of vigilantism, which is considered to be a strand of populism. Populism, in turn, can be defined as,

“...political and economic nationalism over internationalism; opposition to ‘a global government secretly controlled by a financial elite’; ‘racial integrity,’ not integration; acceptance of ‘hereditary differences in intelligence and ability’ between races or ethnic groups; anti-socialists ‘belief in private property’ and ‘the inequality of human gifts’...”⁴⁰

This utilization of populism in their political foundations is relational to the Minutemen’s nativist discourse and discriminatory views of the migrant as the eternal other. The glorification of national sovereignty and culture is a fundamental aspect of the Minuteman platform.

⁴⁰ Willis A. Carto, ed., *Profiles in Populism* (Greenwich, CT: Flag Press: 1982) ix-xvi. As quoted in Sara Diamond, *Roads to Dominion: Right-Wing Movements and Political Power in the United States* (New York: The Guilford Press: 1995): 150.

The manifestation of populism can be found in the vigilante status of the Minutemen. Vigilantism is characterized by six separate elements according to Johnston: premeditation, volunteerism, active citizens, the use or threat of violence, reaction to social deviances, and personal and collective security.⁴¹ All of these qualities can be attributed to the Minutemen as a group.

Of most importance to the discourse of autonomy is the idea of the active citizen, which signifies “voluntary activity engaged in by (private voluntary agents) without the state’s authority or support.”⁴² The idea of active citizens is also referred to as autonomous citizenship by Johnston. The idea of active citizenship and disillusionment with the government is evident in Chris Simcox’s original call to arms.

“You are reading this because you believe that you can actively participate in one of the most important, socially responsible, and peaceful movements for justice since the civil rights movement of the 1960s. You are considering joining in this activist protest because you are done talking. You have debated, you have begged, you have pleaded with your government officials -- public servants whom you trusted to stand by the oath they took when sworn into office to protect the United States from invasion by enemies foreign and domestic.”⁴³ Therefore, vigilantism is, by definition, autonomous from the state and relies upon a strong base in civil society, although rightist in political leaning.

Vigilantes attempt to take control of the monopoly of violence that is usually seen as a part of the state through means of taking the law into their own hands. As Chris Simcox states, “We, as citizens, are the government, are acting within the social contract of our right to freedom, and *we will apply our efforts within the limits of the laws we have created,*” (emphasis mine).⁴⁴ They see themselves as an alternative to the state and invaluable in providing the service of protection to fellow citizens, justifying intervention

⁴¹ Lee Johnston, “What is Vigilantism?” *British Journal of Criminology* (1996).

⁴² Ibid, 226.

⁴³ Minuteman Website

⁴⁴ Minuteman Website

through patriotic and nationalistic rhetoric revolving around the noble defense of the nation-state. Justification through hyperpatriotism is self evident in many Minutemen speeches.

“Our efforts will change the course of history and ignite others to stand with courage to make a change. Many are waiting for the outcome and will themselves be motivated with a new sense of activism; we will be leaders who will make a difference, role models who will influence future generations. Are you with us, Americans? If yes, then ‘let's roll!’”⁴⁵

Xenophobia is transformed into bravery and nobility which is carried out in the fulfillment of civic responsibility as an American citizen.

Traditional vigilante discourse revolves around the inability of the state to fulfill its role as protector, which serves as a cause for mobilization. The Minutemen consistently attack the government in their failure to moderate, if not terminate, flows of undocumented immigration into the country. Vigilantes are also seen as staunch defenders of the law, as the Minutemen claim to be. Although they operate on the periphery of the legal system, their main goal is to uphold laws that may seek to guard national sovereignty and a unitary cultural identity. Therefore, they commonly seek to criminalize immigrants and punish those that violate the law, such as illegal immigration and undocumented immigrants that have settled into the American society. These trends in Minutemen thinking are most amply exemplified by a flier from March 30, 2006, asking for contributions to the Organization, which can be found in Appendix 2.

The Minutemen are the personification of modern day vigilantes that seek to protect the status quo and maintain “American culture” in the face of supposed subversion and adversity. They are autonomous from the state and use this autonomy as a strategy to advance their goals as “protectors of the country.” The Minutemen’s form

⁴⁵ Ibid.

of vigilantism allows them to guard American society from what they regard as impure influence and chaos. The Minutemen utilize the political space created by neoliberalism and the new citizenship as an autonomous venue to defend conventional and racist ideals and values.

Conclusion

Autonomy has been a vital factor in the movements of both the Zapatistas and the Minutemen. As illustrated, it has been used as both a goal and a strategy to achieve these objectives. Autonomy also helps to situate both movements in relation to the state by enforcing separatism and, in the case of the EZLN, seeking greater inclusion.

Autonomy can also be seen as the product of the different interpretations of the new citizenship for each group. For the Zapatistas, the new citizenship ideologically signifies the reconstruction of rights and traditional citizenship, which culminates in the demand for indigenous autonomy and political representation. In the case of the Minutemen, the new citizenship is a result of the reduction of state capacities and the ability of civilians to rise to the occasion, resulting in the autonomy of vigilantism.

Different strands of racism are implicit in the struggles for social change as illustrated by the Minutemen and the Zapatistas. The Zapatistas seek to disband the homogenizing national identity of mestizaje in Mexico. The traditional concept of *lo mexicano* imposes a certain qualifying characteristic on all Mexicans that is not necessarily universal and common within all regions of the country. Indigenous communities have continuously endured the consequences of this racist legacy of national and cultural identity in Mexico through the denial and violation of citizenship rights.

The Minutemen, on the other hand, seek to limit the societal beneficiaries of American citizenship and adhere to a new form of cultural racism based on the epistemology of whiteness, which conflates nationality and race.⁴⁶ Cultural racism is essentially a form of exclusion utilized by the dominant culture against immigrant flows originating from Third World countries.⁴⁷ This type of racism focuses on the undesirable quality of certain cultures and the intrinsic inability of diverse cultures to integrate and mesh accordingly.⁴⁸ The Minutemen often couch their platform in cultural as opposed to racial terms in order to extend dominance over immigrants and lay claims to the advantages of citizenship rights within a legalized and politically correct framework.

The Minutemen and the Zapatistas are both striving for change in order to preserve disappearing ideals and traditions in this era of rapid neoliberalism and globalization. They both seek to affect the government and public perception in order to initiate political, economic, and cultural transformation. They have utilized the concepts of citizenship and autonomy to advance their ambitions in varying degrees. These differing analyses have resulted in instances of armed rebellion, vigilantism, and democratic negotiations. Similarities between the Zapatistas and the Minutemen can be found in the discourse of citizenship and civil responsibilities in order to initiate action and mobilization. Differences are self evident in political leanings, socioeconomic standing, strategies and ultimate goals.

⁴⁶ Stolcke, Verena "Talking Cultures: New Boundaries, New Rhetorics of Exclusion in Europe" *Current Anthropology* Vol. 36 No. 1 (1993): 1-24.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 1.

⁴⁸ For the development of this argument in terms of global conflict, see Huntington (1996).

Appendix 1: Excerpts from the San Andres Accords

II.

1.- The creation of a judicial framework that establishes a new relationship between indigenous peoples and the State, based on the recognition of their right to self-determination and the judicial, political, social, economic and cultural rights that obtain from it. The new constitutional dispositions must include a framework of autonomy.

2.- Such a judicial framework must be produced with the recognition of the self-determination of indigenous peoples, who, with previous societies, are the ones who have suffered a historical continuation of colonial oppression, maintain and recognize their own identities; and possess the will to preserve them, based on their own, distinct cultural, social, political and economic characteristics. Those attributes characterize them as indigenous peoples, and as such, they are constituted as subjects with a right to self-determination.

Autonomy is the concrete expression of the exercise of the right to self-determination, within the framework of membership in the National State. The indigenous peoples shall be able, consequently, to decide their own form of internal government as well as decide their way of organizing themselves politically, socially, economically and culturally. Within the new constitutional framework of autonomy, the exercise of self-determination of indigenous peoples shall be respected in each of the domains and levels in which they are asserted, being able to encompass one or more indigenous groups, according to particular and specific circumstances in each federal entity. The exercise of autonomy of indigenous people will contribute to the unity and democratization of national life and will strengthen national sovereignty.

IV.

THE ADOPTION OF THE FOLLOWING PRINCIPLES, WHICH MUST GOVERN THE NEW RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN INDIGENOUS PEOPLE AND THE STATE AND THE REST OF SOCIETY:

2.- Self-determination. The State shall respect the exercise of self-determination by indigenous peoples, in all fields and levels where they will try to validate and practice their separate autonomy, without damaging national sovereignty and within the new normative framework for the indigenous towns. This implies respect for their cultural identities and their forms of social organization. It will also respect the abilities of the indigenous towns and communities to determine their own development, as long as national and public interest is respected. The various levels of government and State institutions will not intervene unilaterally in the affairs and decisions of the indigenous towns and communities, in their organization and forms of representation, and in their current strategies for the use of resources.

Appendix 2: Minuteman Flier concerning the May 1st Protests

Mob... Desecrates US Flag while Demanding US Citizens' Rights

This weekend illegal alien mobs came out of the shadows and descended on Phoenix, Denver and Los Angeles.

Like an invading and menacing horde, they demanded US citizen rights, but without any citizen duties, responsibilities, loyalties.

Are riots in the streets and the burning of cars in Washington, DC next?

One million illegal foreign migrants and their advocates militantly marched in the streets of America under the flag of Mexico, demanding our federal laws be ignored, and their criminal trespass into these sovereign United States be rewarded with unlimited benefits—including all the rights of American citizenship!

These mobs claim the right to live and prosper in the United States as “immigrants.” But their own actions reveal an organized effort to force the American taxpayer to accept large foreign colonies in our nation, pressed upon us through acts of intimidation and the threat of violence. We have the right and the moral obligation to defend America, and “just say ‘No!’”

Law-abiding US citizens reject sedition, aggression and acts of defiance against our republic’s ordered liberty. Minutemen will respond in April at the US borders... saying, as loyal Americans have always said, “Immigration, yes—colonization, no!”

Illegal aliens and their handlers are shouting: “No nations, No borders” and “Our ‘rights’ trump the US, its Constitution, its citizens and its laws.”

But illegal aliens are in America only because they are guilty of criminally ‘jumping’ our borders. Since when do mobs of lawbreakers deserve the blessings of liberty, over those honestly, patiently and faithfully seeking to become American citizens?

This is more than a wakeup call—it is an affront to the basic requirements of responsible self-government.

Our government has failed in its duty to enforce the rule of law. It has allowed international criminal syndicates, drug cartels, foreign governments, and radical advocacy groups to undermine the very foundations of the constitutional rights Americans have fought for and died to protect

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