Educating for sustainable peace

A field study of the Zapatista educational projects in Chiapas

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Abstract

This qualitative study has examined the Zapatista educational projects in Chiapas, drawing on two months of fieldwork conducted in the Caracoles of La Realidad, Oventic and Morelia. The aim of the study has been to develop a critical reflection upon how the Zapatistas through their educational projects have addressed past issues of educational malpractice. Employing methods of participant observations and informal narrative interviews it has been possible to get the empirical material that have explained the understandings in the communities that today informs the practices of Zapatista education. Through the application of critical pedagogy it has been possible to interpret and explore how the projects have based in 1) a view of knowledge as a de-commodified social construct. 2) The need of teachers, or promoters, to be developed in democratic manners and 3) the reemphasis on successful bilingual education to support a process of conscientization. Hence fundamentally contrasting against the historical implementations of education interpreted in a banking manner. As these premises constitutes a problem-posing education the concepts have been interpreted to amount to a peace education resulting in the development of values and attitudes that articulates an utopia of a world with room for many worlds, guiding aspirations of peace.

Keywords: Knowledge, Zapatista educational projects, peace education, critical pedagogy, conscientisation.
Word count: 13 795
“In our dreams we have seen another world, an honest world, a world decidedly more fair than the one in which we now live. We saw that in this world there was no need for armies; peace, justice and liberty were so common that no one talked about them as far-off concepts, but as things such as bread, birds, air, water, like book and voice.”
— Subcomandante Marcos (2002:18)

\(^1\) See appendix 8.1 for original quote in Spanish.
All my gratitude to the people encountered in Mexico from whom I learned so much. And to my family for all the valuable input, irreplaceable in success or failure.

No one mentioned, no one forgotten.

Thank you
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List of abbreviations

EZLN  Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional/ Zapatista Army of National Liberation
FRAYBA  El Centro de Derechos Humanos Fray Bartolomé de las Casas
CIOAC-H  Central Independiente de Obreros Agrícolas y Campesinos - Histórica/ Independent Center of Agricultural Workers and Peasants - Historical
ILO  International Labour Organization
JBG  Junta de Buen Gobierno/ Good Government Council
MFS  Minor Field Study
MST  Movimiento de los Trabajadores Rurales Sin Tierra/ Movement of Landless Workers
NGO  Non-Governmental Organization
NAFTA  North American Free Trade Agreement
PAN  Partido de Acción Nacional/ National Action Party
PRI  Partido Revolucionario Institucional/ Institutional Revolutionary Party
PVEM  Partido Verde Ecologista de México/ Ecologist Green Party of Mexico
SFC  Schools For Chiapas
SIDA  Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
UN  United Nations
UNAM  Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México/ National Autonomous University of Mexico
UNESCO  United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF  United Nations Children’s Fund
1. Introduction

The story of how the Zapatista Army for National Liberation (EZLN) on the day the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) came into effect in Mexico, emerged from the Lacandon jungle in the southeast of the state of Chiapas has almost turned into folklore. The movement, based in indigenous communities, started an armed rebellion out of nowhere in 1994, and for that they gained a voice in the global system (Stahler-Sholk, 2010:269; Bahn, 2009:541ff).

Neither the indigenous people’s sufferings nor their endeavors in present-time communities, materialized trough the Zapatista movement, reach the peace and conflict academia, let alone the Swedish public with frequency. This study draws on two months of fieldwork conducted in the region of Chiapas where a number of Zapatista Caracoles2 were visited. Making it possible to meet and live with locals and activists involved in support-projects in the communities, with a specific focus on the “autonomous schools”, schools independent from the government, constructed and run by the Zapatistas.

With the aid of a Minor Field Study-scholarship (MFS) from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) I was able take part in an international caravan. It had been given the task of painting murals on a newly constructed Zapatista school that earlier had been destroyed by paramilitaries in May, 2014. The fieldwork enabled me to understand the lived experiences of the Zapatistas as well as how they are continuing their struggle in a low-intensity conflict setting where the schools has been developed as a response to the experienced social injustice.

The cry in 1994 was “enough is enough3”, after 500 years of struggle the declaration of war against the Mexican government was also a declaration of a war against the existing social injustice - the absence of work, land, roof, electricity, health, education,

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2 Literally translates into snail, but is the metaphoric name of the Zapatista regional governments of which there are five. Like a snail shell the pattern symbolizes the direct democratic practices in the communities where information goes in to the Caracol, then back out to the communities.

3 “¡Ya Basta!”
independence, freedom, democracy, justice and peace (EZLN, 1993). In other words it was a war against structural violence, with the significant fact that in the wealthiest state 26 % of the population belonged to an indigenous population that had been neglected and discriminated through the government’s attempts of education (Galtung, 1969:5ff; Vargas-Cetina, 1998:137; Gonzalez and Gall, 1998:242).

Consequently the armed insurrection reached the San Andrés Accords in 1996 which promised greater autonomy, i.e. self-determination for the indigenous community, de jure creating equality (San Andrés Accords, 1996). However, without the authorities officially accepting the commitments, inequality has de facto remained (Despagne, 2013:119). Nonetheless the Zapatista movement has in coherence with the commitments continued to provide for themselves and strive for equality on the basis of their right to autonomy.

Through the autonomous schools the Zapatistas are to this date providing a political good where there once were none. Incorporating the experiences of the indigenous community from which an alternative education is articulated. Employing it in a non-violent way, this “education of resistance” works as a space for social change attempting to transform the social conflicts from the bottom-up. Perpetuating a vision that another world is possible (Evans, 2008:504f; Schell-Faucon, 2001:2).

1.1 Research problem

In the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention (International Labour Organization [ILO] 1989) and the Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (United Nations [UN] 2007), both ratified by Mexico, indigenous people’s particular right to autonomy in education is asserted. However to assuming the rights of a marginalized people have been problematic, though proclaimed by international organizations and officially acknowledged by the national government, they have never been guaranteed in practice.

As the Mexican educational system has been faced by the autonomous education, the notion of critical pedagogy developed by Paulo Freire lays bare the distinction between systemic education, which can only be changed by political power, and educational projects, which should be carried out with the oppressed in the process of organizing them. (1996:36)
Hence with the autonomous schools articulated as *educational projects*, the research problem in focus in this thesis concerns the issue of how Zapatistas through their organization have addressed the experienced structural violence through their projects.

### 1.2 Aim and research questions

Hence, this study is conducted with the aim of developing a critical reflection upon how the Zapatistas through their educational projects have addressed past issues of educational malpractice.

Deriving from two months of fieldwork in Chiapas, the study puts to the foreground actors who have lived and worked in Zapatista communities while also building on my own observations in the field. This focus will add new knowledge from Chiapas to the literature that is intertwined with a peace and conflict perspective that tries to understand conflicts in relation to a sustainable peace.

To reach the aim the overarching research questions guiding the study has been formulated as follows:

- What lived experiences inform the current educational projects? And how do the educational projects address these experiences?

These have in turn been synthesized into more direct sub-questions to be answered:

- How do the community members of La Realidad, Oventic and Morelia understand the previous efforts of formal education?

- How can the educational practices in the communities of La Realidad, Oventic and Morelia be interpreted in terms of *critical pedagogy*?

- What in the interpretations amounts to a *peace educational* process within the fabric of violence in La Realidad, Oventic and Morelia?

The synthesized research questions have been designed to be explained in the light of the theory of *critical pedagogy*. By employing the theory of *critical pedagogy* - a tool to address one’s source of oppression – it has been possible to interpret the material and identify themes, to explore if these findings can amount to a process of *peace education* that is conducive to sustainable peace.
1.3 Research Overview

Ever since the rebellion commenced in 1994 and the Zapatistas gained international recognition, there has been extensive literature produced on the Zapatistas *per se*. In parallel but stretching further back in time, before the uprising in 1994, there has developed a field focused on education in Chiapas and the indigenous communities, often with a focus on bilingual projects. Often the scholars belong to the field of social anthropology and have been emerged in the field for a long time, often observing and living with indigenous communities (Harvey, 2001:8). However the research explicitly focusing on the educational projects of the Zapatistas is very limited. This section will discuss and critically examine the main findings in earlier research and explain how they are relevant for this study.

1.3.1 On the Zapatistas

Among acknowledged Chiapas- and Zapatista-knowers is Niel Harvey who in his book, *The Chiapas Rebellion: The Struggle for Land and Democracy* (2001), offers an historical account of the regional context, drawing on ten years of fieldwork from 1987. The account provides introductions to several perspectives on the origins of the uprising, for example the more “government-friendly” explanation of the rebellion as imposed on the indigenous people by urban Marxists⁴. But the greater focus is put on the origins based in the socioeconomic needs of the people, an assumption adopted in this study as well. But because more than a decade has passed since the production the current analysis is not up to date. Which makes Niels Barmeyer’s *Developing Zapatista autonomy: Conflict and NGO Involvement in Rebel Chiapas* (2009) a more complete analysis of the Zapatista advances and limitations on the basis of *autonomy*. With *autonomy* being a point of departure, much of the focus is put on the Zapatistas as functioning within, or even competing with the state. Though the research provides first hand experiences of the involvement of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) his own encounters with the educational projects in the communities lacks a real perspective on its relation to the conflict.

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1.3.2 On education in Chiapas

In a narrower field that looks at education in Chiapas, both by the Zapatistas and by the government, the access to academics is much more limited. Since the literature in a greater extent is produced in Spanish and rarely translated into English the discussion within the academic circles are very limited. Nonetheless the extensive compilation of the Zapatismo\(^5\) in communities; *Luchas ‘muy otras’: Zapatismo y autonomía en las comunidades indígenas de Chiapas* edited by Richard Stahler-Sholk and Bruno Baronnet and Mariana Mora Bayo (2011) advances findings that the municipalities employ practices, including education, that produces the indigenous community members as subjects. Mainly through *praxis*, the fusion of theory and action. Findings that is further advanced in the independent works of Bruno Baronnet (2009;2015) who also questions the practices of *indigenismo* and its persistent existence in contemporary multicultural practices that avoids the issue of political autonomy. In more generalizable terms several quantitative studies presents findings that overviews how the formal education and bilingual attempts of education have failed (Vargas-Cetina, 1998; García and Velasco, 2012; Despagne, 2013). As they are presenting statistics from schools located in indigenous communities showing illiteracy, drop-outs and poor performances, they still lack a qualitative aspect which in contrast this thesis will help provide through narratives describing some lived experiences.

1.3.3 On peace education and critical pedagogy

Apart from the aforementioned research that either centers on Zapatismo as such or qualitative research in indigenous communities evaluating the implementations of the formal education, a number of researchers have incorporated the *critical pedagogy* or *peace education* at the core of their research. With the examples of Latin-American social movements such as the Movement of Landless Workers (MST) or the Zapatistas this kind of research stresses a holistic political interpretation of past and present experiences and practices (Jaramillo and Carreon, 2014). For example Lia Pinheiro Barbosás PhD dissertation (2013) at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) results in a philosophical claim of the education and pedagogies as decisive for the Zapatistas to articulate themselves as political subjects.

\(^5\) A notion comprising the counter-discourse of theories and practices articulated by the Zapatistas.
Similar with the aim of this study Monisha Bajaj (2015), who integrates the ideas of critical pedagogy into critical peace education, uses the Zapatistas’ educational projects as an example in stating the finding that to make larger assessments about social justice and of political processes to achieve peace, cultivating critical consciousness is an important presupposition. Hence making a very suitable closing point to the relevance to further comprehend how methodologies in the educational projects, repeatedly used by social and indigenous movements, can address issues related to social injustice (Jaramillo and Carreon, 2014; Harris, 2004:12).

1.4 Delimitations

This study will mainly focus on my experiences drawn from the Zapatista Caracoles La Realidad, Oventic and Morelia, this is where the fieldwork mainly took place and the majority of the gathered material stems from. It is important to keep in mind that when studying the Zapatista movement, since it is based on the idea of autonomy, ideas and practices are very likely to change depending on time and space. Hence my findings are limited to the geographic places during the specific time spent there.

1.5 Disposition

Given an overarching introduction formulating the need and aim of the study followed by a presentation of earlier findings in the research overview, and an extensive background in chapter two will be describing the socioeconomic conditions and fabric of violence in Chiapas. From the background the thesis moves on to the third chapter that concerns the theory that has been used. The notions of peace and autonomy are defined as well as the key ideas of critical pedagogy and peace education. In chapter four the methodology discusses the appropriateness of the chosen research design as well as the process of conducting fieldwork. Chapter five contains the analysis and is the main chapter where the findings from the material are described and the theories are applied to interpret the material. Ultimately in chapter six the conclusion returns to the aim to discuss and answer the research question with final comments and suggestions for future research.
2. Background

In this chapter an account of the regional context will be made including some of the most important and relevant aspects of the fabric of violence in Chiapas. Starting with the socio-economic context, followed by key events that have brought about the recent conflict dynamics in Chiapas, going as far down as the local level of the Caracoles.

2.1 Enough is enough!

The state of Chiapas has been one of Mexico’s wealthiest states in terms of resources. Ensuring a position as producer of about half of the country’s hydroelectric power, the largest coffee exporter and the second largest petroleum producer, while also maintaining prominent positions in other agricultural production areas such as corn, tobacco, soy and cacao. However there has been a discrepancy in the distribution of wealth which is contrasted by the extreme poverty where, in 1994, about three-quarters of the population was malnourished and 39 percent earned less than the $3 minimum wage (Burbach, 1994:114ff). The material conditions of that time made its impression on the schooling as well, characterized by poorly motivated teachers, language discord and absenteeism where 30 percent of the children did not attend school while having an illiteracy rate of 54 percent above the age of 15 (Burbach, 1994:114ff; Barmeyer, 2009:164). Echoing the concerns put forward by indigenous communities at the Las Casas Indian Congress in San Cristóbal as early as October 1974 (Womack Jr, 1999:157ff)⁶. These social grievances and structural violence has been put in the forefront as the causes of the rebellion in 1994, and they continue to be an important part in the socio-economic context in Chiapas (Harvey, 2001:8f)⁷. Reaffirming the need for human security and satisfaction of the developmental need to maintain stability and avoid a protracted social conflict (Azar 1990:7f).

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2.2 The Neozapatistas and the fabric of violence

But the EZLN´s armed insurrection brought about a radical change in the political environment. Not least by bringing attention to the structural violence which was combated in the *autonomous territories* (Bahn, 2009:542). But also through the self-sustaining provision of previously non-existent political goods such as health clinics and quality schooling (Barmeyer 2008:508ff).

When the sixth declaration of the Lacandon jungle (“La Sexta”) emerged in 2005, the EZLN and the movement set out a new course. Reorganizing themselves as a new political force situated in a wider civil society, unified in intersecting struggles against capitalism and neoliberalism (Navarro, 2008:21). Once again the Zapatistas, by some nicknamed the “neo-zapatistas”, was changing the political environment. Molded by the earlier conflict context the organic development of the movement had been filled by a new generation of insurgents as

> those who were children in that January of ‘94 are now young people who have grown up in the resistance, and they have been trained in the rebel dignity lifted up by their elders throughout these 12 years of war. These young people have a political, technical and cultural training that we who began the Zapatista movement did not have. This youth is now, more and more, sustaining our troops as well as leadership positions in the organization. (EZLN, 2005)

Consequently, in parallel to the consolidation of autonomy in the communities the youth growing up during those 12 years of war has ever since been an essential actor. Especially as responsible for the educational projects the youth has been put in the forefront of the conflict fighting, not with guns, but through creating an alternative to the formal Mexican education that was aimed at homogenization and centralization (Baronnet and Breña, 2004:113).

But fighting without guns against structural violence and the government´s malevolence to fully meet declarations or conventions has not necessarily guaranteed less violence (Despagne, 2013:119; ILO 1989; UN 2007). On the contrary, the usually hostile attitude against the Zapatistas, that at its epitome resulted in the deployment of 60 000 troops and special police units, has after the San Andrés Accords, been replaced by a counterinsurgency strategy employed by the government.
Resulting in divisions and a new fabric of violence (Barmeyer 2008:506ff). As a direct consequence of the created divisions, in May of 2014 Zapatista teacher José Luis Solís López (hereinafter referred to by his nom de guerre “Galeano”) was murdered in La Realidad, Caracol. This became a defining moment of the dynamics in the local, as well as the regional, conflict context. Described in a recent report from the human rights organization El Centro de Derechos Humanos Fray Bartolomé de las Casas (FRAYBA), the murder of the well-known Zapatista-teacher reflects how the aforementioned structural violence has been used as an instrument of manipulation. Implicating the government parties, as the dominating Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) has preserved the conditions that demands justice. While the Ecologist Green Party of Mexico (PVEM) and National Action Party (PAN) has been linked to the Independent Center of Agricultural Workers and Campesinos – Historical (CIOAC-H), the paramilitary grouping responsible for the harassments and the murder of Zapatista teacher Galeano (FRAYBA, 2015).

It has been made clear that there is a strong link between how the structural violence has been used as a form of counterinsurgency to create division and maintain territorial control. At the same time direct violence from paramilitaries in organizations such as CIOAC-H has been directed against Zapatistas organizing for socio-economic development and community building (FRAYBA, 2015; Azar, 1990:1f).

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8 A nom de guerre, mistakenly assumed to be taken from Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano. In reality it is taken from the insurgente Hermenegildo Galeana, a lieutenant during the war for independence in Mexico (Subcomandante Galeano May 2:nd 2015).

9 “The mother of Caracoles, sea of our dreams” (“Madre de los Caracoles, mar de nuestros sueños”)

10 FRAYBA is a non-profit civil organization founded in 1989. It is active in Chiapas where it among other things provides peace observers to indigenous communities (FRAYBA 1.a).
3. Theoretical framework

The theory-chapter will explain the defining ideas of the peace and conflict research field that are used in this thesis. Given the peace and conflict-framework, the chapter will explain the framework and define core concepts of critical pedagogy as well as what underlies peace educational processes. Following every explanation and thoughts on potential counter-argument it will be made clear how they will be applied in the analytical chapter to interpret the material and make connections to general social processes related to the conflict and education (Chambliss and Schutt, 2010:23).

3.1 Peace and Autonomy

3.1.1 Peace as the presence of social justice

Traditionally people have been thinking about peace in terms of ceasefires and stopping the direct violence, but there exists a second dimension to the idea of peace. The first is called negative peace and concerns absence of violent actions we associate with warfare. But peace-researcher Johan Galtung (1969) has also claimed that for a sustainable peace to be in effect there is a need of positive peace, a peace aimed at preventing the continued presence of indirect, cultural and structural violence. These are forms of violence that to a greater extent are concealed in society, manifested in overt inequalities between groups in society that radically prevents one group from realizing their potential to live a full and dignified life, for example through unequal educational opportunities (Galtung, 1969:173ff; Reychler, 2006:2f).

Consequently the connotations attached to the term peace will in this study more associated with this second dimension, i.e. positive peace. Since there is a multitude of interpretations of peace it is here more concretely distinguished as the presence of social justice where relationships are restored and social systems that serve the needs of the people are created. This to, in comparison with the first dimension, attain a more long-term and holistic view, i.e. sustainability (Fountain, 1999:4ff).
3.1.2 Autonomy as an alternative social structure

The characterizing conflict trait in the Chiapaneco context is the frequent use of the notion autonomy. While peace education works within a specific conflict context and needs a space of practice, autonomy in this context of conflict serves as the determining factor of establishing a space within which it becomes possible to develop educational projects (Jäger, 2014:6; Schell-Faucon, 2001:2).

For example the autonomous territories in Chiapas have become the spaces where the Zapatistas employ their own education. In common language it would be reduced to signifying being independent or perhaps “self-determent”. But in Zapatista territories it in addition denotes a fluent and abstract relationship, not bound to a geographical space. Rather it aims at in its core incorporate decentralism and democracy in practices. This together with the collective dimension in the aspirations of autonomy is essential to keep in mind when understanding on what foundations the educational projects are constructed. It has been designed more as an alternative social structure to the present representative democracy (Barmeyer, 2009:54; Andersson, 2001:98f). Tied to the political theory of autonomism, different approaches occasionally perceive the Zapatista autonomy to be developed from either Marxist or anarchist principles. However the main point is their unique avoidance of dogmatism and their continual reflexivity which is considered inextricable for the survival of indigenous traditions and culture (Barmeyer, 2009:54).

3.2 Theory of Critical Pedagogy

The understandings of critical pedagogy will provide the main instrument of interpreting meanings, making it possible to from a grassroots-perspective make connection of how the educational projects functions to address past and present issues (Kincheloe, 2007:12).

Naturally since the tradition of critical pedagogy goes back to the Frankfurt School, it is closely linked to the discipline of critical theory, critiquing society and addressing issues of power with the aim of emancipation and empowerment.

Thus it has built many of its concepts on basic beliefs from the discipline, for example the assumption of hegemony\textsuperscript{12} as an exercise of social control legitimating dominant sets of values through the leaders in society, for instance teachers. This is important to keep in mind when interpreting the valuable role of “teachers” in the Zapatista education (Darder, Baltodano and Torres, 2009:5ff; Giroux, 1997:6).

Though the father of critical pedagogy Paulo Freire was from Brazil, where he experience the workings of the structural violence that he later became dedicated to tackle, the discipline is today dominated by academics from the north western hemisphere (Freire, 1977:5ff). As notorious academic Joe L. Kincheloe notes it has become as most established in North American circles where the practices has been adjusted to the social practices of American classrooms. Kincheloe therefore calls for a need to turn an eye towards the richness that exists in subjugated indigenous knowledges to once again inform educational theory (2007:11ff).

As the theory is not designed as a homogenous set of ideas, a differing school of thought based on anarchist Ivan Illich articulates in contrast a thought of de-schooling\textsuperscript{13}. Rather giving the main significance to criticizing the traditional forms of schooling and established institutions. However, with the aim of developing reflections upon the interpretations of the education, the relevant critical pedagogues are those aligned with the original ideas of Freire. For example Henry A. Giroux and Peter McLaren who in contrast with Illich provides necessary tools in interpreting new forms of education, rather than solely critiquing (Freire, 1977:10ff). They are first of all building their interpretations on an underlying value-base needed in education (Fountain, 1999:3) necessitating the following understanding that

\begin{quote}
there is no such thing as a neutral education process. Education either functions as an instrument that is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, or it becomes “the practice of freedom”, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world. (Freire 1996:16)
\end{quote}


Thus critical pedagogy has developed a couple of key concepts necessary for turning education into a means for emancipation.

3.2.1 Conscientisation

The fundamental notion in critical pedagogy is that of conscientisation\(^\text{14}\), it has implicitly been referred to earlier; essentially signify a representation of the development of a critical consciousness (Freire, 1977:7ff). In other words conscientisation refers to “learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality” (Freire, 1996:17). This is formulated as a process where theory and practice is inextricably related, meaning that in educational projects the teachers teaches with the aim of realizing the students’ creative potential to transform. To develop a critical consciousness and becoming aware about a situation will realize the capability to change it, not merely accept it (Freire, 1977;1996:61). Hence conscientisation becomes a key component that will be used to interpret how students develop an understanding of their situation in the communities from which peace education might be informed.

3.2.2 Banking education vs problem-posing education

This inevitably leads to the second assumption relating to the more practical design of education. Freire also uncovers the dichotomy of banking education vs a problem-posing education. The former is recognized as the traditional form of education, where knowledge is distributed by those considered knowledgeable to the non-knowledgeable\(^\text{15}\) (1996:53ff). In coherence with a hegemonic “culture of positivism”, the denial of its own ideology and claim of absolute objectivism, it assumes a perception of knowledge as independent of time, space and human production. Hence this paradigm promotes mediation and methodologies of education where students passively, without developing a critical consciousness, accepts the common sense paradigm and adapts to the world as it is (Giroux, 1997:21; Freire, 1996:54).

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\(^{14}\) Originally articulated in Portuguese as conscientização (Freire, 1977:7).

\(^{15}\) See appendix 8.2 for detailed mapping of student-teacher relations in banking education.
This implies that the banking concept is a method of dominance that perpetuates the existing social conditions while undermining a development of a critical consciousness for transformation of reality (Freire, 1996:53).

On the other hand from a critical point of view, knowledge is perceived as a social construction tied to power; from which it is possible to translate it either into the interest of domination or emancipation. The inseparability of power and knowledge gives significance to the ideology behind it, deciding if it is to be used as a tool to legitimize a set of beliefs or conversely, employed as a source of skills and attitudes to develop agency and critique necessary for emancipation (Giroux, 1997:9ff).

Accordingly, the problem-posing education’s contrasting dialectical relationship of knowledge gives meaning to conflicts in society not as isolated events, but rather as tied to the interaction between individuals and society. Thus the holistic view of conflicts acknowledges that the interconnectedness of knowledge, cultural norms and the society at large creates human activity as both a product and as a force of change (Darder, Baltodano and Torres, 2009:11f). In this sense rather than forming students as passive objects to whom knowledge is deposited in a banking manner, students are in the problem-posing education understood as subjects. And as such, self-conscious beings capable of creating and transforming the reality they find themselves submerged in (Freire, 1996:52ff). These dynamics of two contrasting forms of education will be in the forefront of the analysis when interpreting the past formal attempts of education as opposed to the educational projects developed by the Zapatistas.

3.2.3 Student-teacher relations

Ultimately, to through a problem-posing education and the process of conscientisation, a deep relationship between the students and the teacher needs to be arranged. The alternative perspective of problem-posing education on the social relationship comprises attitudes and practices that create a democratic relationship. In which the lived experiences of both teacher and students are valued, both having something to contribute and learn from each other (Freire, 1996:53).

With a content derived from the students’ view of the world dialogue and analysis serve as the pillars upon which reflection and actions rests (Freire, 1996:90).
As an emancipatory educational process, the former objects become subjects empowered to not only exist in the world, but also to engage with it. Practically this involves encouraging the students to examine the causality of events, subjecting it to analysis and to avoid viewing the world as static and unchangeable. This puts great focus on dialogue as a means for the teacher, where concrete situations in the everyday life functions as a point of departure to stimulate critical reflection (Darder, Baltodano and Torres, 2009:282; Freire, 1977:85ff). As this concept of student-teacher relationship means specific social relations, the implementation in the analytical chapter will help interpret how attitudes and practices derived from this relationship can amount to peace education as well.

3.3 Peace Education

While peace education in comparison to the theory of critical pedagogy is more of a process where individuals acquire values, skills, attitudes, behaviors and knowledge it builds much of its perception on common notions as critical pedagogy. Employing a similar terminology in explaining underlying conditions that perpetuate violence (Harris, 2004:12f). As a tool to achieve and maintain peace it has been concluded in previous research that educational work for youths is important during all phases of a latent conflict, post-conflict situations and in times of negative peace. However, partially due to the aforementioned multitude of constellations of “peace” and because of different conflict contexts, there is no uniform understanding of what amounts to an explicit peace educational process (Berghof Foundation, 2012:76; Fountain, 1999:1ff; Harris, 2004:8). Though the overarching guiding principles include the aim of reducing violence, non-violent transformation of conflicts and enhance peace-competences through a wide range of proposals to train youths (Berghof Foundation, 2012:76; Fountain, 1999:1ff).

The definition of peace education that will be brought to the analytical chapter and used in this study builds on the understanding of the process as practices aimed at preventing a protracted conflict and encourage a critical reassessment of the past. Meaning that these practices are used in a step towards transforming cultures and social structures antithetical to peace by informing human agency (Schell-Faucon, 2001:1; Bajaj,
2015:3). Though some peace-educationalists would subcategorize it as “development education” the link between informing human agency is in the end imperative to create a force to achieve peace as a form of social justice, and by that critical to peace education (Harris, 2004:12; Fountain, 1999:40; Hauman, 2011:243ff).

What has become clear is that all notions explained can be viewed as interrelated and overlapping in one way or the other. Given the interpretation of the main concepts in critical pedagogy it is possible to, following the understanding of peace educational processes, in the analytical chapter explore what in the Zapatista education amounts or could inform a process peace education and by extension peace.

In summary what is most important to keep in mind is the understanding of autonomy as the practice that constitutes the space for a process of peace education. That seeks to reduce violence and critically reassess the past through the acquisition of values, skills, attitudes, behaviors and knowledge. The use of critical pedagogy provides tools of interpreting the process of conscientisation in the educational projects as they seek to address the past experiences.
4. Methodology

This chapter describes the methodological framework. This includes a description of the social constructivist worldview, from which the study has been approached. Also the chosen qualitative research design will be discussed and motivated as well as the ethnographic techniques and the employed methods in gathering material in the field. This is followed by a focus on how the material has been accessed, ethical considerations and issues encountered during the fieldwork, the role of the researcher and the assessment of the material. In the last part an explanation of how concepts and theories will be used in the method analysis of the material will be made.

4.1 Research design

This study has been conducted with a worldview that aligns with the social constructivist approach. This means that the underlying assumption is based on people existing as actors within the world of which they create subjective meanings from their experiences. Rather than believing that there exists an objective truth as the positivist approach tends to do, social constructivism reflects the complexities that emerges from human beings interactions and historical and cultural norms (Creswell, 2007:24f;2009:7f). It is an approach typically related to qualitative research designs which also characterizes this study.

Since qualitative designs generally seek to explore and understand the ascribed meanings to social phenomenon or problems by groups of people or individuals, it is the most relevant approach (Creswell, 2009:4ff). Although it in comparison with a quantitative design does not have the same generalizability, it is not the aim of the study. Instead as a qualitative approach allows for a focus on human subjectivity and a sensitivity of the social context it will in terms of the aim help develop a critical reflection upon how the education addresses the issues experienced by the communities (Chambliss and Schutt, 2010:222ff).
4.1.1 Strategy of inquiry

In studying the Zapatista communities of La Realidad, Oventic and Morelia, a strategy of inquiry mainly based on ethnographical techniques has been deemed most suitable, viewing community members and activists taking part in implementing the autonomous practices as the cultural group to be studied. The specific focus on their understandings of past experiences in everyday life to be able to interpret the contemporary actions, would be hard to pin point with for example a content analysis (Creswell, 2007:24f; 2009:11ff). In addition to this motivation of the suitability of the techniques, they have also allowed the research to deal with the emerging complexities of the topic. To realize the aim of in a descriptive and explorative way represent and interpret an underrepresented marginalized group´s perceived reality that has evolved contextually (Chambliss and Schutt, 2010:8f).

A definition of ethnography as ‘participant observations plus other methods’ have been employed which have implied that methods such as informal narrative interviews and document analysis have been employed side by side with participant observations. Which has resulted in comprehensive material stretching from field notes and documents to noted informal interviews (Crang and Cook, 2007:35; Trost, 2005:27; Creswell, 2007:70ff).

In the field this strategy of inquiry has entailed the employment of the following methods resulting in the mentioned material:

- *Participatory observation* – field notes on observed behaviors and expressions in the everyday conditions of the cultural group.
- *Informal narrative interviews* – accounts of the participants´ authentic subjective interpretation of the context and lived experiences.
- *Document gathering* – documents such as theoretical papers or guiding documents directing the practical implementation. As well as internal documents evaluating the taught content in class. (Trost, 2005:27f; Creswell 2007:24ff)

Acting in the role of an “observer as participant”, or conducting participant observations, means a type of presence defined by John W. Creswell as having one´s role as a researcher known among the studied cultural group.
It has the advantages of being able to record or note information as it appears in the moment, however one of the limitations is that the researcher might make observations that cannot be reported. A weakness to be remembered when critically interpreting the material as there always is a possibility of events gone by unreported in the study (2009:180f).

In regard to the informal narrative interviews Jan Trost basically defines it as giving the respondent the opportunity to talk about his or her life experiences without any interruptions from the interviewer. Resulting in very context-based interviews performed during very different conditions. However this method has been deemed to fulfill the aim of obtaining knowledge about people´s lived experiences and understandings as it is allows different stories to emerge, only guided by similar meta-questions and from there being very open-ended, resulting in different follow-up questions (2005:27f).

4.2 The process of gathering of material

As has been mentioned this study is grounded in two months of fieldwork conducted from the end of March to late May in 2015, in Chiapas, Mexico. Where the city of San Cristóbal de las Casas was the center where I could connect with gatekeepers involved with the Zapatista movement and consequently gain access to the Zapatista Caracoles of La Realidad, Oventic and Morelia. Sites of research have been chosen on the basis of being accessible both in relations to communications from the city and in gaining permission to conduct research in the communities. All together it resulted in a good mix of La Realidad the historically important first Caracol, Oventic located closer to the city and therefor used to receiving a lot of “Zapaturistas” and lastly Morelia as a quiet and “discreet” Caracol. The main gatekeepers has been persons associated with the grassroots-support organization Schools for Chiapas (SFC16) through which it was possible to also connect with key informants and retrieve an perspective from within the movement (SFC, 1.a; Chambliss, 2010:229f).

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16 Schools For Chiapas is composed of grassroots activists and communities, supporting the Zapatistas. Created in 1996 as a project to construct schools, they do not view themselves as a traditional NGO but simply a collective of individuals in solidarity with people seeking ways to make the world a better place (SFC 1.a).
The organization itself caught my attention during the process of doing background research as they were mentioned as an experienced organization that has been working in the communities since the start of the uprising in Niels Barmeyer’s book (2009). Formed as a solidarity organization they have been very helpful, probably partially based on the possible gains of having a researcher bringing attention to and spreading knowledge about the Zapatistas. Furthermore the two months of fieldwork included participation in a two week international caravan to La Realidad, organized by SFC upon invitation by the Zapatistas. The purpose of the caravan was to paint murals alongside community members on the newly rebuilt school and health clinic. During this time it was possible to take field notes (treated later on), make observations in the community and conduct informal narrative interviews with activists, and community members (Trost, 2005:27f). Moreover from the informal interviews and with the help of key informants it has been possible to obtain relevant documents that have been used as primary material in understanding the educational projects. This amounts to two articles on intercultural education by Jorge Gasché, an anthropologist with a focus on indigenous education which apparently has been an inspiring feature in informing the educational project. Even more interesting and unique has been the “curriculum” (henceforth referred to as Curriculum 2015) I was given in confidence by an informant. As a “curriculum” written and compiled by students from the Secundaria in a Zapatista community by the end of the semester in April 2015, it gives an insight to what the students have been working with during the semester, in their own words.

4.3 Ethical considerations and problems in the field

As always when conducting research and fieldwork it involves a great deal of ethical considerations. To be able to take precautions regarding respect, reciprocity and carefulness in accessing and dealing with the data (Chambliss and Schutt, 2010:40). Principles that are holding great importance in conflict contexts like the one in the Zapatista communities, not least in La Realidad.

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17 Consisting of children generally between 12-17 years.
At the point of the fieldwork, due to recent circumstances the preexisting tensions in the community had risen, speaking of course of the destruction of the Zapatista health clinic and school and the murder of Zapatista teacher Galeano (SFC, 1.b; FRAYBA, 2015). This had resulted in the usually reserved Zapatistas to be even more reserved from fear of provoking or incite more violence in the community. Hence my first precaution was to, from the start, be open with my purpose and background, sharing my research interest with the delegation participants and organizers who in turn informed the JBG (the good government council18). This ensured a proper procedure of people with local knowledge making sounds decisions in regards to security of both the members of the community and me as a researcher.

With the guiding principle of “do no harm” a special focus was placed on protecting the participants of the research. As a part of this the most important step has been in the process after the fieldwork to sustain privacy and confidentiality (Creswell, 2007:72f; Chambliss and Schutt, 2010:55). Therefore all the names in the thesis has been altered to provide informers with anonymity, making it impossible for someone else to identify who has said and done what (Trost, 2005:41). A second precaution that has been taken in fulfilling the desire of the participants is to not have any of our conversations recorded for security reasons. Hence the written notes on the informal narrative interviews have been built in as separate sections in the field notes (Trost, 2005:41).

The biggest problem for the study that was encountered concerned the initial plan of involve children participating in the Secundaria, with the initial aim of interviewing them or at least participate as an observer during classes.

However this was made impossible due to ethical and security considerations expressed by the JBG as well as the fact that the children were on vacation during my time of visit. Instead I had to limit the study to solely rely on indirect observations of children moving in the surroundings. This was probably the biggest setback in the field along with the in general time consuming processes of obtaining permissions from the JBG. For example, having a formal meeting with the JBG (which was denied) or making a home visit was subject to long processing times. Making impossible the desires of talking to officials and acquire a more representative opinion.

18 “Junta de Buen Gobierno”, the regional government consisting of locally elected representatives from the communities.
The last problem encountered and hard to resolve was to approach the women in the community and hear their views. The lacking of accounts of the women is a weakness I here acknowledge as I believe their lived experiences in the past are significantly different from those of the men. However as the research in the field was limited by a strict timeframe the cultural dynamics of traditions and norms in the much more isolated communities obstructed and delayed the process of establishing a mutual trust necessary for informal narrative interviews (Trost, 2005:27f).

### 4.4 Reflexivity and the role of the researcher

Particularly when investigating a foreign milieu it is of great importance to reflect over what impact the presence of the researcher himself will have, therefore it is necessary to practice reflexivity. But as Deborah Court and Randa Abbas advice, based on their own experiences of ethnographic fieldwork, it should not become an excessive self-examination of the researcher, but rather a balanced analysis of the relation between researcher, respondents and different contexts at work during a fieldwork (2013:487). Hence, moving around in Mexico, and especially in isolated communities like La Realidad who are not used to tourists or foreigners, it is unavoidable to realize that you are observed with extra attention. Having the less common characteristics of being tall, fair skinned with bright hair sometimes reflects the dynamics of race in Mexico where your psychical features to some extent becomes the determinant factor in being judged.

However, without going into details on dynamics of race that soaks the social relations in Mexico, the obstacle it initially might pose in becoming an insider often functions as a source of interest and curiosity.

Perhaps interpreted as one of the milder workings of white privilege, viewed as undeserved societal benefits in comparison with non-whites living under the same circumstances (Mills, 2007). In the grander scheme it could be seen from the fact that during the international caravan´s presence in La Realidad, not once did a military vehicle pass through the community, despite their alleged weekly presence the months before the arrival of the caravan. Signaling a privilege occupied by foreigners while at the same time the two-folded purpose of the Zapatista invitation.
At the same time it exemplifies how the researcher being “emerged” in the field, still might not fully encounter the true everyday experiences in his own observations.

With a very limited timeframe becoming a “insider” was posed a great difficulty, however becoming what Sandra Meike Bucerius refers to as an “outsider trusted with insider knowledge” (2013:691) still proved to put me in an appropriate role that minimized the room for misinterpretations of the gathered information. While it at the same time allowed a different perspective, to for example be able to empathize but not necessarily sympathize with the participants. Though being emerged with a subjugated cultural group definitely poses as challenge towards remaining critical and not cross over to solely sympathize with the group and withhold critical reflections. A challenge I found best dealt with through engaging in discussion with other outsiders participating in the caravan and with academics encountered in San Cristóbal (Trost, 2005:72f).

### 4.5 Assessment of the material

Since a significant amount of the study is concerned with the subjective meanings of people who have experiences from educational practices, their accounts needs to be retold. Hence the material, specifically concerning the portion stemming from informal interviews, has been based on a purposive sampling. Largely guided by who is knowledgeable about the issues while at the same time showing an ability of displaying multiple perspectives and of course by who is willing to participate (Chambliss and Schutt, 2010:123f). Following these preconditions I have used the accounts of the following participants to attempt cover the most relevant representations encountered, outlined in order of given space in the study:

- Daniel – Having direct experiences of education as a teacher and mentor in the communities, not necessarily based in just one Caracol, but several. Valued as the main key informant.
- Luis – being politically active Zapatista, who since childhood years been active in the movement.
- David – expressing the perspective of an activist that has lived and worked with projects in the communities since the uprising.
Through their words or indirect articulations I have attempted to provide an accurate portrayal of their understandings.

In addition to the narratives some of the material that has been gathered has only been available in Spanish therefore the sources have been subject to my own translations. Though the language sometimes have appeared to be a barrier to overcome I chose not to rely on a translator from the “outside” since that could risk a loss of people making their own wordings and conceptualizations or even approach me. Further, the attempts to communicate directly are an important part in recognizing a mutual trust when having a conversation. That is also why, for shorter translations, the original phrase will appear in a note but for longer ones the Spanish versions are available in its entirety as an appendix.

However concerning the full documents they can be accessed through the author. This applies for especially for *Curriculum 2015*, mainly due to the commitment to confidentiality. On the other hand the two articles by Jorge Gasché on *intercultural education* that have been gathered in the field are public material and accessible.

Concerning the field notes they have been developed continuously during the fieldwork. During which observations of individuals’ behaviors, activities and comments made in the field have been documented in a semi-structured manner as notes (Creswell, 2009:181). To in a later stage been compiled digitally and organized along identified themes that have been highlighted in the texts. The original field notes remains in the hands of the author, but the compiled version is accessible since names and revealing details has been altered to provide anonymity and maintain confidentiality. With the purpose of retaining transparency and achieve validity it is possible to validate the authenticity of this material through examining the transcriptions of the field notes (Bevir, 2010:50f; Chambliss and Schutt, 2010:12).
4.6 Structure and method of analysis

In the analytical phase I have applied the preconceived understanding of peace education and the theoretical assumptions associated with critical pedagogy on the material. This since they provide concepts and notions that makes it possible to interpret how the educational practices are addressing the experienced issues in the past.

The field research has used a combination of both emic and etic approaches with the aim of attaining the understandings of the members in the cultural group while also leaving space for an outsider interpretation with the help of the theoretical framework. This means that in the analytical chapter the emic approach, i.e. the accounts from inside the studied cultural group resulting from informal narrative interview, has firstly been used to sketch a general portrait of lived experiences of the community members. Secondly the etic approach involves the use of critical pedagogy in interpreting the educational projects and how they inform peace education in the conflict. The purpose of this strategy has been to in the end create a holistic cultural portrait of the educational projects, from which the reader will learn about both the experiences of the participants, and through interpretation how the practices address them (Creswell, 2007:72f).

When applying the lens of critical pedagogy and peace education it will be possible to analyze how the projects play a part in people’s actions towards peace and to in the final part explore how possible discrepancies or similarities impact the conflict situation through peace education. In the analysis the accounts of the informants and observations is intertwined with the application of the theoretical framework to be able to interpret the meanings ascribed to experiences.
5. Analysis

In this chapter I will present and analyze the material gathered from the fieldwork in Chiapas. This material as well as relevant secondary material will be related to the theoretical framework. In conducting this analytical process with the background of the research problem, the discussion will be guided by the research questions.

Initially a short narrative will account for my encounter and interpretation of the circumstances under which the fieldwork was conducted. Thereafter follows a description of the lived experiences and the constructed educational projects from actors encountered in the field will later allow for an analysis. Here the use of critical pedagogy and peace education will help to identify patterns in the gathered material and interpret the meaning of the Zapatista educational projects in relation to the preconceived concepts. Lastly, an interpretation of how the developed educational projects might affect the conflict through peace education will be explored based on the aforementioned understandings.

5.1 A narrative from an education in resistance

When making my first contact with a Zapatista community in late March of 2015, it felt as entering an invisible country embedded within the Mexican state, to some extent true in reality due to the autonomy created within Zapatista territories. Where the embodied practices were indicated through signposts saying “Here the people rule and the government obeys”19 (field notes, March 30).

As a part of an international and symbolic caravan we were greeted with curiosity to a community seemingly calm on the surface. However the signs of the ongoing conflict were there, not least with the presence of the peace observers from FRAYBA on the other side of the stream that separated them from the autonomous school (field notes, March 30).

19 “Aquí el pueblo manda el gobierno obedece.”
Living and moving around in the Caracoles of La Realidad, Oventic and Morelia as a peace and conflict researcher meant after a while being struck by how isolated from the rest of the local community the Caracoles are.

As the autonomous communities not necessarily are homogenous and solely consisting of Zapatistas, it shows how autonomy works on an abstract level. Not completely bound to the control of geographical spaces. Therefore it is hard for an “outsider” to enter and comprehend the fabric of violence which is very much localized and ever changing. The reality is that there has been a significant decrease in Zapatista affiliated families since the uprising two decades ago. Meaning that in many communities Zapatista families are in minority like in La Realidad. Often they live side by side with non-Zapatista families, families that perhaps were a part of the movement in the past. But they also live side by side with people who oppose the ideas of the Zapatistas, sometimes with violent means (field notes, March 30).

It is hard to imagine, when standing there in front of the school and health clinic surrounded by curious children, that the same building just one year before had been destroyed by the same perpetrators who murdered Galeano. Though it was a provocative attack aimed at deviate or extinguish the essence of the Zapatista struggle, it has come to be the testimony of the strength and determination that exists. As I was told that the new school was considered to be one of the most expensive in the world since it was payed for with the life of a person (field notes, April 2).

About three weeks after my visit in La Realidad, a commemoration of Galeano was organized in Oventic in connection to the beginning of a seminar week initiated by the EZLN²⁰. At this commemoration the legacy and vision of Zapatista teacher Galeano was voiced through the words of Galeano’s 18-year old son. In front of a couple of thousand listeners from all over the world he said what I had read so many times on banners in autonomous communities; “We don´t want vengeance, justice is what we want²¹” (field notes, May 2).

- A simple political stunt to gain legitimacy would perhaps be what the sceptics would claim. However, after hearing, seeing and living in a reality where this phrase that is so simple to say but so hard to obey, indeed is abide by; it is easy to appreciate the sincerity in their words.

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²⁰ The seminar “Critical thought versus the capitalist hydra” (“El pensamiento crítico frente a la hidra capitalista”), May 2015.
²¹ “No queremos venganza, justica es lo que queremos.”
As it now has become the guiding principle for the whole movement, to not give notice to the events in Chiapas would most likely mean a significant loss in informing conflict transformational ideas. The Zapatista educational projects are in the forefront as a pedagogy of resistance, implementing an education that is accessible, engaging, democratic and contesting larger inequalities with an alternative vision that is acting for peace (Bajaj, 2015:1ff).

However, to believe that the current violent events have emerged as isolated actions just until now defining the movement, would be a great fallacy. The rusty roofs of Zapatista homes, or the sealed off governmental hospital in the community reveals how the lived experiences of a marginalized people have brought about radical action to improve the conditions of a long forgotten people. Developed and grown out of the historical necessity the autonomous schools as a space to learn, the “teachers”, as role models and guides, are posed as a threat to the existing dominant structures (field notes, March 31; April 5).

5.2 “The capitalist system destroys the education”

Above the window of one of the classrooms in La Realidad it is painted “the capitalist system destroys the education. Our autonomy constructs the other and new education" (field notes, March 31; April 5). A forceful statement that could be perceived as a bit peculiar for a western academic, who is a product of a “capitalist educational system” himself.

In itself it gave a hint about how lived experiences in different social environments, experiencing different educational systems, produces diverse actions resulting from distinctive interpretations. In the quoted phrase it is expressed by the dichotomy of education in Chiapas where on the one hand an occidental project of modernization, reproducing forms of domination, is met by an education trying to understand the roots of this domination with the purpose of overcoming it (Lia, 2013:302). It might seem like unfounded illogical reasoning but the worldview behind the quote and the previous assumptions builds on several interrelated dynamics related to education that will emerge from the subsequent accounts.

So in order to understand the socio-historic trajectories producing the current educational milieu in the communities one needs to make an effort.

22 “El sistema capitalista destruye a la educación. Nuestra autonomía construye la otra y nueva educación.”
The people affected by the educational practices have rarely had a voice in the official discourse listened to by the public. Nonetheless, during a couple of evening conversation with another caravan participant, Daniel, it was possible to get a comprehension of the past. To Daniel pedagogical practices and popular concerns were matters well-known; being an upper middle-aged man with a background as a teacher and experienced “mentor” in different indigenous communities.

While sitting in one of the classrooms in the newly constructed school, with a candlelight casting suggestive flares over a copy of Frantz Fanon’s *Wretched of the earth*, I got a first grasp of an explanation as we engaged in a discussion about the experiences that indigenous communities have lived through. Without any reassuring illusions Daniel said that specifically in Chiapas there has practically been no education provided to indigenous communities in the past. As I contested if there really has been *no* education, he emphasized *practically* in his wording. Explaining that there of course had been “attempts”, in the sixties for instance the government tried to in an institutionalized way integrate the communities to make them “Mexicans” (field notes, March 31). An articulation that in previous literature has described the “attempts” as tied to the national project of homogenization, building on the Mexican *indigenismo*23 (Baronnet, 2009:29ff; 2015:85ff). It is a notion that is based on the asymmetrical relations of power between cultures. In other words the attempts were developed from a lens of the dominant culture, building on the mestizo24 identity. Meaning that the assimilating practices in the nationalistic ideology of *indigenismo* in reality became a procedure of conforming the indigenous people to pacified *objects* (Despagne, 2013:117ff; Baronnet and Breña, 2008:115ff). Coherent with the possible option to employ practices either for domination or emancipation, the described ideology informed a knowledge constituting attempts based on domination through a banking form of education (Freire, 1996:53).

As followed this dimension of understanding previous efforts of education, the words of Daniel implicitly touched on the sensitive but nonetheless significant theme of racism. A theme who’s profound impact firmly surfaced much more expressively in a conversation with Luis, a short, seemingly always happy middle aged man.

23The from above implemented policy or idea of integrating the indigenous peoples (defined by their “otherness” in ethnic, cultural and economic terms) into the existing structures of the nation state (Solano, 2005:568).
He had accompanied us to paint the murals in La Realidad and as one of our conversation on the history of Mexico soon ended up in the legacy of colonization, he made it clear that the very culture in Mexico has been and still is permeated by racism affecting the indigenous people – as “it has been absorbed into the very hearts and minds of the people” further saying “and that is where we need to change. From the bottom up” (field notes, April 4).

Considering these understandings of the previous efforts as based on a point of entry in the superiority of one culture helped to further understand my observations. Since the consequences of the assimilation was visible in the everyday life through the Spanish language predominance on the expense of the local language Tojolabal in La Realidad. Similarly the absence of traditional clothing in the community helped to comprehend how community members like Luis, could identify the previous educational efforts as detrimental to the community. Where education served to eradicate local culture and traditions with the government’s attempts to “integrate” them into the existing discourse and structure of the state (field notes, March 31).

Parallel to the presupposition of the integration into these structures, capitalism existed as the constituting historical context informing educational practice, thus the following experiences to be explained builds on earlier research. It suggests that the formal education and pedagogical practices were merged with the productive processes within the capitalist system, becoming a subsector of the economy- tying students to dominant forms of capitalist labor formation with little regard to other impacts (Darder, Baltodano and Torres, 2009:10; McLaren, 1999:20; Reinke 2004:485f).

Accordingly, returning to the narrative of Daniel; the attempt of imposing a dominant culture was simultaneously linked to the contradiction of social classes. Apart from the cultural distance the pedagogy that was experienced by the people was understood as purely developed in the cities, for a “productive” life in the city. This “city paradigm” caused several clashes in its implementation that created a vicious circle. Firstly, since the teachers who were sent to the communities often were from the cities, with an internalization of a concept of “modern society”, it often implied two things:

A) As students, training to become teachers, at a university in the city, they generally came from a middle class background.
B) The purpose of pursuing a higher education and become a teacher in a modern society was to gain a higher material standard in life. (field notes, March 31)

Hence when sent to rural communities to teach, the city life was strongly contrasted with different cultural norms and traditions. This was combined with social and economic conditions far from those they pursued with a higher education. Ultimately it gave rise to what the locals today call “backpacker teachers”25 (field notes, March 31).

In other words teachers coming in to the communities and soon thereafter leaving as it did not correspond with their expectations of material comfort or gains. Not only did this cause a constant neglect or instability in the provision of education in the rural areas, but it also caused many rarely documented social problems. As the commitments of the teachers often declined rapidly, problems often related to alcohol like violence, sexual abuse and corruption ensued. Eventually creating tense relations between teachers and the community, sometimes also divides within the communities themselves (field notes, March 31). Experiences like these have not been limited to the Caracoles of La Realidad, Oventic and Morelia with surrounding villages. Earlier research supports the findings with similar cases in other parts of Chiapas, while also suggesting that the teachers themselves lacked support from federal and state level. For example the shortage of material and failed payments of services can of course also be seen as important contributing factors to the malpractices (Reinke, 2004:486; Baronnet, 2011:197).

Secondly there was language mismatch. As the literature describes Chiapas as a state where 80% of the indigenous people did not understand Spanish, I learned that it in the past Spanish still often became the language of instruction in school (Vargas-Cetina, 1998:142). However as there has been attempts of bilingual education, that is to say using both Spanish and an indigenous language in class, by the government it sooner or later failed (field notes, March 31). As there in Chiapas are at least 12 different indigenous languages spoken a logical prerequisite for bilingual education to function is that the teacher speaks the same indigenous language as the students (García and Velasco, 2012:3). A fact that not always was met, however hypothetically there have historically existed attempts of bilingual education in Chiapas but the very practices of them failed (field notes, March 31).

25 “Mochila veloz.”
As Daniel, who had been mentoring in many different communities, explained to me; for many of the rural communities, including the Caracoles, these circumstances have resulted in the succeeding knowledge, behaviors and attitudes being heavily influenced by alienation and loss of self-esteem. These are the lived experiences that explain the subsequent development of the Zapatista education (field notes, March 31; April 10-11). But they also serves to explain the reasons behind the statistical representations of miseducation presented in earlier research, i.e. illuminating the roots of the high frequency in absenteeism, illiteracy and poor results (Vargas-Cetina, 1998:143f; Burbach, 1994:114ff; Barmeyer, 2009:164).

Although capitalism has become the dominant universal system, the uprising in 1994 and the succeeding creation of autonomous territories have wrecked the old boundaries constituting educational practice. The implementation of autonomy has created alternative social structures allowing the communities to redefine and construct a new education that can address the past grievances (McLaren, 1999:2; Darder, Baltodano and Torres, 2009:10).

5.3 “Autonomy constructs the other and new education”

It is from these lived experiences that the Zapatistas developed an alternative form of education by necessity consciously contrasting against the formal paradigm. While the schools in the past functioned as a space of domestication, on the basis of autonomy it has become possible to construct something new.

Historically social movements in Latin America have frequently been using education as a source of empowerment, to learn to read and write with the aim of using the political word in the struggle (Jaramillo and Carreon, 2014:397). According to Daniel the first inspiration to the Zapatista educational projects or the autonomous schools first appeared in one of those movements, namely among Guatemalan refugees.

As the neighboring country Guatemala experienced a long-lasting and bloody civil war, many political refugees crossed the border over to Chiapas where they often ended up living in basic refugee camps, within which the people started deliver political goods. Because the Guatemalan refugees did not want to go to Mexican schools and learn Mexican history, they instead started their own schools in the refugee camps with the purpose of learning from their own history (field notes, April 2).
Which can be interpreted as based on the perception that learning history from someone else’s outlook would mean to collectively suppress the own history. A perception that in the terms of critical pedagogy in the long run would give rise to social amnesia, i.e. the collective forgetting of culture and traditions (Giroux, 1997:6).

Naturally since the formal attempts of education was employed for years, the aforementioned malpractice that resulted in the neglect of the indigenous language and decline in literacy has been kept fresh in memory. So in combination with the inspiration from the initiatives of the Guatemalan refugees, the contemporary educational practices has been developed (field notes, March 31; April 2).

From discussions with Daniel three themes important for the further interpretation emerged in the new education;

1) The view of knowledge as notion is fundamentally different from the one in the past, but also the one generally held in “modern” societies. Reinforcing the ideas that:
   a. Knowledge is not something static, or “dead” to be found in certain places or among certain people. Rather it exists everywhere and is accessible by everyone.
   b. Knowledge is a right everybody should have access to, it is not to be commodified and sold instead it is virtually conceived as an obligation to share the knowledge possessed. (field notes, March 31)

The first premise reiterates some of the fundamental ideas of critical pedagogy, very much viewing knowledge as a social construct and doing so in a very articulate way. In contrast to the banking concept which was aimed at conforming the rural people to a city life, the Zapatistas emphasis on the practicability of education acknowledges the interconnectedness of knowledge, cultural norms and the society (Darder, Baltodano and Torres, 2009:11f). As their society is very sustenance based and culturally tied to an agricultural way of living, the most important “classroom” exists outside the classroom. With the purpose of an education being “preparing you for life”, the content taught in class is constantly related to the environment outside. This clearly contrasts with the “dead” and commodified knowledge the “westerners” are paying for at the universities (field notes, April 5).
As this practicability is incorporated in the education it becomes an informal process of conscientisation. Since students are engaging with the reality and world that exists outside the classroom pursuing the knowledge that is relevant for sustenance. The image emerges of the contradictions in traditional Western education, which from the point of view of the Zapatistas, takes people out of life to put them in classrooms where the “supposedly” learns about life (field notes, March 31). Hence, by this very conclusion a trait of conscientisation has emerged, showing how education in the making might become reflective and reflexive, and therefore essentially problem-posing (Freire, 1996:52ff).

The second premise of the new education is inextricably a direct result from the historical experiences of “backpacker teachers”, since;

2) The schools do not have teachers as such, rather they call them “educational promoters”. They are characterized by several underlying postulations aimed at avoiding the structures that has damaged the communities in the past:

   a. Promoters should in a as a high degree as possible come from the community in which they teach.
   b. The promoters are elected by the community members, in a consensual way involving the parents and potential promoters who wants to occupy the cargo. The same practice of consensus is employed in deciding on the content in school.
   c. The cargo of being a promoter rotates among community members who wants to be a promoter and are deemed suitable.
   d. Being a promoter does not entail economic compensation. However they receive support from the community, not only confidence, but also practical support through conducting work at home or provide food, i.e. work you are unable to perform yourself when occupying a cargo. (field notes, March 31)

Henry A. Giroux makes an assertion that educationalists are born into a historical context, while at the same time embodying its history. Hence stipulating that the practitioners not only become products of history but also producers of history (Giroux, 1997:17). From decoding the age of the notably young promoters in the communities, it is possible to understand their role as possible pillars in the process of peace education (field notes, April 11).
The observations of young promoters is supported by earlier studies that have found the average age in some communities to be 20 years, ranging between being 13 and 26 years old (Baronnet and Breña, 2008:115f). But also by the internally acknowledged generational shift with a great number of “children of Zapatismo” now occupying the cargo of being a promoter (Navarro, 2008:29). This means that youths that once were born into the politics of the uprising, have embodied the demands and politics of the struggle and today with the important role of being promoters they produce history based on these subjectivities.

Lastly and perhaps the most fundamental part in realizing the potential in the first two themes of the educational project, is how the past insufficient bilingualism in the schools have been addressed. Hence the last theme concerns the following;

3) The elevated role of language in the educational practices.
   a. The classes are aimed at being bilingual, with instructions given both in Spanish and the correct indigenous language spoken in the community.
   b. It is viewed as the vehicle of making knowledge.
   c. To be able to articulate ones ideas in one language or the other is supposed to increase the motivation in school. (field notes, March 31)

How this is employed practically throughout the learning process is reflected in the Curriculum from the Secundaria, where the children for example read about the life of Emiliano Zapata26 in Spanish to later write an informative text in Tsotsil (Curriculum 2015). Not only is this aimed at preserving the local language, but in critical terms these practices can interpret literacy as social action in the process of conscientisation (Darder, Baltodano and Torres, 2009:289). That is to say that as the children learn to and becomes able to express themselves, in contrast to the historical detrimental effects of alienation and loss of self-esteem they are rather empowered and encouraged to engage in dialogue about the world.

Today the establishment of a proper literacy education becomes a connecting feature of the problem-posing model to enable a much needed dialogue where knowledge that connects theory and practice on an abstract level of learning, classroom practices does not serve to be a disconnecting feature but rather a force mobilizing competencies. While realizing the purpose of human communication the students are also encouraged to participate (Curriculum 2015).

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26 Leader of the revolutionary army between 1910-1919 during the Mexican revolution, today a national icon as well as the eponym of the EZLN (Harvey, 2001:120f).
Dialogue becomes an important step in nurturing democratic and participating citizens that seeks to engage with the world. This is where the educational projects in essence become a transformative and emancipatory practice as in the process of conscientisation the promoters as well as the community members are among the ones developing the education (Freire, 1996:35ff).

5.4 Informing a peace educational process?

Though the Zapatista educational projects never have been illustrated as aligning with peace educational processes, one might still ask if not the projects initiated by the Zapatistas contains features amounting to or perhaps furthering the capacity of peace education. Since peace education has been described as a multifaceted process taking different shapes in finding ways to reduce violence and transforming conflicts due to different contexts (Fountain, 1999:1ff; Harris, 2004:7).

A shallow interpretation of the educational projects, or perhaps the movement as a whole, could for an outsider seem like projects perpetuating conflict through the idolization of, at some point in history, armed revolutionaries like Emiliano Zapata, Che Guevara and the masked Subcomandantes and Subcomdantas. They are quite visible everywhere, from the walls of the school buildings to the Curriculums evaluating the activities of the school year (field notes, April 1; Curriculum 2015). But would that necessarily imply the subconscious communication of values, attitudes and knowledge antithetical to peace?

Because although the Zapatistas are viewing themselves as revolutionaries, and the local community members certainly regards the ongoing processes as revolutionary, few of the pejorative characteristics generally associated with “revolutionaries” are articulated. After living in surroundings influenced and tinted by revolutionaries it would seem too over-generalizing to claim that their mere presence indirectly encourages armed insurrection (field notes, April 1). On the contrary, for example in learning the value of collective work students had painted murals of Emiliano Zapata, Che Guevara, a weaver and the natural surroundings. Hence behind what meets the eye rests a praxis of learning to work together including encouraging values, attitudes and behaviors that would suggest an peace educational process

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27The commanders in EZLN.
(Curriculum 2015; Fountain, 1999:1ff). Since the students also in what can be described as a form of conscientization in the classroom, studied the role of these people and the historical circumstances they lived under (Curriculum 2015). So in the end as different symbols always are subject to interpretations and distortions, the real question of relevance in this case is how their presence is interpreted by the community and most importantly, by the children?

As a social movement the Zapatistas have created initiatives that have inspired social movements all over the world. Though these projects are exercised within a limited autonomous space they reflect a capacity and volition of emancipation and redefinition of cultural and social reproduction (Baronnet, Brayo and Stahler-Sholk, 2011:28).

In my conversations with Daniel specified around where the theoretical inspirations came from, in addition to the practical inspirations of the Guatemalans. Daniel stated that; sure Paulo Freire was a known name as well as his thinking in several of the communities. But at the same time he suggested that what really needs to be understood is the significant role, in the practical development, of the idea of intercultural education advanced by anthropologist Jorge Gasché (field notes, April 5). Though the ideas are developed from a Peruvian context there are resemblances between indigenous struggles as such, they are focused on reassessing educational practices in indigenous communities. The concept of intercultural education is presented in relation to the growing globalization with its ensuing phenomenon of a hegemonic “civilization” (Gasché, 1999;2010).

In contrast to the hegemonic civilization it embraces indigenous education as practical and focusing on socialization as an important part of learning how to live and how to conceive the world. At the same time it is refuting the common abandonment of the notion utopia, meaning that having a social utopia in mind is an important projection guiding human aspiration (Gasché, 1999:10ff). Reminding me of one of the several conversations about Zapatista teacher Galeano in La Realidad, where a couple of words attributed to him pins down exactly this; “you have to imagine something before it exits” (field notes, April 2). By extension meaning that assertions in the capacities in the Zapatista educational projects addresses an imagination of values and attitudes that seek emancipation from expressions of subjugation.

For example once again invoking the racial dynamics of Mexican society the educational projects as problem-posing means that the students learn to examine themselves in relation to these dynamics.
During one of our political discussions someone mentioned the phrase “we were conquered as Indians and we will be liberated as Indians. Creating new minds and a new freedom” (Solano, 2005:568; field notes, March 30). Signifying in terms of peace education that in the problem-posing education students acquire the skills of being able to understand and deconstruct racist images on the basis of the development of a critical consciousness (Harris, 2004:6).

After all, as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization’s (UNESCO) constitution states that since “wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed” (UNESCO, 1.a). The one “doctrine” guiding the autonomous educational projects can be found in the phrase expressed during the seminar “Critical thought versus the capitalist hydra” which is “we are learning while walking” (field notes, May 4). Meaning that the autonomous educational projects´ reflexive attempts of constructing a pluralistic world that keeps many truths, in the spirit of UNESCO, would help construct defenses of peace. Thus it can be used as an example of projects inherently embodying peace educational traits (Hauman, 2011:244). And so perhaps the prevalence of these ideas will in the long run have a positive effect on the fabric of violence in Chiapas. Because in the end, after more than 20 years of struggle the Zapatistas are still walking.

28 “Aprendimos caminando.”
29 “La educación autonoma construye mundos diferentes donde quepan muchos mundos verdaderos con verdades.”
6. Conclusion

In this final chapter the study will be summarized and the findings discussed in relation to the aim and research questions, while contextualized in a broader research context. Finally a suggestion of relevant research to be conducted in the future will be provided.

The aim of this study has been to develop a critical reflection upon how the Zapatistas through their educational projects have addressed past issues of educational malpractices. This study has been focusing on the Zapatista educational projects as a set of practices developed out of a historical necessity of the indigenous people in Chiapas. The study builds on first hand empirical material that has been created during two months of fieldwork in Chiapas, where Zapatistas as were studied as a cultural group in the Caracoles of La Realidad, Oventic and Morelia. From the fieldwork and the methods such as participant observation and informal narrative interviews overarching questions about the role of the lived experiences for the contemporary education and conversely how its’ practices has been designed to address these experiences were developed.

Hence in the narratives provided from the communities the understanding of the government’s attempts of education have articulated the formal educational system as homogenizing project tainted by a nationalistic discourse, indigenismo. At the same time the content was purely developed in the cities with practices intended to integrate the rural communities into a capitalist labor formation. In short understood as a project of domination, subjugating the indigenous people. These findings have confirmed earlier research that has found the attempts being highly dysfunctional and ignorant to local cultures and traditions causing alienation, loss of self-esteem and instability. Supported by preexisting quantitative research findings, that statistically has confirmed the malpractices, exposing high numbers of illiteracy, drop-outs and poor study results.

Building on the experiences the subsequent application of critical pedagogy made it possible to distinguish the old attempts as based on a banking concept of education and the Zapatista in contrast interpreted as problem-posing education.
Based on the themes of practice the underlying assumptions emerged that 1) knowledge is viewed as a social construct that is to be de-commodified. 2) The significance of the teachers, or promoters, needs to be developed in democratic manners involving concerned parties, families, promoters etc. 3) The reemphasis on successful practices of bilingual education is a key in furthering the process conscientization, making it possible for students to articulate their perceived situation. Whilst doing so in manners connected to the previous assumption, i.e. in a dialogical way with the promoters on the basis of a democratic student-teacher relationship.

As these themes have been present in the practice it has made possible to explore how they amount to peace education. Resulting in the interpretation that the practices associated with the Zapatista problem-posing education as cultivating critical consciousness. From which values, attitudes and knowledges that articulates a utopia of a world with room for many worlds are guiding aspirations of a peace, understood as the presence of social justice.

As this study has been very limited in both the timeframe and in the scope of the Zapatista movement, the findings of this small-scale study is to be considered non-generalizable. This study has solely explored possible interpretations while contributing its critical reflections.

Consequently on a closing note making it suitable with a proposition for future research. It would be benefit the field if future research were conducted with different methodologies as it would widen the understandings of lessons to be made. For example with an enlarged timeframe it would be suggested to perform a collective or multiple case study of the educational implementation across different communities in Chiapas with the purpose of identifying differences or corresponding themes despite the autonomous practices. Also a research project aimed at explicitly focus on the discourse in school, affecting the taught content, would provide knowledge this study did not have the possibility to explore while it would stimulate the topic of alternative educational projects.
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7.4 Material


Curriculum of the Secundaria of 2014-2015
8. Appendices

8.1 Translations

"En nuestros sueños hemos visto otro mundo. Un mundo verdadero, un mundo definitivamente más justo que en el que ahora andamos. Vimos que en este mundo no eran necesarios los ejércitos, que en él eran la paz, la justicia y la libertad tan comunes que no se hablaba de ellas como cosas lejanas, como quien nombra pan, pájaro, aire, agua, como quien dice libro y voz, así eran nombradas las cosas buenas en este mundo." (Marcos, 2002:18)

8.2 Excerpt from Pedagogy of the oppressed

(a) the teacher teaches and the students are taught;
(b) the teacher knows everything and the students know nothing;
(c) the teacher thinks and the students are thought about;
(d) the teacher talks and the students listen meekly;
(e) the teacher disciplines and the students are disciplined;
(f) the teacher chooses and enforces his choice, and the students comply;
(g) the teacher acts and the students have the illusion of acting through the action of the teacher;
(h) the teacher chooses the program content, and the students (who were not consulted) adapt to it;
(i) the teacher confuses the authority of knowledge with his own professional authority, which he sets in opposition to the freedom of the students;
(j) the teacher is the Subject of the learning process, while the pupils are mere objects. (Freire, 1996:54)