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Networked, rooted and territorial: green grabbing and resistance in Chiapas

Dianne E. Rocheleau

Land grabbing has been characterized by large-scale commercial land deals or green grabs of large conservation tracts. In Chiapas, Mexico, green grabs employ a networked strategy across state, corporate and civil society lines to evict peasant and indigenous communities, and facilitate entry of extractive industries, plantations and industrial 'ecotourism'. The resistance is rooted in place(s) and in a coalition of civil society organizations and autonomous communities. Network illustrations and field reports show that several environmental organizations occupy pivotal positions in grabbing and/or resistance networks, with large powerful groups linked to state and corporate interests. The experience in Agua Azul, a key node in a planned tourism megaproject, illustrates the deployment of networked and dispersed power to unmake and remake territories across scales. Small purchased plots form nodes in far-flung circuits of ecotourism and archeological sites. The substantial resistance is likewise rhizomatic in character, reaching across archipelagos of forest and farming communities and distant allies, to reconstitute autonomous territories. Ongoing land struggles play out in networked spaces, with entire territories, and many lives, at stake. Emerging coalitions of human rights, indigenous, religious and environmental groups promise an expanding resistance to evictions and territorial green grabs in Chiapas and elsewhere.

Keywords: land grab; green grab; political ecology; territory; networks; Chiapas; Mexico; dispossession; resistance

Introduction

Land grabs by nation states, multinational corporations, investment firms and wealthy individuals have recently captured the attention of eager investors, as well as a diverse range of actors implicated in, or impacted by, this alarming global trend (Blas and Wallis 2009; De Shutter 2010; Borras et al. 2011a; Sassen 2013). In addition to global media, this issue has engaged United Nations (UN) agencies (Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), International Labor Organization (ILO) and UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR)), as well as scholars, human rights groups, and food policy and farmers’ organizations worldwide (Rosset 2011; Torrez 2011; Rosset and Martinez-Torres 2012; Martínez-Torres and Rosset 2014). Last but not least, land grabbing has affected and grievously harmed people who have been denied access to forest, rangeland, farmland and water resources, or have been uprooted from their homelands (Grajales 2011; Borras et al. 2011b).

The phenomenon is not new (Verma 2014), nor is it exclusive to a single region, yet the recent wave of land grabs has gained notoriety based on cases of direct sales and long-term leases of mega-parcels in Africa and the Middle East, ostensibly to produce food or energy...
crops (Blas and Wallis 2009). In other cases, vast tracts of land are the object of green grabbing for conservation, recreation and tourism (Fairhead, Leach, and Scoones 2012; Corson 2011; Corson 2012; Corson and MacDonald 2012; Ojeda 2012).

In contrast, this paper examines the use of networked, distributed, rooted, and territorial power by both land grabbers and resistance movements in Chiapas, Mexico (Rocheleau 2011a, 2011b, 2012a; Borras et al. 2011b). The focus on rainforest and archeological tourism, as well as biodiversity conservation, and the mobilization of distributed networked power, by both grabbers and resisters, provide a window on green grabs in general, especially in Latin America (see Wolford 2010).

The first section contrasts the current wave of large-scale land deals (especially in Africa), with networked, distributed green grabs in Mexico. A case study from Agua Azul in the municipality of Chilón in the state of Chiapas illustrates the nature, cost and effectiveness of equally networked resistance across dispersed locations in a larger, non-contiguous territory. The discussion and conclusion relate the case study to territorial green grabbing and resistance in Latin America more generally. They also signal the fluidity and potential for change in the constellations of networked actors among both grabbers and resisters.

The dominant model of land grabs by simple purchase
The new scramble for land in Africa has become the iconic example of the new wave of land grabbing through outright purchases of mega-parcels. Individual transactions range from tens of thousands to hundreds of thousands of hectares. This phenomenon has been discussed by international agencies largely in terms of corporate, state and individual actors as buyers, and as property owners. Rural people in the region, who are neither buyers nor sellers, are cast simply as those whose lives and livelihoods ‘are affected’ and who must give (or not) ‘prior informed consent’. One takes away an impression of rural people suffering ‘collateral damage’ from business as usual. The theft of homelands, the destruction of livelihoods and the appropriation of entire ecosystems are normalized, ironically, as part of a process of ‘land tenure reform’ and ‘free trade’. At best, we are led to expect more participatory ‘negotiations’ between rural communities, multi-national corporations and states.

The diagram of the dominant model of land grabs (Figure 1) presents what I take to be the view of the mainstream development agencies, and highlights some of the contradictions in that scenario. Investment capital and relationships between investors are hidden in a cloud, which obscures their workings and relationships from the gaze of the other actors. The UN system and related nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) provide advice on land deal policy and practice by state and private-sector actors, including contradictory advice to privatize land, to respect human rights and to secure free, prior and informed consent from owners and/or residents. Even when something called ‘consent’ is procured, and delivered back to the cloud of investors, the terms of such processes are murky and suspect (see helicopter in Figure 1).

The state is present, participating and complicit in a posture of passivity. This model links land grabbing to ‘failed’ or ‘weak’ states, with very low land prices, and assumes purchase or long-term lease of single large parcels of land. The land itself is treated as a single entity, a substrate, for ‘development’, though real people, other living beings and whole worlds are at stake. Land use conversion to industrial food and energy monocrops provides low wage or seasonal work on plantations for some. The destination of people expelled from the site of the land deal is pictured as a cloud of ‘elsewhere’, cloaking the various fates of displaced people.
While it is likely that people resist these land deals in a variety of ways, there is little written as yet about that resistance in Africa. Many of the best known and publicized land deals have occurred in war-torn regions and conflict zones where the stakes of direct resistance are especially high. If and when it does occur, both resistance and its repression may also be rendered invisible within a broader tapestry of explicit and visible violence, as for example in Somalia or Southern Sudan. In other cases, with strong national states, swift and brutal repression may overwhelm resistance and both may go un- or under-reported. And as Borras and Franco (2013) point out, resistance is not always the main or the only response.

Figure 1. Land grabbing: the prevailing model.¹

¹Organizations noted in Figure 1: International Monetary Fund (IMF); World Trade Organization (WTO); World Bank (WB); United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR). United Nations Secretariat (UNHQ), UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the International Labor Organization (ILO).
Contrasting case of green grabs and resistance in Chiapas, Mexico

The state of Chiapas, in contrast, presents a complex case of networked, territorial green grabbing and equally networked, dispersed and persistent resistance (Figure 2). A strategy of multiple forces brought to bear by a diversity of actors in parallel land acquisition processes is exemplified by the last 20 years’ experience in the state. Networked land grabbing processes driven by conservation and tourism interests, or the pretext of such, are less visible, more distributed and more complex than the large land deal form of grabbing, but no less significant, or violent. As Figure 2 suggests, there is a decidedly Foucauldian dimension of dispersed power at work here, a Latourian dimension of networked assemblages, and a rhizomic structure of relations among both grabbers and resisters (Deleuze and Guattari 1987; Foucault 1991; Latour 2007). Yet the Chiapas land grabbing process defies definition and explanation by any one of these, since what is most significantly at play, and at work, is a struggle between multiple, entangled and networked powers, with roots in distinct territories, even worlds, often overlapping in the same Cartesian space (see Rocheleau and Roth 2007; Escobar 2008; De La Cadena 2010; Blaser 2013).

Figure 2. Rooted networks, green grabbing and resistance.2

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2Key to abbreviations for organizations and groups: ENGOS, Environmental non-governmental organizations, local and national; IENGOS, International Environmental Non-governmental organizations; Ministry of tourism, Secretariat for tourism (SECTUR) and tourism development agency (FONATUR); Ministry of Environment, Secretariat of Environment and Natural Resources.
Histories of grabbing and resistance

Both land grabbers and resisters in Chiapas are also rooted in the very specific history of Mexican land law and agrarian culture, where the land is for the people who live and work on it, and care for it (Conant 2010). The Mexican Revolution in the early twentieth century resulted in a sweeping land reform, though imperfect and unfinished (Esteva 1983). Under Article 27 of the 1917 constitution, the *ejido* system provided land for farmers to use, but not to buy and sell (Bartra 2004). It entitled community members to land allocations for residential and agricultural use, governed by local assemblies made up of the recognized community members (initially composed of all – and only – male heads of households). Some indigenous communities maintained ‘*comunidades agrarias*’ in a system roughly parallel to *ejidos*. In Chiapas, the revolutionary reforms came decades later, and many communities remained legally landless, as tenants of largeholder ranchers and farmers.

National counter-reforms were initiated in 1987 and implemented in 1992 to amend Article 27, followed by programs to survey and privatize individual parcels, to disband the existing *ejidos* and to end the process of forming new ones (de Ita 2006; Hernandez Espino 2007). This neo-liberal counter-reform of land law, and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), paved the way for the current land grab and spawned a surge of political and cultural resistance by a broad base of social movements and civil society organizations (Collier 2005; Muñoz Ramírez et al. 2008). They were, in effect, engaging in preemptive resistance to land grabbing, based on analysis of the likely outcome of these policies. And they were right (Esteva 2013).

In 1994, a broad social movement coalesced around the struggle for land and territory, with the Zapatista Army of National Liberation, (henceforth EZLN, for *Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional*) and the related autonomous civilian communities pre-eminent among them (Harvey 1994, 1996, 1998; Stephen 2002; Rosset 2009; Baschet 2013). The Zapatistas timed their catalytic uprising on 1 January 1994 in direct response to the implementation of NAFTA on that date, and the related assaults on agrarian communities and communal property. Other groups resisting the counter-reforms and supporting recuperation of peasant and indigenous lands included Christian ecclesiastical base communities, the pacifist Catholic communities of *Las Abejas*, and several other peasant and indigenous associations, rural artisans’ unions and farmers’ unions, some directly and others indirectly allied with the Zapatistas, and some not at all as noted by Miguel Angel Garcia Aguirre (pers. comm. August 2011) and Maderas del Pueblo del Sureste (2008). The Liberation Theology wing of the Catholic Church supported the land struggle with several thousand catechists who served as rural community organizers and human rights promoters. Bishop Samuel Ruiz of San Cristobal took a lead in convening peace negotiations between the government and the Zapatistas and in guaranteeing the safety of the latter.

A diverse array of national and international civil society organizations rapidly coalesced around these groups forming locally rooted and internationally networked solidarity movements, including religious, indigenous, peasant, feminist, human rights and, to some extent, environmental networks. While social theorists may debate whether such networked movements are best understood in Marxist (Harvey 2012), post-Marxist (Hardt and Negri 2000, 2009), Foucauldian (Escobar 2011), feminist (Gibson-Graham 2006), regional and postcolonial (Escobar 2011; Escobar and Alvarez 1992), anarchist (Scott 2009; Baschet...
2013), indigenous (Nash 2001; Marcos 2010) or decolonial (Sousa Santos 2006; Escobar 2008; Esteva 2013; Mignolo and Escobar 2013) terms, the people on the ground were busy taking pages from all of the above and orders from none. It seems clear that elements of several liberatory traditions as well as new creations were at work (See also Gutierrez Aguilar, 2014 on similar phenomena in Bolivia). The Zapatistas and their allies wrote more than a few pages of their own into the emergence of the alter-globalization and resurgent indigenous movements (Benjamin 1995; Marcos 1997, 2002, 2004, 2006, 2014; Marcos and Le Bot 1997; Baschet 2013).

The communities in resistance refused to accept landlessness, eviction, resettlement or even continued residence under new terms, without rights to farm, gather and graze their animals, manage and protect their forests, and govern themselves (Marcos and Le Bot 1997; Baschet 2013). After the brief uprising and 2 years of negotiation, the Zapatistas and President Ernesto Zedillo signed the San Andres accords in 1996, which provided for recognition of indigenous territories nationwide, autonomy for self-governing indigenous communities and reversal of the constitutional changes threatening communal lands. The original San Andres Accords were not ratified by the Congress, which instead passed a more conservative and limited Indigenous Law in 2001. However, Zapatista communities and many other indigenous and peasant groups continued to respect the San Andres Accords, based on the recognition and respect of indigenous territories, as opposed to individual or community property. This reflects a strong current of contemporary resistance thought in the region, based in legitimacy versus legality (Cideci Seminar 2013), and indigenous autonomy versus representation (Juntas de Buen Gobierno 2013a, 2013b, 2013c, 2013d).

From 2000 to 2006, the PROCEDE program offered surveys to document and legalize individual holdings in ejido lands. They eventually also offered to legally register entire communal holdings as property. However, the land would still be eligible for sale, or as collateral for loans. Many indigenous and campesino organizations and civil society allies continued to oppose PROCEDE, including the communal option (Stephen 2002; Collier 2005) and insisted on the recognition of indigenous and campesino territories. Signs posted clearly at the entrance to Zapatista communities still proclaim the prohibition on trading in land:

Esta usted entrando en territorio Zapatista. Aquí no se vende ni se compra la tierra … Si a eso viene, usted no es bienvenido
You are entering Zapatista Territory. Here we do not buy or sell land …. If that is your intention you are not welcome.

(Author translation of signs observed in or near Zapatista communities from 2005 to 2013).

Twenty years on from the 1994 uprising, the Zapatistas and several other networks of communities are engaged in non-violent resistance to eviction, in the face of intimidation by a formidable group of armed forces arrayed against them (Rocheleau 2012b). These include: paramilitary-type organizations; local, state and national police forces; the military; private

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4Scott (2009) has discussed the history of similar quests for autonomy, as opposed to taking of state power, among people in the mountain communities of Southeast Asia.

5The Indigenous Law passed by the congress lacked provisions for territorial rights and autonomous self-government that were key elements of the original accords.

6PROCEDE, the Certification of Ejido Rights Program, followed from the reform of Article 27 and the new Agrarian law.
security forces and federal security agencies (Centro de Derechos Humanos Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas 2012). They are also subject to fragmentation through non-military, government sponsored counter-insurgency measures and massive subsidy programs, as well as internal changes in alignment within movements.

They persist in the struggle to realize their collective visions of local livelihoods, culture and non-violent, self-governed communities joined in regional networks (Pérez Espinosa 2011; Juntas de Buen Gobierno 2013a, 2013b, 2013c, 2013d). The Zapatistas and their allies continue to build and maintain connections to national and international networks of people in solidarity with their struggle, aspirations and accomplishments (Conant 2010; Evans 2005).

Current green grabs in Chiapas: the Palenque tourism megaproject (CIPP)

The current green land grabs and the resistances in Chiapas (Figure 2) proceed against this historical backdrop, in stark contrast to the simple land purchase model (Figure 1). The Mexican federal state is not ‘failed’ or even ‘weak’. The strong national state, with a diversified economy and high land values, facilitates the expropriation of land for exclusionary protection, or exploitation, of natural resources in Chiapas, characterized by an agricultural economy, low land values and low wages. In spite of extreme poverty and inequality, Chiapas is also one of the richest states in Mexico in terms of mineral, energy and forest resources, and scenic wonders, all now targets of the acquisitive powers of a host of actors from investors to conservation organizations, the tourism industry, mining interests, industrial agriculture giants (prominent among them, Monsanto7) and alternative energy developers (CAPISE 2002). The state was singled out by former Mexican President Felipe Calderon, and the former Governor, Juan Sabines, as the ‘pilot project’ for the regional development initiative formerly known as Plan Puebla Panama (PPP), now the MesoAmerica Project.8 The multi-lateral ‘regional integration’ effort (conceived and promoted by the US), commits Mexico, Central America and Colombia to joint ventures by state and private capital, with major US participation. The initiative focuses on transportation and energy infrastructure, with much of the power destined for mining and manufacturing industries, as well as energy consumers in the US (Bartra 2001, 2004; Wilson 2008).

The most relevant element of this integrated plan, with respect to green grabs in Chiapas, is the Palenque Integrated Planned Center (hereafter CIPP), a combined conservation and tourism initiative originated in 2000 by President Vicente Fox. Although it could not be realized due to the ‘inability to secure the needed territorial reserves for the project in 2004’ (i.e. popular resistance) it surfaced again as a flagship project of both President Calderon and Governor Sabines (Wilson 2008; Maderas del Pueblo de Sureste 2008; Zunino 2010a, 2010b, 2010c; Pickard 2011). The CIPP was planned as a world-class inland tourism archipelago of archeological sites, pristine forest stands and scenic waterfalls and lakes, in a green sea of biodiversity conservation, carbon storage and ‘environmental

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7In fact, Monsanto is on Conservation International’s ‘Business and Sustainability Council’ (Conservation International 2013).
8The inaugural projects of the PPP, particularly large dams, encountered stiff resistance throughout the country and especially in the states of Chiapas, Oaxaca and Guerrero. Renamed the MesoAmerica Project in 2008, it linked regional development plans to US and regional military, policing, Drug War and border control strategies (Zunino and Pickard 2008, 2009; Maderas del Pueblo del Sureste 2008; Wilson 2008).
services’ (Figure 3). The plan also included several Chiapas hotspots of ecotourism and endangered ecosystems of the Meso-American Biological Corridor (a transcontinental ribbon of linked ecological reserves, public and private). Cultural tourism, featuring indigenous people as spectacle, was widely lauded as a potential engine of economic development linked to the CIPP (Gonzalez 2007; Bellinghausen 2008).

As a candidate for governor in 2006, Sabines explicitly promised ‘Cancun in the Rainforest’ and staked development and poverty alleviation in Chiapas on the tourism mega-project (Gonzalez 2007; Calvo 2008; Centro de Derechos Humanos Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas 2012). While the Palenque CIP, along with four others, did not come to fruition under the past two administrations, the Palenque project is back on the table as the only CIP proposed by the new administrations at federal and state level. A study commissioned by the Federal Tourism Promotion Agency (FONATUR) in March of 2014 placed it next in line (Ramírez 2014).

The necessary evictions and land grabs for the CIPP have not yet been realized, but several kinds of cartographic and discursive sleight of hand have been employed to develop multiple, distinct territories, most of them inherently incompatible with conservation and ‘ecotourism’, and unsustainable over the long term (see Balvé 2011 on Colombia, and Vandergeest and Peluso 2006; Peluso and Vandergeest 2001, 2006 on Southeast Asia). The Centro de Investigaciones Economicas y Politicas de Accion Comunitaria, henceforth referred to as CIEPAC (CIEPAC 2010) and Otros Mundos (2014a) have mapped sites of mineral and petroleum exploration permits near recently constructed, planned rural resettlement centers within these same circuits, and palm oil plantations have already been introduced into the region (García Aguirre 2011). While these multiple objectives and trajectories are not ultimately compatible, the channeling of different flows, movements and lines of sight can, for a time, protect...
the direct gaze of tourists from any unsightly views of mining, pipelines and plantations. Like-
wise, their gaze can be selectively focused on commercial spectacles and performances of
ancient Mayan cultures, while removal of living indigenous peoples from their homelands
remains invisible to the seemingly casual yet highly regimented touristic gaze (see Bellinghau-
sen 2008).

The land grab within the area of the planned CIPP is both driven and further supported
by the fog of greening generated by dominant paradigms of global environmental conser-
vation, the related selective reclassification of people and their lands, and the smoke,
mirrors and maps of global financial investment practices.

The fog of greening

Once we move beyond the simple purchase model of state, buyers, sellers and residents, a
new set of key actors emerges. The ‘fog of greening’ is generated, unwittingly or intention-
ally, with the help of selected, powerful international and national environmental NGOs,
and national and state agencies with mandates for environment, tourism and land reform.
Federal, state, corporate and NGO actors employ a diverse portfolio of techniques in a
layered process of succession, to facilitate or directly enforce the acquisition of locations
desired for specific ‘green’ attributes (Zunino 2010a, 2010b, 2010c; Chapin 2004; and
see Ojeda 2012, 2013 for similar cases in Colombia). Miguel Pickard (pers. comm
October 2013) and Miguel Angel García Aguirre (pers. comm. August 2011) both cite mul-
tiple instances where federal and state environmental and tourism agencies, and environ-
mental NGOs helped to secure state control of large tracts of reserve land, creating the
matrix from which new territories are made. This coalition of actors employs meta-
strategies to redefine the terms of connection between people and land, often trying to
sever those connections for some, while facilitating them for others. New land tenure
laws and land use rules (market-led agrarian reforms promoted by the International
Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank and some UN agencies) combine with green pretexts
of ecotourism and conservation to legitimate new exclusive reserves and subsequent evic-
tion of farming communities in the area (Figure 2).

The fog drifts from forest green to neon green as various federal and state officials
invoke visions of ‘Cancun in the rainforest’ and ‘Disneyland in the rainforest’ (Gonzalez
2007; Bellinghausen 2008; Calvo 2008; Centro de Derechos Humanos Fray Bartolomé
de Las Casas 2012). This process is also abetted, directly or indirectly, by programs of a
handful of UN agencies (United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), United
Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and United National
Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat)), the Meso-American Biological Corridor
program, and environmental programs of development banks, bilateral funders (US, UK,
EU), investors and philanthropic foundations. International and national tourism industry
actors also play a major role: linking tourism to reserves, parks and greening; lobbying
central governments and selected agencies to deploy police and military force to provide
a greater sense of security for investors and tourists; and promoting the region as a vast
untrammeled wilderness for eco-adventure, discovery and spectacular vistas.

Several international conservation organizations actively support the removal of rural
communities from areas that have been reclassified as ‘reserves’ (Chapin 2004; Zunino
and Pickard 2008, 2009; Pickard 2011). Some of these organizations have been linked
to government cleansing of campesinos from the campo in the area of Las Cañadas, in
the Montes Azules and Lacandon Biosphere Reserves, and across the border in Guatemala
(CAPISE 2002; Choudry 2003; Grandia 2012). The World Wildlife Foundation (WWF)
The Carlos Slim Foundation, The Nature Conservancy, Environmental Defense Fund and Conservation International are all engaged in the politics of reserves and/or in REDD+ carbon offset pilot efforts in Chiapas, both of which have impacted communities and rural livelihoods in Montes Azules and Lacantun Biosphere Reserves (Pskowski 2013; The REDD Desk 2013; Global Justice Ecology Project 2011; Comité de Derechos Humanos Fray Pedro Lorenzo de la Nada 2011; Bellinghausen 2014b). Most of the international conservation organizations active in Chiapas have remained silent in the face of violent repression and evictions, as well as the rapidly expanding and ecologically destructive ‘development’ outside of reserves and parks. Both occur at the expense of small farms with ecologically and nutritionally diverse cropping systems (García Aguirre 2011).

While the fog of greening can and does occur elsewhere, it is particularly important in Mexico, given its agrarian revolutionary history and culture, to legitimate eviction through environmental protection and public interest. The push to secure territorial reserves for the CIPP also facilitates the removal of oppositional communities from the vicinity of planned commercial and industrial development, under the twin pretexts of national and global nature conservation and tourism as a clean, green development mechanism.

The Cancun and Disney metaphors bandied about in 2006–2012 invoke visions of regional landscapes and economies transformed by the networked nodes of tourist destinations. The tourism industry already brings 4.25 million tourists annually to Chiapas. Tourism makes new territories and specific landscapes and ecologies through concrete practices that directly affect ecological structure and function, and regional landscape character, as well as economies and cultures. One might say that the industrial variant of ‘eco’ or nature-based tourism, more than any other enterprise of similar magnitude, destroys the basis of its own production/existence, also known as the second contradiction of capital (O’Connor 1988, 1991; Henderson 2009). Intrinsic territorial transformation and environmental degradation by large-scale tourism itself is further compounded by the instrumental use of green pretexts (see Ojeda 2012, 2013) to grab land for the other elements of the regional plan, from oil palm plantations and oil and gas fields to mines and pipelines.

Dispossession by delegitimation

Another obligatory prelude to dispossession is the reclassification of indigenous and campesino groups and specific communities to delegitimize them and justify deterritorialization. Various federal and state agencies, environmental NGOs and commercial interests, including mass media, collaborate directly and indirectly to recode the status of land and people and the identities of multiple, entangled territories. Modernist concepts of culture and nature are weaponized as discursive tools in campaigns of dispossession by delegitimation. Members of peasant and indigenous communities are cast as inefficient farmers who deforest the land, deplete soils, displace wildlife and live in misery. Alternatively, they may be branded as culturally inauthentic, or falsely accused as violent criminals (especially in the case of leaders). In Guatemala and Colombia (Sundberg 2003, 2004; Ojeda 2012, 2013), researchers have reported that states and international conservation NGOs have selected specific, often small indigenous or campesino groups as the ‘authentic indigenous’
people of the zone. This is often accompanied by disparaging the legitimacy of other groups with equal or stronger claims to indigenous or traditional status.\(^\text{10}\)

In Mexico, the Lacandones (some of whom live in Chiapas) have been celebrated in national commercial television ads (aired frequently on Televisa 2010, 2011), posters and magazine covers as the ‘true guardians of the rainforest’. Yet their exclusive claims to reserves in southern Chiapas are not supported by history (de Vos 2002). The national advertisements, paid for by the state of Chiapas, served to delegitimize (through silence and absence) the place of other larger and less compliant indigenous and campesino groups in the rainforest (for a distinct and detailed analysis of the Lacandones see Calleros-Rodriguez 2014). Over 40 communities of other ethnicities have already been evicted on this pretext from the area of the Montes Azules and Lacantun Reserves, in recent decades.

\textit{Smoke, mirrors, maps and smoking guns}

The networked strategy of shopping for pixels, purchasing polygons and making/taking territories is well adapted to the specific economic and investment conditions of the state. Chiapas land prices are low in the Mexico context, but high compared to other international ‘investment opportunities’. Investors and developers engage in a strategic, selective approach, and purchase or lease relatively small land parcels. Developers focus on capital investments on site, the provision of contracts and jobs in the region, and promise ‘trickle-out’ benefits for local communities.

This strategy relies on massive state investments in transportation infrastructure and social re-engineering of territorial identity and extent, as well as the location, lives and livelihoods of indigenous and campesino communities. The federal and state plans for these takings and remakings of territory have been maintained as de facto state secrets, protected from scrutiny by indigenous, political, social and human rights organizations, a decision reported in a government document (FONATUR 2011).

State agencies, developers, banks, pension funds and speculators have been issuing contracts to geographic information system (GIS) firms and university researchers to identify pixels that meet specific lists of criteria. These may include: proximity to roads; proximity to airports, hotels and towns; presence of and proximity to scenic features, including waterfalls, rivers and lakes; presence of or access to ‘good’ water; soil types; carbon storage potential, land tenure, individual property tracts; demographic data; and political history, current configuration and disposition.\(^\text{11}\)

The resulting maps of color-coded cells reflect the client’s criteria and serve to identify blocks or patches of land with fixed boundaries (polygons) for potential purchase. The polygons may be as small as 4 hectares, as in a Lake Miramar community bordering the Montes Azules Reserve (Comité de Derechos Humanos Fray Pedro de la Nada 2011), or 600 hectares at Agua Azul in the CIPP circuit (Figure 3). Both sites are home (Henríquez 2011a) to people whose good fortune, their scenic water features and surrounding rainforests, have become liabilities as these features have lit up their home places on the map searches of developers.

What is less obvious, but crucial to green grabbing in Chiapas, is the investment climate for tourism and the inverse relationship of strong peasant social movements

\(^{10}\text{See also D. Hall, P. Hirsch and T. Li (2011) on indigenous status and land conflicts in southeast Asia.}\)

\(^{11}\text{See Ramachandra and Shruthi (2007) for a detailed description of a similar process of remote exploration and technical identification of renewable energy sites in Karnataka state in India.}\)
to security ratings for investment. The ratings rest in part on foreign analysts’ perceptions of ‘security’ and ‘political stability’, and the financial analysts’ opinions about the perceptions of investors. In the past, while money poured into regions of Mexico ravaged by drug war violence, some multi-national banking representatives made investment in Chiapas (one of the least affected areas) contingent on ‘getting rid of the Zapatistas’.12 State and corporate concerns about security, politics and the perceptions of financial investors continue to drive policy and practice. Human rights groups and journalists have documented provocations, threats, subversion and direct violence against Zapatista and other communities in resistance by federal and state police and/or allied paramilitary-type organizations, much of it concentrated in the area of the CIPP. It has resulted in loss of land, crops and livestock, as well as grievous personal injury and death (Centro de Derechos Humanos Fray Bartolomé de las Casas (FRAYBA) 2012; Bellinghausen 2014a).

Resistance to the CIPP

The CIPP has not proceeded unopposed. It has been met with distributed, coordinated, non-violent territorial resistance by indigenous and campesino communities, supported by continuing and resurgent social movements and civil society networks, and global solidarity initiatives (Maderas del Pueblo del Sureste 2008; Rocheleau 2012b; Bellinghausen 2014a). Since 2008, non-violent resisters have been hard at work defending a number of communities on the tourism circuits or in the (likely) path of the highway (Figure 3). The affected and mobilized communities stretch from the starting point of the expanded highway in Mitziton, at the edge of San Cristobal de las Casas (Figure 3), to the areas around San Sebastian Bachajon and Agua Azul, to Palenque.

Rural violence is fomented to make the state ‘safe’ for investment, by removing or silencing rural people opposed to eviction and/or development plans. Once violent attacks occur, or even peaceful meetings to resolve conflicts, state actors, political party operatives or their proxies may then deploy police, military and/or paramilitary forces to specific points of ‘environmental’ interest to ‘restore order’. Conflict justifies removal of people, once they have been identified as inappropriate, out of place or criminal, in newly redefined territories of conservation and tourism development.

Where resistance flourishes, and persists, in spite of the fog of greening, and the smoke and mirrors of tourism development, it is met with dispersed, networked repression, including the smoking guns of targeted political assassinations. Leaders have faced prison, assault and death. Even negotiators working to address conflicts risk criminalization and arrest (Ruiz 2014). Recent assassination and violent attacks have led to accusations of federal, state and municipal government and /or party involvement in fomenting paramilitary violence against individuals and organizations opposed to the CIPP (Centro De Derechos Humanos Fray Bartolomé de las Casas 2012; Sociedad Civil Las Abejas de Acteal 2014).

After eviction of the delegitimized groups from the newly declared ecological reserves and integrated tourism development zones, reterritorialization can follow. The declaration of reserves excluding peasant communities enables the redistribution of land use rights and

12 A message from a Chase-Manhattan Bank security consultant to the office of Mexican President Ernesto Zedillo in 1995 (Silverstein and Cockburn 1995) noted that it was the perception of investors that was at stake and not any real safety threat. This posture has remained more or less the same for the last 20 years.
authority by the state (through sale, lease or concession) and the capture of multiple revenue streams for state actors and allies. Ecotourism expands to include Cancun-like hubs and circuits of tourism (consumption of rainforest nature; Figure 3). Once states and commercial interests wrest control of new areas, they can stretch the idea of serving the public good to allow simultaneous creation of multiple territories of extraction (mining and drilling), industrial agriculture and industrial forest production. The remaining land can be committed to payment for environmental services (PES) and carbon credit contracts (pilot projects for REDD+)\(^\text{13}\) (Gonzalez 2013). This is not a simple linear narrative of eviction of landless rural people by corporate and state interests. It is a carefully choreographed performance that simultaneously builds and obscures multiple overlapping territories, parallel worlds hidden from each other in plain sight.

**Agua Azul: networked and rooted resistance to the CIPP**

The specific, recent experience of communities near Agua Azul, in the heart of the CIPP, epitomizes, and illuminates, less visible territorial grabbing strategies, based on linked sequential and simultaneous actions by multiple state and corporate actors. Agua Azul (Blue Waters) is a popular tourist attraction on the existing San Cristobal-to-Palenque road (Figures 3). The site of a recently declared reserve, as well as a proposed luxury resort and further commercialization of the falls, it illustrates the combined local, regional and national strategy to wrest control of land and related resources from farming communities who neither accept government development plans for their area, nor agree to leave. It is also a major focus of ongoing struggle by communities and individual community members affiliated with the Other Campaign, and adherents of the Sixth Declaration of the Selva Lacandona\(^\text{14}\) and other political and religious organizations in the vicinity.

The proposed tourism project would change the character of the site, the surrounding landscape and access to the river and pools, and nearby forests, fields and homes (Figure 4). The entire community of Bolom Ajaw would be evicted. The new Palenque-to-San Cristobal highway would dramatically affect several nearby towns, displacing homes, fields, businesses, churches, public buildings and plazas. State officials and developers have promised hotel and restaurant jobs, and payment for lands and buildings taken to support the planned development.

The actors involved in the struggle over Agua Azul include: the residents of the Agua Azul area and Bolom Ajaw; the small business owners, merchants and employees at Agua Azul Falls; the ejido authorities and members of San Sebastian Bachajon; the officials of the municipal government of Chilon; members of the Other Campaign and adherents of the Sixth Declaration within San Sebastian Bachajón, Bolom Ajaw and nearby communities; the Tzeltal Tourism Cooperative of Agua Azul; a local branch of OPPDIC (Organización Para la Defensa de los Derechos Indígenas y Campesinos, a state-aligned indigenous organization) and alleged ‘renegade’ members of same; municipal state and federal government officials including the Governor’s office; municipal, state and federal police; employees and

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\(^{13}\)REDD+ refers to Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation, a UN carbon trade program to mitigate climate change through payments by carbon emitters in industrial countries, ostensibly to protect forests in the global south.

\(^{14}\)The Other Campaign formed in 2006 as a national alternative to party affiliation and electoral participation, and an organizational alliance in solidarity with the Zapatistas. Adherents of the Sixth Declaration of the Selva Lacandona (EZLN 2005) constitute a national and international solidarity network supporting its principles.
officials of FONATUR, the Palenque CIPP, Comisión Nacional de Áreas Naturales Protegidas (CONANP) and Secretaría de Medio Ambiente y Recursos Naturales (SEMAR-NAT); two international environmental planning consulting firms; an invisible network of unnamed investors and developers; pro-CIPP environmental NGOs (local to global); resistance-aligned environmental NGOs; Frayba and a network of national and international human rights organizations; and active, widely dispersed, international solidarity networks.

The community of Bolom Ajaw, the ejido of San Sebastián Bachajón and members of several other communities in the municipality of Chilón have waged a multi-year struggle to resist the selective eviction of their communities, the take-over of the waterfall site revenues by state officials and state-aligned residents, and the construction of a major commercial tourist resort as well as the new highway through the region, as illustrated in Figures 3 and 4 (Author’s field notes 2011; Centro de Derechos Humanos Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas 2012; FONATUR 2006, 2008, 2011; Comisión Nacional de Áreas Naturales Protegidas CONANP 2010; Davies 2010). People have organized at various times to take, to defend and, later, to restore the payment kiosk at the entrance to the tourist site, unarmed. They have also blocked the highway and have built and occupied roadside encampments near the entrance on several occasions.

State and federal authorities have portrayed this as an inter- or intra-community struggle between government-aligned community members (from OPDDIC) and those they refer to as ‘outsiders’ from the Other Campaign, or adherents of the Sixth Declaration (La Cronica

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15Translations: Parks and Protected Area Commission and Secretariat of Environment and Natural Resources.
In February 2011, 117 residents were arrested and imprisoned after hundreds of police converged on the rural site of a peaceful meeting convened to discuss the conflicting views of various groups. The police selectively arrested affiliates of the Other Campaign (Centro de Derechos Humanos Fray Bartolomé de las Casas 2011). After a short time, all but five of those originally arrested were released (Hernández Nava 2012). The Bachajón Five spent from several months to 2 years in prison on criminal charges, including murder, that were later dismissed.16

Criminalization of the movement continued in September 2011 when Miguel Vázquez Deara, a leader of the opposition to the resort project and the erasure of Bolom Ajaw, was arrested at his taxi service job in Palenque (Enlace Zapatista 2011). The man who accompanied the police and identified/accused him was the same one who had already issued death threats against him over his opposition to the CIPP. He was arrested, detained, tortured into confessing to theft, convicted, sentenced, imprisoned and later released in June 2013, after a long campaign for his freedom by Frayba and a diverse network of national and international organizations (Enlace Zapatista 2013a).

On the night of 24 April 2013, Juan Vázquez Guzmán, a previously detained and vocal leader of the Other Campaign in San Sebastián Bachajón, answered a knock at his door. He was shot six times point blank. The Other Campaign organized a national and international campaign for justice, and also called for the release of Miguel Demeza Jiménez and Antonio Estrada Estrada, who were imprisoned in 2010 and 2011, respectively (Gutiérrez Luna 2013; Bellinghausen 2013a; Enlace Zapatista 2013b, 2013c, 2013d).17 Both were released in December of 2013 (Bellinghausen 2013b, 2013c). The murder of Vázquez Guzmán remains in impunity. The last reported assassination of a CIPP opposition leader occurred on the morning of 21 March 2014. Juan Carlos Gomez Silvano (22 years of age) was ambushed and shot 20 times by high-caliber gunfire as he drove home towards the autonomous community of the Virgen de Dolores (Virgin of Sorrows). He was the regional coordinator of the adherents of the Sixth Declaration in the ejido of San Sebastián Bachajón18 (Enlace Zapatista 2014).

Other leaders and their communities continue to live under threat of bodily harm, disappearance, death and/or false arrest, as well as eviction from their homes and lands. The strategy of the resistance has been to publicly denounce and confront government officials and their practices from municipal to federal level, through unarmed resistance, and to avoid violent confrontation with other rural people, whether indigenous or campesino, and regardless of party, religious or other affiliations. This strategy has been met with continued violence from police and paramilitary actions.

These are not simply localized actions; the scenario played out in Agua Azul is typical of several places in the Lacandon Rainforest of Chiapas, all of which are part of a larger scheme to take control of and redefine a territory of smallholder farmers, including the heartland of the Zapatista movement. The vision is to string together a series of sites that

16The last two prisoners were released in December 2013 after an intensive national and international solidarity campaign (Centro de Derechos Humanos Fray Bartolomé de las Casas 2012; Bellinghausen 2013b, 2013c).
17Additional detailed reports from communities in the Chilón Municipality and human rights organizations from 2011 through 2013 can be found at the Enlace Zapatista, the civil society communication hub of the EZLN at www.enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx.
18I have revised this account twice to report the assassination of yet another leader opposed to the CIPP near Agua Azul. Several others have died at other sites over the last seven years, from Mitziton to Chinkultic (Centro de Derechos Humanos Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas 2012).
form nodes, in a network of rainforest and archeological wonders that cluster around Palenque as a major new tourist hub (Figure 3). The maps, drafted by state agencies and their consultants between 2006 and 2008 (FONATUR 2006, 2008, 2011) were released formally and informally through NGO networks in the interest of transparency and justice for the communities threatened by displacement.19

It is notable that each of the points along these elliptical tourist paths is slated to be joined by a new highway. Several communities along this path have been subjected to attack, threats and harassment by paramilitary-type organizations, as well as provocation of conflict within or between communities and suborning of local officials to support the CIPP. While they suspected a relationship, the people in the affected communities and their allies had no information about the path of the planned highway until they were 3 years into the campaigns of intimidation, threats and aggression by municipal, state and federal police forces and paramilitary-type organizations (Author’ notes 2010, 2011). The latest version of the CIPP (Ramírez 2014) has been scaled back to focus on the main highway corridor with key nodes at Palenque, Agua Azul, San Cristobal de Las Casas and Chiapa de Corzo, confirming the central role of Agua Azul and the Palenque–San Cristobal highway within the CIPP.

The resistance has been predicated in part on the collection and sharing of information about the CIPP plan, from the highway route, to the circuits of eco- and archeological sites, to the plans for individual reserves and resorts such as Agua Azul. In contrast to the outright purchase of vast tracts of land by outside investors, these tourism circuits nested in the green matrix of almost a third of the state’s land area (Figure 3) involve extensive preliminary work by national and state governments. The slides shared by one NGO in March of 2011, based on 2006 and 2011 FONATUR documents, demonstrate that this is a buyer’s market. The potential investors and developers in ‘high-end’ tourism demand, through the voices of consultants in the internal report, that, first, the region be cleansed of conflicting claims on land, and that all property be secured by proper title. This fails to recognize that most of the indigenous settlements in the region are based on indigenous territorial claims and/or lands reclaimed during the Zapatista uprising. While not currently honored by state and national governments, these lands are recognized under the San Andres Accords.

The exclusive Agua Azul camp will install a private heliport for travel from Palenque to the ‘isolated’ luxury camp, only a few kilometers off the main highway. The report stressed that hotel investors, developers, managers, employees and guests must be safe, and more importantly, they must feel secure at all times. Finally, the report specifically notes that nothing ‘unnatural’ can interfere with the panorama of the ‘pristine’ rainforest and waterfall setting, specifically as seen from the planned luxury hotel and camp. In the landscape architect’s watercolor depiction of the future resort (see sketch version in Figure 4), the community of Bolom Ajaw has been removed. The erasure of Bolom Ajaw is a highly significant absence, that implies an explicit and violent process of rural cleansing, still being thwarted by non-violent resistance (FONATUR 2006, 2008, 2011, Comisión Nacional de Áreas Naturales Protegidas CONANP 2010, Davies 2010).

As illustrated by Figure 2, the imperatives from developers and investors to the state, via international consultants, are translated into action through attempted selective cleansing of

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19 Davies (2010) states: ‘The sources of the report quoted are FONATUR, March 2008 and the Secretary of Tourism and International Relations of the Chiapas government. They have been made available in Spanish by Frayba. [Website URL]’
peasant communities, based on complex combined ethnic and political criteria, with the aim of turning the region into not smallholder agrarian territory. The state ‘brands’ the new territory as the backdrop for the ‘greater Palenque’ rainforest and archeological circuit, with options for stops at one, a few or the whole package of sites (Figure 3). Land that forms the ‘background’ to these circuits can be earmarked for forests for carbon offset projects, ‘productive reconversion’ to commercial monocrop plantations, or other commercial uses.

As illustrated in Figure 2, some national and international environmental NGOs have played a major role in the politics of reserves and the promotion of ecotourism. The NGOs in favor of the Agua Azul reserve and the larger CIPP project have been conspicuous in their silence over the arrests, assassinations and repression of opposition leaders as well as the environmental impact of the planned highway and commercial developments in the area.

According to the project plan, once the cleansing is done, the ground is ready for sale and resort construction (Hernández Nava 2012). In Agua Azul, this has not yet been accomplished after 13 years of planning and 6 years of concerted efforts toward that end. It has been deterred by the tenacious, non-violent resistance by the community of Bolom Ajaw, members of the Otra Campana and adherents of the Sixth Declaration in nearby communities within the ejido of San Sebastián Bachajón, and allied individuals and communities in the region, all supported by regional, national and international solidarity networks and human rights groups (Centro de Derechos Humanos Fray Bartolomé de las Casas 2012; Bellinghausen 2014a). This process does not appear in the mainstream imaginary of land grabbing; however, resistance is active, effective and persistent in Chiapas (Davies 2013).

**Convergence of broader networked resistance(s) across differences**

Government, media and academic analysts have reported on the divisions and fragmentation within the peasant and indigenous organizations in Chiapas, yet there is also ample evidence of persistence and resolve among the communities in resistance. This is matched by a resurgence of religious, indigenous, human rights and other political solidarity networks, and an expansion of regional coalitions to resist local evictions and territorial land grabs. A few surprising developments warrant special mention.

**New alliances in the Montes Azules and Lacantun reserves**

In a surprising development, since 2010, the Lacandones of the Lacantun Biosphere Reserve (Figure 3) have negotiated an agreement to recognize three Tseltal communities in the reserve as legitimate occupants, after previously siding with the state and officially petitioning to oust them, and other communities already evicted. The three communities, Nuevo San Gregorio, Salvador Allende and Ranchería Corozal, are affiliated with the Asociacion Rural de Interes Colectivo (ARIC) Historico and ARIC Independiente, peasant organizations that continue to resist evictions of some indigenous communities in the region (see online illustration of the roots and shoots of resistance in Chiapas, Maderas del Pueblo del Sureste 2008). Representatives of both the Lacandon and Tseltal groups journeyed to Mexico City in 2011 to demand federal recognition of the Tseltal communities, but the federal authorities refused (Comité de Derechos Humanos Fray Pedro Lorenzo de la Nada personal communication 2011). Recent threats by national authorities (Mandujano 2014; Secretaría General de Gobierno del Estado de Chiapas 2014) to evict the three communities have been met by a campaign organized by the Mazules Environmental
Protection and Indigenous Rights Coalition. They demand an end to the evictions, and the recognition of Tseltal communities and others like them in the Montes Azules, Lacantun and other reserves in the region, including Agua Azul. Some of the groups previously evicted from the reserves also continue to seek restitution and to support other groups resisting eviction (Henríquez 2011c).

While one of the strongest movement-aligned environmental NGOs in Chiapas (CIEPAC) has dissolved, and another (Maderas del Puelo del Sureste) has relocated to Oaxaca, key actors from both continue to participate from other venues, and new groups such as Otros Mundos (Friends of the Earth, Mexico) have arisen. Together with the current Mazules Coalition campaign and the ongoing negotiations between Lacandon and other indigenous communities, this signals a diversification and expansion of the coalition against dispossession and environmental destruction in the rainforests of Chiapas (Abraca 2013).

Broad resistance to dissolution of ejido and community assemblies

After 15 years of land survey and privatization projects, a surprising resistance has emerged, across political lines. During this period, some people have left the struggle or specific organizations, some have maintained organized resistance and others have aligned with the government. Yet the strength of peoples’ roots in community, and the rootedness of communities on land, and in place, have held fast, in what Miguel Angel García Aguirre (pers. comm. August 2011) calls an act of ‘deep political intuition’. The relatively high rejection rates of PROCEDE in Chiapas demonstrate this political consciousness. When the program ended in 2006, 589, or 20 percent, of Chiapas’ nucleos agrarios (either ejidos or communal lands) had rejected the program (Secretaria de la Reforma Agraria [SRA] 2006). This form of resistance has had significant results, as in 2006, Chiapas had more ejidos and agrarian communities (nucleos agrarios) than any other state, and these covered 61 percent of the state’s land area (SRA 2006).

Even among communities that did accept PROCEDE, the overwhelming majority have maintained their ejido or community assemblies as the form of local government (Miguel Angel García Aguirre, personal communication, 2011). Yet the ability to buy, sell and mortgage land hinges on completing the last step of the privatization process, the dissolution of the community assembly, by a 75 percent majority vote of the ejido assembly members. Without that last step, land transactions still fall under ejido or agrarian communal law, not private land law. This is an example of subliminal struggle against land grabbing, based on a way of seeing the world, one’s place in it and the territorial terms of connection, and it applies across the political spectrum. As a result, developers of tourism, agricultural and energy projects have had to negotiate long term leases with ejidos, rather than direct purchase, opening development plans to community scrutiny. Some ejidos have removed elected leaders who have entered into deals prejudicial to the community and its lands, and have refused to honor the deals, as in one community at Lake Miramar (Comité de Derechos Humanos Fray Pedro Lorenzo de la Nada 2011).

Resurgence of the national indigenous congress (CNI)

The Congreso Nacional Indígena (CNI), founded in 1996, came out of two national forums convened by the EZLN as part of the peace process and formulation of the San Andres Accords on Indigenous Rights and Culture. The CNI held regional forums leading up to the national forums, a practice which it has followed in subsequent years. It represents a
departure from previous national organizations in the politics of land issues, compensation, integration and identity. The CNI has focused on territory and autonomy, not on land as property, and has insisted on respect for differences both between indigenous and non-indigenous people and among indigenous groups. Since 2012, CNI has proposed a new wave of activism in defense of territory and autonomy, grounded in ILO Convention 169 on the Rights of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples (ILO 1989), and has convened two national conferences with the EZLN, in August 2013 and August 2014. This resurgence derives in large part from the need to respond to widespread land grabbing, including green grabs, in indigenous lands across Mexico, and environmental destruction from large dams, other energy projects, timber and mining concessions, commercial tourism and luxury residential development.

The CNI stakes its claims on the legitimacy of territorial rights versus the narrower legal framing of property rights. While (non-exclusive) territorial rights are not recognized in all national legal systems, they are enshrined in the ILO Convention. They are also the basis on which billions of people in the world recognize connections to land, water, living beings, the Earth and each other. CNI conferences and press releases as well as social movement seminars in Chiapas highlight the mismatch of new land tenure and trade laws with the cultural, economic, ecological and political practices of the vast majority of rural people whose lands are targets of campaigns to acquire land for parks, reserves, tourism, carbon sinks, ‘biofuels’ and other forms of ‘green’ development by public and private actors (Congreso Nacional Indigena 2013; Cideci Weekly Seminar 2013). Fernando Hernandez Espino (pers. comm. September 2014) suggests that this is an ‘ontological divide, a tale of two moral economies’ (see also Wolford 2005). The CNI, including the EZLN as a member, has staked its campaigns for cultural and ecological justice, and against land grabbing, on the cultural and moral framing of territorial rights, both drawing from and supporting resistance to land grabbing in Chiapas (Congreso Nacional Indígena 2013).

Return of liberation theology and Catholic Church solidarity with land struggles

The consciousness of territory being made and broken is both strong and explicit among Catholic civil society organizations in Chiapas (Author’s notes 2007, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013). While it may come as no surprise to find land and territory on the lips of Zapatistas, recent developments in the ranks of Catholic groups in the Diocese of San Cristóbal de Las Casas suggest a renewed and widespread sense of outrage about ‘maldevelopment’ (Shiva 1988) and a sense of hope based on the defense of ‘tierra y territorio’ (land and territory; Henríquez 2011a).

On 24 November 2011, approximately 8000 Catholics from the 54 parishes of the diocese of San Cristóbal de Las Casas conducted a pilgrimage through the city streets, ending with a mass at the Cathedral plaza (Mandujano 2011; Henríquez 2011a). The Diocese had taken the Care of the Earth (El Pastoral de la Tierra) as one of its main annual themes, along with poverty and social justice. In reference to a biblical passage about Daniel in the lion’s den, Bishop Felipe Arizmendi Esquivel said: ‘The lions are the mining companies, the projects that seek to appropriate the lands of the campesinos, [and] the corrupt authorities who sell out and … dedicate themselves to the logging of forests’.

The pilgrimage was organized by the faithful (Pueblo Creyente) of the diocese, and the Ecclesiastical Base Communities, who issued a joint communiqué stating:

We see with pain that in our state of Chiapas there is much poverty, migration … [and] looting of lands. We are witnesses to governmental programs [that] … create dependencies and poverty, and … ‘mega-projects’ which originate in and respond to transnational interests
[that] seek to appropriate and control the territory and natural resources of our state. In many communities, this dynamic provokes division and confrontation… (derived from excerpts from the Communique by the Pueblo Creyente of San Cristobal de Las Casas and the Ecclesiastical Base Communities, published in Henríquez 2011a)

The phrase ‘looting of lands’ in the same document (above) as references to ‘government-sponsored and corporate-led mega-projects’, including tourism, constitutes a searing denunciation of current state and corporate initiatives, by the Catholic faithful of the diocese. Their annual march and communique was supported by the Bishop, who was originally expected to ‘depoliticize’ the diocese. Subsequent events and statements organized by the Catholic faithful of the diocese in 2012 and 2013 have reiterated these points and the Bishop recently (1 January 2014) went on record in an Associated Press (AP) interview in support of the Zapatistas, peasant political and social resistance, and the establishment of autonomous communities (AP News 2014).

More recently, the Diocese of San Cristobal and the Pueblo Creyente convened a pilgrimage of 15,400 people. The half-day pilgrimage entitled ‘For peace, in defense of life, Mother Earth and our communities’, took place simultaneously in several communities from San Cristobal to Palenque, on 19 July 2014 (Oteros Mundos 2014b). The event focused on opposition to the Palenque–San Cristobal highway and the CIPP, with references to land grabbing, human rights, political violence and the imposition of development and conservation plans on indigenous and campesino communities (Rieublanc 2014; Oteros Mundos 2014b). The networked, rooted and territorial nature of the event, and the larger movement, was unmistakable.

**Conclusion**

Perhaps the first and clearest conclusion to be drawn from the experience with green grabs to date in Chiapas is that Conservation and Ecotourism are the leading edge and the pioneer outposts of de- and reterritorialization in Chiapas. The green grab is not only for itself but, through the fog of greening, serves to open the land and the people to a variety of extractive and exploitative industrial developments. Disneyland in the forest, and Cancun in the forest, are prelude to pipelines in the forest, plantations in the forest, highways through the forest, cash crops in the forest, paradise for sale in the forest, and despojo and desalojo (dispossession and eviction) in the forest. This strategy requires a complex network of actors far larger than what is required for direct purchase of large single tracts of land20 (Figure 2).

While we are newly accustomed to think of social movements as agile navigators of complex networks, across scales and within territories, between a diversity of types of actors, corporate and state actors are not far behind. The land grabbers in Chiapas, and beyond, are skilled at network navigation, in search of profit through accumulation by dispossession. In turn, dispossession is attempted through delegitimation of peoples’ identities and their claims to belong to specific territories, as a prelude to forceful eviction. The resistance, with a long history of rooted networks, above and below ground, has built and maintained an agile, flexible and territorial response in defense of ‘life, people and the Earth’. Based on the experience in Agua Azul and throughout Chiapas more broadly, land grabbing can be accomplished, or resisted, through territory-breaking and territory-making, through presence and practice on the part of multiple networked actors, acting simultaneously and in sequence.

20Note that even apparently simple grabs of large single parcels are rooted in complex histories and geographies of power, as in the long history of land grabs in Africa (Verma 2014).
Given the nature of this process, UN initiatives and related efforts to deal with land grabbing cannot rely on rules of engagement between buyers and sellers. Environmental justice with respect to land and territory requires that we consider more than just economic rights to land and legally recognized property. Land and environmental policy needs to recognize and respect networked cultures and ecologies and their construction of, and roots in, multiple territories.

The eviction of rural people under the fog of greening offers state and federal authorities the chance to shine at being green, to selectively remove ‘inconvenient’ political and social opposition, and to take and remake territories in a neo-liberal frame that will support their political objectives, and the progress of the MesoAmerica Project. As such, the real ‘danger’ to the state from the Zapatistas – and broader loose networks of communities in resistance – is not that they make the space violent or threaten the security of visitors and residents. They do not. Rather, the problem for the state and private tourism developers is that the resisters insist on dignity and justice and will not go quietly. They have their own agenda for rural livelihoods in forest and agrarian territories. They refuse to fade into an assimilated, landless and captive rural or urban labor force, while others sell an airbrushed history of their ancestors on their own stolen land. They publicly contest the prevailing assumptions about who threatens forests and biodiversity, and they challenge the illusion of compatibility and sustainability among the parallel universes of extractive industries, mega-infrastructure projects, high-profile new town settlements, industrial agriculture and ‘pristine’ sites of tourism and conservation. They insist on making audible and visible the violence that is being visited upon them and their lands by explicit participation of political parties and government agencies at local, state and national levels, supported by the complicity (willing or unwitting) of several international environmental and development agencies and NGOs, and an invisible network of financial investors and developers.

Recent developments bring the promise of a diversified and resurgent resistance with the renewal of national indigenous activism under the CNI, reintegration of more active Catholic Church participation and the formation of new environmental and human rights coalitions. This in turn begs the question of whether the large international and national environmental NGOs will remain allied with the land grabbers or whether they can find common cause with the resisters.21

21A set of corollary questions directed to state and NGO environmental and sustainable development organizations might include: Are they willing to reassess and reframe their perceptions, policies and practices as well as their alliances? Will they consider withdrawing their substantial support (direct or indirect) from the networked, violent campaign to take and remake roughly one third of the land of Chiapas into a multi-purpose territory, based on indigenous and peasant cleansing, shrouded in the fog of greening? The communities will not wait for answers to these questions and will continue to resist (Davies 2013; Bellinghausen 2014a). Yet the question remains, do these organizations plan to continue paying for new reserves and/or tourism development with the blood, sweat and tears of campesino and indigenous communities evicted (or worse) to serve an exclusionary ‘land sparing’ approach (Fischer et al. 2011) to conservation in Chiapas and elsewhere? And will they continue to look the other way as much of the land ‘freed up’ by conservation takings is chopped into concessions for commercial tourism development, mining, oil and gas drilling, and oil palm and timber plantations? And finally, would they consider reframing conservation and sustainable production within the context of matrix ecology (Vandermeer and Perfecto 2007; Perfecto, Vandermeer, and Wright 2009) with recognition of the legitimacy of forest communities as currently proposed in Chiapas by the Mazules Coalition of environmental and human rights groups and internationally by Via Campesina, Friends of the Earth International and many others?
Most importantly, the implication of the experience of Agua Azul and the larger circuits of the CIPP is that resistance costs, but it can work. It can slow or stop the progress of green grabs through widely networked efforts rooted in history, in place and on the ground, and carefully attuned to the actions and intents of the land grabbers. It has cost people their homes, livelihoods, lands, years in prison, and the lives of a long list of dead and disappeared persons, many of them promising leaders and all of them someone’s friend, relative, spouse or teacher. There is also the sacrifice of time and energy diverted from building, raising crops and livestock, teaching and learning. The question remains as to whether rural communities in Chiapas will have to continue to pay such a high price to resist the vast, violent, networked green land grab.

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