

The Active Voice: Narrative in Applied and Activist Anthropology

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SUMMARY *Applied anthropology strives to support accessible writing, especially in journals that publish the work of nonacademic anthropologists. In this, narrative must be concise and clear, as it reports on active projects that form the basis of research and practice. As such, the resulting texts can neither be jargon filled or excessively interpretive, especially when the production involves the participation of community collaborators. The challenges of writing applied and activist ethnography begin well before the research itself and continue throughout. We must seek informed permission for projects; carry out work in conjunction with the community; obtain preapproval for written products; and work to find a mode of expression that meets complex criteria: to be creative while also being concrete, to present theory to a general audience, and to share the ethnographic endeavor on all levels. This article addresses narrative and ethical dilemmas of applied practice and writing. Illustrations from a number of recent ethnographies supplement text and case studies from Chiapas, Mexico. An examination of the experience of collaborative research and writing that resulted in Duncan Earle and Jeanne Simonelli's book *Uprising of Hope: Sharing the Zapatista Journey to Alternative Development* (2005) illustrates the process of doing and writing ethnography for and with the community. [Keywords: Applied anthropology, ethnography, activism, Zapatistas, Chiapas]*

Late one evening in August 2002, I sat with Martín Arevelo, then president of the Zapatista autonomous municipality of Tierra y Libertad, and his young wife Camila. The couple looked exhausted, just returned from a four-day health-training workshop in the Ejercito Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN) stronghold of Realidad. The rain was falling in sheets, drilling the lamina roof, and it was hard to hear Martin as he read aloud in Spanish from the book proposal I'd just given to him. His Spanish was flawless, as was his Maya, and he stopped reading occasionally to translate a word into English.

"I like this," he said, referring to my Spanish-language book proposal. "I like the idea of telling what it is like to be a mother in a rebel support community, or a president of an *autonomo*. Not another book about Subcomandante Marcos. But I have one reservation, and it has to do with language, with words, which are not always what they seem."

He handed the proposal to Camila, and took a drink of the cup of sweet, dark coffee she'd brought him.

"It's like this. Suppose we say the word *tierra* . . . land. You might think we mean *suelo* . . . soil. Yet we are not talking about dirt, but about the heart of our life, something sacred, about something you die for. How would you know that you got the meanings right?"

I took a deep breath, getting the Spanish arranged to tell a story, a story about getting the words wrong in a draft of my previous book about the Navajo, how this draft was translated into Navajo before it was published, and read to the elders so the people could make corrections to conceptual errors in the text.

Martin was silent. He took the proposal back from Camila, folded it, and put it into an envelope.

"Do you need the answer now?" he asked.

"No, when we come back is fine," I lied, once again marveling at the shape that 21st-century ethnographic fieldwork and writing was taking. The proposal for *Uprising of Hope: Sharing the Zapatista Journey to Alternative Development* disappeared into a process of community and municipal reflection that would take longer than the review process for a referred journal.¹

The communities we work with are no longer the benign recipients of anthropological scrutiny. We have been asked to give up part of the control of the research endeavor, to learn and document together, to return to them with what we write. For some anthropologists this loss of power has not been accepted easily. Do we study others, or learn from them? Do they consent to be part of our researches or are we given permission to remain in their villages?

The challenges of writing applied and activist ethnography begin well before the research itself and continue throughout. We must seek community permission for projects; carry out work in conjunction with its members; obtain preapproval for written products; and work to find a mode of expression that meets complex criteria: to be creative while also being concrete, to present theory to a general audience, and to share the ethnographic endeavor on all levels.

In crafting the texts that document applied anthropological projects, we face similar, yet different, issues compared with those of the writing of "traditional" ethnography. Applied anthropology strives to support accessible writing, especially in journals that publish the work of nonacademic anthropologists. In this anthropology, narrative must be concise and clear, as it reports on active projects that form the basis of research and practice. As such, the resulting texts can neither be jargon filled or excessively interpretive, especially when the production involves the participation of community collaborators. The following pages examine the complex process of creating applied and activist ethnography.

Research Partnerships

Giving agency to those who agree to be part of a symmetrical partnership in research and in reporting does not mean that we cease doing those things that we, as anthropologists, are trained to do. It means a continuous and conscious process of opening out the dynamics of research and writing, as in the fieldwork that I've undertaken with colleague Duncan Earle and members of the Zapatistas in Chiapas, Mexico. Fourteen years have passed since the chilly New Year's dawn when the world awakened to find an indigenous rebellion underway in Chiapas—Mexico's southernmost state. Coinciding with the

signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the rebellion responded to long-standing patterns of exploitation and discrimination in this region of rich land and poor people. After ten days of fighting in 1994, a ceasefire led to stillborn peace accords in 1996. Since that time, the organization has evolved into a social movement tackling the process of alternative development and alternative politics on a national and sometimes international level.

Our involvement with the Zapatista movement dates back to 1997, when leaders of the autonomous municipality of Tierra y Libertad approached members of internationally funded NGOs aiding Guatemalan refugees to look for ways that some of those seemingly infinite monetary resources might come into Zapatista hands. Our relationship with the EZLN is the outgrowth of this initial overture and the ongoing *hermanamiento* ("joining") that developed, including a commitment to accompany the Movement as it charts its own course. In this process, we have brought students from numerous universities to learn how to serve in the context of Zapatismo. As anthropologists, we have also developed a research technique that allows us to offer our skills, receive "informed permission"² to assist the Movement, and finally to document the mutual learning experience that has resulted (Earle and Simonelli 2000, 2005; Simonelli 2002; Simonelli and Earle 2003a, 2003b).

Working in Chiapas, this has meant that we bring to the partnership those skills that each of us has, and from this derive a modified research design that emphasizes symmetry in the research endeavor and attention to community concerns surrounding how and when information should be shared. Moreover, our shared practical concerns tie in directly with our theoretical interests. For us, applied ethnography is the expression of praxis, the combination of knowledge, theory, and action presented in a tight but readable text. In Chiapas, involvement in community and municipal discussion and planning provided the opportunity to document autonomous development as a social experiment. The subsequent analysis of these practical expressions of human action informs the construction of theory concerning development and social change. Their continuing real life practical dilemmas, successes, and failures serve as tests of our theoretical concepts. Ethnography documents this process.

In our work in Chiapas, communities saw it in their interest to help the research process because it helped in their larger project in life. In the final analysis we received their informed permission to be scribes of portions of their social experiments, but not until we were made fully aware of the responsibilities associated with our collaboration. At the same time community members began to learn methods of research that continue to be useful to them. Eventually, we received permission to write *Uprising of Hope*, which was published in 2005.

Learning how to do active research is an integral part of the learning experience for anthropologists. Learning how to write about research is even more difficult.

Telling the Tale: Writing as Process

"I like the book," one of my first-year seminar students noted concerning Robert Carlson's 1997 Guatemala ethnography, *The War for the Heart and Soul of a Highland Maya Town*. "But it gets so confusing when he puts all those names in a row. I lose the story."

She was commenting on the way in which American Psychological Association (APA) style citations interrupt the flow of an otherwise readable text. Deciding how to wed scholarship and storytelling is one of the difficulties of the ethnographer's craft. Some writers stick to a conventional referencing style, within the context of accessible, jargon-free writing. Others feel that footnoting is less obtrusive to the text, and give us, the readers, the option of pausing to see who said what and where. In my own writing, I've tried a number of stylistic tricks. My first book, *Two Boys, a Girl and Enough!* (1986) was the dissertation-turned-ethnography, and while it was packed with scholarship that I marvel at in retrospect, it was a real sleeper. The second, *Too Wet to Plow: The Family Farm in Transition*, was a collaboration with a photographer, and was published by a trade press (1990). Using carefully crafted black-and-white photography to detail what happens when farm communities fall apart, it also included 40 pages of text. In this presentation, the "factual" material stood alone as preface to the vignettes of daily life on failing dairy farms in New York State. Some readers read the text. Most just looked at the photographs.

My third book also focused on a situation of rapid change, this time on the Navajo reservation. *Crossing between Worlds: The Navajo of Canyon de Chelly* also relied heavily on black-and-white photography (1997). This time, however, the text was expanded to over 120 pages, and the vignettes opened out into the factual information concerning Navajo families in a changing world. This technique worked well for a book that was designed to appeal to a nonacademic market, while at the same time containing rigorous scholarship. To safeguard the flow of the story, there were no specific references cited in the body, but each chapter was followed by a bibliography for the topics covered. This time the photographs were integrated into the text, luring the viewers into becoming readers.

Duncan Earle and I used this storytelling method again in the writing of *Uprising of Hope: Sharing the Zapatista Journey to Alternative Development* (2005). With over 300 pages of text, this book was a much more overt example of engaged scholarship and involved a true crafting of both the research endeavor and the presentation of the written word. The actual research and writing was done by both of us at a time when Duncan was living and teaching in El Paso, Texas, about 2,000 miles away from my East Coast base. In addition to the subtleties of joint academic authorship from a distance, we shared the authorial voice with our community collaborators. As noted above, this meant not just an approval process granting us informed permission to proceed, but also adding the actual voices of our Zapatista and non-Zapatista collaborators. Moreover, it was also a book about the community development process which meant that project reports needed to be included in a readable fashion.

To date, there are few ethnographic works that present themselves as being explicitly applied ethnographies, which is what we were trying to achieve in *Uprising*. There are, however, many examples of good engaged scholarship, reported in well-written and even poetic text, as in the work of Christine Eber (2000) or Christine Kovic (2005). Others include Paul Farmer's 2003 work *Pathologies of Power*, which is solid medical anthropology that includes all of these characteristics, and, in addition, has managed to gain popular notoriety. Similarly, Kris Holloway's *Monique and the Mango Rains* (2006) is a truly readable look at development through the eyes of a Peace Corps volunteer. Set in

Mali, the author provides an honest and often heartbreaking narrative that is rapidly replacing Marjorie Shostak's *Nisa* (2000) in introductory anthropology classes.

A recent look at a sample of 9 of the 53 entries into the 2007 competition for the *Victor Turner Prize for Ethnographic Writing* reveals that, increasingly, ethnographers are taking pains to write about their research and projects in ways that are accessible both stylistically and textually. While many of these authors might not describe themselves as applied practitioners, their works are examples of engaged scholarship with wide reaching policy implications. In all of the sampled ethnographies, the writers allow the text to flow uninterrupted by citations, using extensive chapter or end notes and appendices to drive home the scholarship behind the story.

Medical anthropologist Carolyn Smith-Morris (2006) uses narratives and text in an ethnographic exploration of the lifeways and values of Pima women experiencing diabetes. In *Diabetes Among the Pima: Stories of Survival* she creates a readable, theoretical, and practical volume that includes both the voices of native peoples and the analysis of anthropology.

Antonius C. G. M. Robben (2005) uses similar techniques to provide a multi-level analysis of the cycle of violence that coalesced in Argentina from the 1970s. *Political Violence and Trauma in Argentina* is an example of historically based anthropology with wide-reaching implications in the area of human rights. Participant-observation of the on-going documentation of death, including demonstrations and exhumations, is combined with archival research and interviews, with specific citations in notes and appendices.

Global transformation is the overall topic of three other recent ethnographies spanning three continents. Edward Fischer and Peter Benson (2006) link Guatemala and the United States in a unique analysis of the relationship between health-obsessed American consumers and Maya farmers. In *Broccoli and Desire*, Fischer and Benson go beyond economic models to examine the relationship between global economic forces and everyday life. Moving to Indonesia, John F. McCarthy (2006) focuses on the politics of environmental change by merging a classic ethnographic focus on local and village institutions with political and environmental analysis. *The Fourth Circle: A Political Ecology of Sumatra's Rainforest Frontier* provides activist reporting that asks the reader to consider why projects designed by outsiders so often fail. Finally, we travel to Egypt as Jessica Winegar (2006) looks at the heated cultural politics of the Middle East through the lens of art and the marketing of culture in *Creative Reckonings*. This look at transformations in Egyptian culture is a uniquely focused examination of change in societies with colonial and socialist pasts.

Community and coexistence form the basis of two explorations of neighbors and neighborhoods struggling with the process of change. In *Zenana: Everyday Peace in a Karachi Apartment Building* (2006), Laura A. Ring takes us to a multi-ethnic, middle-class high-rise where women's exchanges are part of the daily life of urban Muslim society. In contrast, Russell Leigh Sharman's *The Tenants of East Harlem* (2006) takes an intimate look at less affluent local life, absorbing the reader in the rhythms of a community whose roots are threatened by gentrification. His work is an engaging analysis of the history and process of immigration and social inequality in a major U.S. city.

Bridging rigorous academics and memoir, Richard Roy Grinker (2007) provides a moving exploration of the rise in our understanding of autism in his ethnography *Unstrange Minds: Remapping the World of Autism*. In a work that could easily bridge the gap between academic and popular literature, Grinker provides an analysis that will help parents and institutions understand autistic children and adults.

While all of the previous works rely heavily on the narrative and voices of those whose lives make up the fabric of ethnography, Thomas J. Ferguson and Chip Colwell-Chanthaphonh (2006) are meticulous in their collaboration between Native Americans and archaeologists. *History Is in the Land: Multivocal Tribal Traditions in Arizona's San Pedro Valley* takes the reader to Arizona's San Pedro Valley where 10,000 years of history forms the basis of the cosmology and ecology of four contemporary tribes: Zuni, Hopi, San Carlos Apache, and Tohono O'odham. Ferguson and Colwell-Chanthaphonh take an active role in moving beyond the often confrontational discussion of who "owns" history.

Each of the ethnographic works outlined above is an example of engaged anthropology. Using the method and theory that has long informed qualitative research, the individual authors have chosen to document and detail issues and problems that go beyond cultural description. This creates not just a change in narrative style but also a difference in how those who hold the power in the places where we work view what we do. As qualitative research and its narrative documentation moves beyond interactive note taking, there are times when anthropologists are called upon to take an explicitly active, and not always unbiased role in the lives of those who open their communities to our research. These activities are not always well-received by those in governmental roles.

Research as Activism

My fieldwork in Chiapas took place during the height of the conflict there, during a time when the Mexican government actively pursued international scholars and activists who they believed to be at the heart of the Chiapas uprising. During the 1990s, anthropologists working in Chiapas experienced a growing climate of hostility and suspicion regardless of the focus of their research. Whether working in advocacy roles with NGOs in communities, attempting to do other issues-based research, or leading student programs, getting official academic visas became more and more difficult. Though many of us typically conducted research on tourist visas, especially during the early phases, this was a gray area, and left us subject to possible expulsion from the country. The likelihood that field notes, computer disks, and lists of contacts would be demanded by the immigration authorities increased. The only research or program acceptable to the government of the then-ruling PRI party was the classic ethnographic study of an essentialized Maya, an image of the indigenous that conservative voices in anthropology constructed during years of Chiapas fieldwork. Anything else was viewed as human rights related and, therefore, political. Even the classic anthropological act of observation could land you on the wrong side of a political conflict, as I found out in 1999:

It was amidst this increasing official frenzy that I found myself in the company of sociologist colleague Kate O'Donnell, out at the Chiapas Immigration office in March

1999 gingerly trying to come up with an innocuous definition of *political*. It was after five, on March 23rd, two days after the conclusion of the Zapatista organized *Consulta Nacional*, a nation-wide referendum on indigenous rights. I was sitting outside the white-washed building housing the offices of *Migración*, the tricolor Mexican flag waving before it, eating an ice cream sandwich and reading the poetry of Rosario Castellanos, back against the wall. The sun was hot on my face, and I devoured the warmth, absorbed it, as if the penetrating rays could erase the events of the previous forty-eight hours.

"Did you see the movie *Forrest Gump*?" asked Rene Pulido, the director of Immigration.

I was puzzled. What did shrimp and *Forrest* have to do with my current dilemma?

"Do you remember the tee shirt that *Forrest* was wearing, the slogan?" Rene continued.

A year had passed since Immigration last ran wild, expelling foreigners from Mexico in a desperate search for outside agitators at the root of the Chiapas conflict. They were at it again, and my colleague Kate O'Donnell and I were a piece of it. We were about to be expelled from Mexico; asked to leave, told not to return, for watching an impromptu march related to the *Consulta* and now deemed to be "political." I shaded my eyes to look at Pulido, watching his face as he had watched mine, searching for involvement, conspiracy, and guilt, as I answered the same set of questions about the same set of events couched in countless different ways for more than three hours. . . .

Rene ran his hand across his chest to indicate an imaginary line of words on a tee shirt, and smiled slightly.

"Shit happens," he said simply, recalling the movie. "And shit has happened to you."

We had prepared for our "interviews" with Immigration by poring over our Spanish dictionaries, looking for neutral terms to describe the day. We made word lists. *March* and *rally* were discarded in favor of *parade* and *procession*. We substituted *watch* for *observe*; *learn about* for *research*. We linked our previous anthropological experiences to projects in Chiapas, mentally sanctioning past visits to women's weaving co-ops, justifying our very presence in the state, trying out all possible INM questions. How do you define political? Why did we let down our guard? [Earle and Simonelli 2005:63-74]

Part of the "guard" we carried with us as researchers included keeping the communities with whom we were involved from additional scrutiny by the Mexican government. During these difficult early times, both before and after our involvement with Immigration, I found it unsafe and impossible to write anthropological monographs for publication. The easiest mode of expression was poetry because it was decidedly ambiguous and could also carry the emotional load I was feeling about the situation in Chiapas. We were being served a tiny sampling of the constant intimidation which structured the daily lives of the people who lived in Chiapas, a serious lesson. I wrote poems to describe the reality and the emotions (Simonelli 2000a; 2000b). A number of these early field poems appeared in this journal (Simonelli 2001a, 2001b).

The Critique of Practice

Earle also elected to express some of his most disturbing field experiences as poetry, as seen in this issue of *Anthropology and Humanism*. His initial fieldwork in Guatemala came to a halt in 1978 when the violence in that country threatened the Maya people with whom he was working as an applied anthropologist employed by Save the Children. He eventually moved across the border to

Chiapas to the Lacandon rain forest *ejido* (public land) of Ojo de Agua, studied a different Maya language, and began to learn about alternative development in the same jungle area where my researches brought me years later. Recalling his early applied ethnographic experience, he noted that:

In Ojo de Agua . . . each *ejiditario* had a more or less equal chance, forty hectares and a family, and of course a few sheep. . . . But the arrival of the Guatemalan refugees changed all that. When they came streaming across the border in 1982, '83, and '84, especially during the reign of President Rios Montt and the killing fields part of that dark history of genocide and flight, the labor dynamics changed. The Chamula Maya, with coffee prices down and the coffee cooperative INMECAFE coming apart, were struggling to cover costs. They cut ties with kin in the highlands, and hired the Guatemalans. More than that, they took them in, like a kind of guest-worker. . . . This arrangement was not altruistic, although it was sympathetic and based in identification with the plight of indigenous people marked for slaughter. The Chamula colonists were always quick to remark how it could have been them. . . .

Having the Guatemalans there in Ojo with us often put me back into deep Guatemala reveries, back to where I used to live in K'iche', the splash of faces, *compadres* and *comadres*, *ahijados* and *ahijadas*, the still living and the now gone. Good people of dependable character and love of life, the ones who first gave me insight into the problematic of community development, showing to me how naive and ignorant so much of the efforts at assistance I had been a part of were. They had been my teachers and guides through the maze of complexities of rural Maya life, they had taught me by simply living and being and speaking openly, about the importance of the immaterial to the material, of culture to instrumental, physical aid, and of the importance of understanding social diversity and conflict to inform the way you go about starting local interventions and organizations. [Earle and Simonelli 2005:50–62]

Using that particular insight about how development projects ought to proceed, Duncan finished his fieldwork in Ojo de Agua in the early 80s. He made a few visits back in the next decade, and then was gone for another twelve years, as often occurs in the course of the anthropological life cycle. Then, on January 1, 2000, I traveled with him on his first return to the *ejido*, acting in the role of applied anthropologist/scribe, to the place where he was known by the name Lucas (see photograph on the front cover of this issue, "Duncan Earle brings his completed ethnography back to show it to *ejido* founder Miguel in Chiapas, Mexico"). For me, it was easiest to document this return poetically:

Revisit–Return

We left the city early,
 quiet, post-Millennium Sunday—
 traveling in a world which has not ended,
 a surprise to these *Evangelicos*.
 The anthropologist returning
 to the scene of his studies
 to the study of the scenes
 which have filled the community's planted years
 while his life wandered in stops
 immigrated to other intentions
 and they remained the fixed photo
 still-paused in heart memory.

Cross the rebuilt bridge from the village
 where autonomy brought disaster
 cross it, with purposeful steps
 to the village where independence carries security
 up to the gate where the family stands
 moving as if awakening from the years
 of his sequestered memory—
 the children become women
 the women the mothers of children
 and there is not a second's hesitation
 as they call his name in greeting,
Lucas!
 like it was yesterday
 like it was as it is, the rolling flow
 of time that knows only absence and presence
Lucas!

They surround him, ask the awkward questions first.
 Where has your life gone? And we wondered when
 we would be reassured that what we remembered
 was reflected in the cave of your heart.
 Switching between the languages of their two lives
 whisked away to worship, to sing, to Praise
 then to hold court, the men with questions,
 the bawdy and the suggestive, and the replay
 of months compressed into moments
 the comings and goings of the separated selves.

Miguel closes his eyes, skin taut over high cheeks
 sitting at the table, where the food is spread
 a meal that is the welcome; the women at the edges
 men talking of harvests and chainsaws
 and how many are left, how many took the new road
 to the place that was once only over the mountain.
 And in the morning, the family photos
 freeze frame their lives but not a fixed print—
 it bleeds around the edges,
 like the daughters who leave
 venture away from the seed,
 who fall far from the tree.
 Like the unnamed disease that drops the leaves
 from the aging coffee,
 where the fertilizers suck life slow.
 Like the changes in the community
 the changes in the anthropologist.

Lucas!
 when will you be returning
 to make sure what you remember
 is formed in the right words, in the true words
 the probability that you will return
 is like the cyclical visitation of the
 of the Maya year bearer;
 return to cross the hammock bridge
 cross it on the broken boards
 that lead from their lives into yours.

Duncan's return to Ojo de Agua turned his unpublished dissertation (Earle 1984) into a retrospective study of social, economic, and environmental change.

His comparative Guatemala–Chiapas Ph.D. research was finished at a time when violence in Guatemala was at its peak. Since some of the Maya he worked with were at risk from government death squads, he and his committee determined that the dissertation should not appear in University Microfilms. Thus, it is truly unpublished, and reflects another ethical dilemma we face as ethnographers: whether to publish, and allow others to perish.

Sixteen years later, we were finally able to build on Duncan's work. We entered into our research together in Ojo, and with the Zapatistas, from the perspective of community development, attempting a critique of the extent to which NGO projects were meeting the needs of those they were designed to serve. Often, an NGO project with an ostensibly economic face was really aimed at achieving social transformation, and the "McDevelopment" projects offered to communities met the mission statement of the organization donating the money but not the needs of the people. Such was the case with a program to rebuild houses in Guatemala after an earthquake, recounted by Duncan in *Uprising*, a program that focused on housing as a material object, without taking into consideration its local cultural logics, its existence as an idea for those who live there. Duncan asked his compadre, the elderly Maya shaman Don Lucas, to comment on the houses:

"Well Don Lucas, what do you think of this?" I waved my hand toward the new structure.

"Bonito," he chirped, with some enthusiasm.

"So you would like to have a house like this one?" Another titter.

"No, no es casa para mi," he laughed. It's not a house for me, hee hee. . . .

"Why not, Don Lucas?"

"Pues, Don Duncan, they did not finish it, and it is abandoned, right here along the roadside, by the place where the four roads divide, the crossroads."

Oh yes, the crossroads, like in the Popol Vuh, where life meets death, and where the local spooks hang out at night. I had heard of this idea.

"And no one has put cross signs on the doors and windows to keep them out, as we always do when we must abandon our homes. It gives a fright, how it is. More because the way it sits, it looks. Don Duncan, perhaps we are odd to you but our houses look to the West where Our Holy Sir goes down into the saintly earth. Look around this valley, all homes sit the same. Except the graveyard, the prayer house for the dead, the *oratorio*, that one looks as this structure does, back to the east, back to death. *Da susto*. It gives a fright to have a house sit in such a way. They are now crossing themselves when they walk by, the people from these hamlets, and they walk faster, they do not tarry. Worse if night is on them. And no *permiso*, no one asked the Holy World for a license to build here.

"*Algo mas*, Don Duncan. I don't know about everyone, but for me, those roofs of tin do not serve us well. First, they get hot in the day sun, chilly by night. Not like our tile from the fired clay. Then the poor corn, the *maicito*, up in the attic. The tin forms the drops of water from the dew onto our holy food. Oh, and who can hear our speech, when the rains come, with the roofs of tin. *No sirve eso*."

Now Lucas was on an ecological and linguistic roll. Houses had to fit into the ecosystem, just as facing west was also gaining passive solar heating in the portico after the daily rains recede, and afforded putting the back of the home to the prevailing winds that drive the rain. But he was pointing to their function as granaries, suggesting that a function essential to the home as a cultural and material structure is its storehouse role, where the corn is kept. The smoke from the fire below drives off the insects and deters the mice, making the house a good place to share with your corn. But not with a tin roof. . . .

Nobody copied the model in those 103 communities, although I couldn't say if it was material, social, or cultural problems that were more prominent in their minds

when they ignored what the gringos came to suggest. [Earle and Simonelli 2005:59–60]

Don Lucas' report on the NGO house project could have saved its NGO donor money, time, and effort. But this was 1978 and few project directors considered community members to be their research collaborators. Lucas' commentary was a precursor to what we would learn from later recipients of NGO aid in Chiapas. With NSF approved questions in hand, we stopped to visit a Zapatista community we knew had been involved with recent NGO projects:

We settled in at the kitchen table, with soup, tortillas, and chiles making a filling repast. Duncan reached into his bowl and pulled out a dark, wiry leg.

"This one of those DESMU chickens?" he asked nonchalantly, referring to one of the NGOs McDevelopment projects. Francisco put down his tortillas, and leaned back from the bench, against the kitchen wall. He let out a deep guffaw.

Carmen went to the stove and brought brimming mugs of coffee sweetened with the honey from their now restored hives. She looked at her husband.

"Let me tell you something about those NGOs," she began. "Don't get me wrong, it's not that we don't appreciate the help, the projects that especially DESMU has tried to bring to us. But, you know, we are way out here, and how often do they come? Once every one, two weeks? If a grant comes to them, in our name, we have to wait for them to give us the money, little by little, like we were children, like we wouldn't be able to set it aside, save it until it was needed. So take the bees, for instance. Comes a day when there is a big wind, or maybe the paramilitary, and the *cajas* get destroyed. We need to rebuild them. Now. Before all the bees are dispersed. But we can't. We have to wait for Ariana or Daniel or Gabriela to show up, to dole out the money. What do they think? Learning to be accountable, learning to control the money is part of learning to do development."

Carmen was on a roll. Francisco was nodding in agreement. . . .

Carmen sighed. "It's not just that. Working with the bees is not easy. The money came to the women, a women's cooperative. We took it, of course. But we can't do all the work ourselves, just the women. We never have. We are a community. We need to work together, especially when there are groups of people working against us. Why do they want to divide us so?"

Carmen's perplexity at the structure of NGO development projects designed for women only was one we would hear again later that day in another community. Projects designed for women seemed theoretically sound, since they empowered women by giving them their own economic assets. But, as Francisco and Carmen were fond of saying, you can't talk about the validity of theory until you have put it in practice. And here, the practice didn't support the theory. They were a living test of the applied notion of praxis. We wrote about their analysis and I reported it at the 2001 meeting of the American Anthropological Association, especially Carmen's critique of feminist-inspired development projects (Simonelli 2001b). It was not well received.

Down the road, in Ojo de Agua, two generations of Maya settlers also had a commentary on the development process, and on the activity of research and documentation. In 2006, we returned to Ojo to bring them a copy of *Uprising*, and read out in Spanish the passages that pertained to their lives and struggles, including the story of the founding of the ejido: "Books are good," said Felipe, the founder's son, reaching out to look at a copy. "But what we need is a video,

something we can show to the children, the grandchildren, about this man's achievements, so they live on. He is not so long for this world. They can see it after he is gone.

"We used to be just alone, this ejido, what did we know, like we were asleep. But now we are organized, we have leadership, *leaders*. Things have changed. First we were just taking everything the government said. Like PROCEDE, we just invited that engineer in to measure the land for individual parcels; it was a vote to privatize our land. But what did we know? Then we found out that entering PROCEDE, privatizing, gives the government *more* control over what we can do with the land. We just left that engineer there, half way through his work. We did not give up our ejido rights. We are connected, not just over the hill, but all along the jungle and border." He gestures down toward Guatemala.

"Now the government notices we are organized, because we sent away the engineer, because we do not agree. So then they start talking about programs, projects, money for this and for that, but you have to enter the PROCEDE. This is how they work, they give you more if you want it less, if you resist, if you get organized. Now things have changed. We all have rights now. The children in school, in the family, they have rights. Including the women! You cannot just mistreat your wife because you want to. *Hay derechos* . . . one has rights! . . .

"We should not need to migrate, to abandon our families," continues Felipe. "We should be able to make a decent living here. And not with the sad few coins of the government agencies tossed at us."

Felipe's commentary on our book was invaluable to us as we moved to the next step in responsible ethnographic writing, that of translation into Spanish. The communities we work with are entitled to the products of our research and it should be our obligation to return ethnographies to them in their own languages.

Giving Up Control

A tapestry of voices came together in *Uprising of Hope* to create our applied ethnography, reflecting a myriad of ways of presenting narrative: story, dialog, poetry, history, and documented research. In the final analysis, the words of community members said more than any report we might write on a failed development project. They added up to a critique that the Zapatista communities would eventually ask Marcos, their spokesperson, to voice:

The Zapatista communities are the responsible parties in their projects (more than a few NGOs can testify to this), they make them go, make them produce and in this way make improvements for the collectivity, not just for individuals. . . . With the passing of the *Aguascalientes* there also dies the "Cinderella syndrome" [an attitude of deprecating charity; providing cast offs to the poor relations] of some civil society types and the paternalism of some national and international NGOs. . . . At least they die for the Zapatista communities, that, from this moment onward the communities will not receive leftovers nor permit the imposition of projects. [Earle and Simonelli 2005:13]

One of the lessons that anthropologists are slow to learn is that the imposition of projects, as described by Marcos, also extends to the imposition of research agendas and the way in which work is reported. The process of doing applied research and writing ethnography for and with the community asks us to do more than just reconsider the ethics and practice of development. It also

asks us to give up some of the control. We must develop or adapt appropriate conceptual and action frameworks to link our tradition of detailed understanding of local level phenomenon with the larger political and social landscape. Our work is a product of the intricacies of these relationships, and produces alternative models for those working collaboratively in the field. We learn from them; they learn from us . . . and they learn well.

Zapatista actions over the past six years have revealed an intrinsic understanding of the importance of "appropriating the enemy." For instance, in 2003, the movement announced a 10 percent tax on all development projects carried out by non-Zapatistas in Zapatista regions. Part of the revenue from this tax and other fund raising initiatives goes to provide their governance bodies (JBGs) with venture capital in order to help their communities engage in collectively organized entrepreneurship. One year, they used resources to buy coffee at higher prices than the coffee coyotes, ultimately forcing up the price paid to producers. Two years ago, they invested a large sum of money in the construction and provisioning of a men's collective, as part of a community store. Sounding suspiciously like an "angel fund" investment, the collective has five years to work to stabilize the business. If, at the end of five years, they are accumulating "remanente," the remainder or profit returns to the JBG who use it to start the whole process again for another one of their communities. In the meantime, non-Zapatistas are buying what they need at competitive Zapatista stores, getting free health care at organization clinics, and coming to the JBG for the resolution of conflicts. As they construct their society through alternative development projects like these, we, the ethnographers, get to play rotating roles, as consultants, students, and scribes, to name a few.

The communities we work with learn our techniques rapidly. They live anthropological theory, they breathe the ethics of development, they swim in a vast sea of ever evolving praxis. And most recently Martin Arevelo, now a Zapatista "elder" political advisor, began to write his own book about the EZLN experience, which completes a cycle of research, writing, and exchange. A consummate storyteller with a gift for narrative, Martin has been a participant-observer of the rebellion since before it was a formal uprising.

"How do I begin writing?" he asked. Now, with used laptop at his side, Martin continues to crisscross Zapatista territory, but this time, writing as he goes. In a recent e-mail he talked about potential titles: "We could call it *La Palabra Del Machete* or *La Palabra Del Volante*."

I am happy to give up control of the construction of the narrative of applied and activist research to my colleague and add potential editor to the long list of skills I bring to the ethnographic table. Whether it is called *The Machete Word* or *The Flying Word* it will be Martin's word, not mine.

Martin summed up the process of crafting narrative in words that are familiar to us all: "Well. The truth is it's difficult. There are many things that one has to think about in order to accommodate them in words; even though the words are many, only some of the many are the ones you have to write. To relate it verbally is difficult at times; to write it even more complicated. At times I arrive home tired from my work and can't write, but I'm sure that I will finish."

So am I. I can't wait to see this evolving genre of ethnographic narrative!

Notes

1. Sections of this article appear, as referenced, in Earle and Simonelli 2005.
2. We use the term *informed permission* to describe the process by which communities grant the researcher the privilege and opportunity to carry out mutually-designed projects. This is in contrast to the IRB-generated notion of informed consent, which encodes an asymmetrical and legalistic power relationship between the researcher and those whose lives and actions inform our work. Informed permission goes beyond the paternalistic connotation of protecting those who may not know that they need protection. (See Earle and Simonelli 2005, 2000; Simonelli 2002; Simonelli and Earle 2003a, 2003b.)

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