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REFLECTIONS ON THE STATE IN MODERN MEXICO

(Reflexiones sobre el Estado en México Moderno)

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Abstract: *This paper takes up a discussion on the state in the context of so-called Mexico. It starts by exploring the state's peculiar existence, both in its constant struggle to unify and define itself as something which truly is, and also in its simultaneous concrete yet abstract presence. These two characteristics help us understand the historical development of the state in modern Mexico, and the complexity of pinning down state power. Next, the paper turns to the state's hostile relationship to self-organization, in order to think of the state as a particular form of social organization grounded in relations of domination, and opposed to the self-organization of the people. Lastly, this paper offers some thoughts on recent developments in Mexico, which show the state's continuing quest to smash or regulate self-organization into non-existence, and thus (re)produce the state and its power.*

Keywords: Mexico; State; Autonomy; Self-organization; Anarchism

Resumen: *Este artículo aborda la discusión sobre el Estado en el contexto del llamado México. Comienza explorando la peculiar existencia del Estado, tanto en su continua lucha por unificarse y definirse como algo que realmente es, como en su presencia simultáneamente concreta y abstracta. Estas dos características nos ayudan a entender el desarrollo histórico del Estado en el México moderno, y la complejidad de precisar el poder estatal. A continuación, se aborda la relación hostil del Estado con la autogestión de las comunidades, para pensar el Estado como una forma particular de organización social basada en relaciones de dominación, y opuesta a la autogestión de los pueblos. Por último, este articulo ofrece algunas reflexiones sobre los recientes acontecimientos en México, que muestran la búsqueda continua del Estado para aplastar o regular la autogestión hasta su inexistencia, (re)produciendo así el Estado y su poder.*

Palabras Clave: México; Estado; Autonomía; Autogestión; Anarquismo

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With some hesitation, I want to take up a discussion on the complicated subject of "the state." While filling many volumes of study—on the birth of the state, state formation, state sovereignty, the nation-state, state violence, the capitalist state, state and globalization—the state continues in many ways to elude our understanding. Like trying to clutch smoke with your fist, the state exists but can't quite be grasped.

The state maintains a peculiar existence in human society, both as something abstract, ideological, even mystical or magical, but also material, multifarious, always present, most always violent. And while the state is a historically recent social formation in human history, it has been ideologically fixed into our imaginations to such an extent that it is hard for many people—even those engaged in building alternative worlds—to imagine surviving and even thriving without this thing we call the state.

The "formation of the state" is often traced to the emergence of certain practices or institutions which definitely marked human history. We could talk about the invention of writing, animal and plant domestication, sedentary agriculture, enhanced transportation, and taxation (Scott, 2019). The modern state we might characterize by certain forms of bureaucracy, territoriality, nationalism, ideology, etc. (Rocker, 1937; Anderson, 2006; Sharma and Gupta, 2006). The state is often bound to the idea of sovereignty, and of sovereign control over a certain territory (Hobbes, 1998). One of its most commonly noted characteristics, is its monopoly on the legitimate use of force within a given territory (Weber, 1965).

In modern Mexico, the state is expressed in myriad forms. It can be seen as a political party slogan painted on a wall in an Indigenous town in the sierra mountains. It is the national guard controlling the southern border to prevent the flow of migrants through the country. It is the police killing of a Salvadoran migrant in Tulum. "It was the state!" after 43 students from the Normal Rural School of Ayotzinapa were disappeared under uncertain circumstances in Guerrero. It is the surrounding of Zapatista territories by military and paramilitary forces, and the deployment of thousands of riot police to squelch popular demonstrations on the streets of Mexico City. The state is the law, courts, borders, and prisons. The state is also an idea of something that doesn't quite exist.

A characteristic of the state which underlies much of what the state does, and which runs through much of this essay, is the state's hostile relationship to collective self-organization. This is an insight that I want to take from anarchism. In looking at both the historical development, and the contemporary organization of the state in so-called Mexico, it seems that forms of collective self-organization which escape the organizational forms necessitated by the state, have continually nagged state power and the state idea. In Mexico, it is the ever-present alternative organizational forms, modes of life, etc., which continually remind us of the artificiality of the Mexican state, and the possibilities of social organization and social reproduction beyond the state.

In what follows, I want to think through some facets of the state, and what they mean in the context of modern Mexico. I want to look at the state's peculiar concrete yet abstract existence, which makes its power more elusive and makes resistance to it more complicated. I want to show that fundamental to the state project in Mexico, is the articulation of the idea of the state, and the idea that there is indeed a cohesive state and society. Most importantly, I want to think about the state's relationship to self-organization, to suggest that the state is in the business of smashing and/or regulating collective self-organization into non-existence.

There are of course downfalls to writing about the state, particularly for those like myself, who are much more interested in doing away with the state, than propping up its already fragile

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existence. To write about the state, to seek to define and conceptualize it, can reinforce the existence, importance, and even legitimacy of the state, which are fundamental to its ongoing preservation. Yet, there is also a necessity to continue critiquing the state, to continue rupturing its perceived normalcy, to continue presenting its absurdity, violence, and illegitimacy. There is a need to continue resisting the grasp the state seeks to maintain over our imaginations, bodies, and lives. That is, at least in part, the intention of this essay.

Articulating the State

To think about the state, in any context, but particularly in Latin America and Mexico, is to think about an ongoing struggle for articulation, unification, centralization, and rationalization of both a society and the state. This was the original idea expressed by political philosophers like John Locke and Thomas Hobbes. The foundation of the state necessitated the passage of "primitive beings" from the state of nature into the bonds of civil society, "...by agreeing with other men to join and unite into a community for their comfortable, safe, and peaceable living one amongst another, in a secure enjoyment of their properties, and a greater security against any, that are not of it" (Locke, 1980: 52).

Locke's description of the voluntary association of populations into civil society is of course distorted. Like Marx's description of the expropriation necessary to jumpstart capitalism, the emergence of the state is equally, "...written in the annals of mankind in letters of blood and fire" (Marx, 1990: 875). The emergence of the state in human history, and the imposition of the state in the colonial world, were not processes of voluntary association, but were processes of extreme violence and coercion, which were not accepted willingly, but rather contested with a multiplicity of forms of resistance (Clastres, 1987; Clastres, 2010; Scott, 2019).

From its Independence from Spain in 1821 birthing the Mexican nation-state, to the post-revolutionary quest to unify a whole variety of local and regional powers, to the contemporary war on Indigenous and autonomous self-organization, the Mexican state has sought to articulate itself into a coherent whole, while simultaneously disarticulating alternative forms of organization, land use, decision-making, community power, etc., which confront or escape the organizational forms necessitated by the state.

The quest for the unification, articulation, and centralization of the state, is grounded on a pivotal division, between the state and society, between the ruler and the ruled. French anthropologist, Pierre Clastres, equated this division with the emergence of the state:

> The state is the exercise of political power. We cannot think power without the state and the state without power. In other words: there where one locates an effective exercise of power by a part of society over the rest, we find ourselves confronted with a divided society, that is, a society with a state (Clastres, 2010: 231)

The emergence and existence of the state requires the existence of a separate organ of power, which when disconnected from society, holds power over it. That separate organ of political power is the state. Thus, the fundamental separation for the emergence and existence of the state, is the division between the state and society. This is a division that is constantly res-

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haped, reconstructed, and even rearranged, to reproduce state power and the state's existence.

The state is also founded on the idea of sovereign control over a specific territory, which is integral to the struggle for unification and rationalization inherent to the state. Yet, to say that states actually fully control or manage those territories, is mistaken. Individual and collective activity is never fully captured, articulated, or administered by the state, and different forms of social organization and movement are always present, derivative of local histories, and the material conditions of everyday life.

In Mexico, this is particularly the case, with one of the principal obstacles to the state's full expression, being the 500+ years of Indigenous existence and resistance. Refusing both assimilation and elimination, Indigenous communities throughout Mexico have maintained their languages, their forms of collective organization, festivities and work, their traditions and political and social practices. The inability of the Mexican state to complete its project of domination, is partially derivative of the Indigenous presence, and the resistance of Indigenous communities to the homogenizing efforts of the modern Mexican State.

The Bolivian social theorist, René Zavaleta Mercado, called this character of Latin American societies, the *formacion social abigarrada*, or motley social formation. That is, a society where a plurality of practices, temporalities, and modes of production are present, where the society isn't flattened out and articulated into one particular organizational logic, but disjointed, heterogenous, characterized by its multiplicity and contradiction:

> The notion of the motley social formation rather serves to think the coexistence and disjointed overlapping of various historical times, modes of production, conceptions of the world, languages, cultures, and different structures of authority. In the notion of motley social formation, the emphasis is not placed on articulation and refunctionalization, which is the central feature of the conceptualization of the notion of social-economic formation, but rather the emphasis is placed on the opposite, in the idea of disarticulated overlapping (Tapia, 2010: 100).

Zavaleta's idea of the motley society, hints at the lack of articulation between different modes of social and political organization. If the existence of the state is predicated on the articulation of society and the state, the motley character of Mexican society, is thus an obstacle to the state's cohesive articulation. The motley character of Mexico speaks to a social complexity which threatens certain characteristics demanded by the state form.

There are other factors in Mexico that contribute to its motley character, and challenge the state. For example, the presence of organized crime groups throughout Mexico, which control territories and industries, and compete for local power in complex relationships with the Mexican state. In many instances the state and organized crime groups work hand in hand, fulfilling objectives which are mutually beneficial. The breaking up of autonomous community organization and land defense being one of those mutual objectives.

We can also think about the self-defense and community police forces which have arisen in different parts of the country, particularly in the states of Michoacán and Guerrero, seeking to provide self-organized security and justice in communities overwhelmed by violence (Fini, Fuentes Díaz, 2018). These different forces contribute to the complexity of power and sovereignty

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in Mexico, and animate the multiplicity of forces present which undermine the state's monopoly on the legitimate use of force in a given territory.

Integral to the material unification of a society under the state, is the ideological production of the society and state as such. While materially, Mexico is characterized by its motley character, by struggles for Indigenous autonomy, organized crime forces competing (and cooperating) with the state, etc., fundamental to the existence of the state, is the production of the idea that the state does indeed exist as something cohesive, relevant, and legitimate. While this has material expressions, it is also characterized by an ideological battle.

Sociologist, Philip Abrams, was clear in seeing the state as an ideological force, and the way in which the concept of "the state" serves to obscure the actual social relations which exist in its name. Abrams suggested that the state wasn't a unified totality, and that political institutions that are usually articulated under the name of the state, rather than showing a unity of practice, are actually "...divided against one another, volatile and confused" (Abrams, 1988: 79). For Abrams, "The state is the unified symbol of an actual disunity. This is not just disunity between the political and the economic but equally a profound disunity within the political" (Abrams, 1988: 79). For Abrams, part of the essence of the state, was its conceptual substitution for a set of practices, relationships, and modes of action. The state thus serves to obscure those relationships. He writes, "In sum: the state is not the reality which stands behind the mask of political practice. It is itself the mask which prevents our seeing political practice as it is" (Abrams, 1988: 82).

For Abrams, the idea of the state obscures the actual functioning of political and social practice. The state is an ideological tool, seeking to unify a lack of unity. It is also an ideological tool in obscuring the reality of what the concept supposedly represents. The state thus works in the ideological realm, developing the idea of its unity, existence, and legitimacy.

The state's simultaneous attempt to materially and ideologically unite, concentrate, and rationalize itself and society, leads us to an important characteristic of the state, which is pivotal to the effectiveness of its power. That is, the state's simultaneous concrete yet abstract character. Bolivian political scientist, Oscar Vega Camacho, speaks to this oddity of the state:

> The state is fundamentally an abstraction that has a concretizing force and a power of efficacy through diverse apparatuses, devices, networks, authorities and functions. It is an abstraction because we cannot say: this is the state, here is the state or the state is like this...although, it is very true, that we are accustomed to use these modes, but on behalf of something that is not there, or in charge of that which authorizes to speak in its name, but the state itself is intangible, of a peculiar immateriality or of a different composition of reality (Vega Camacho, 2010: 133).

Camacho makes the point that the state is an abstraction that has power through various apparatuses, agencies, and authorities. In this way the state is present, but it remains at a safe distance. It is an idea, abstract and immaterial, yet productive of material effects.

The concrete/abstract character of the state is built into the common differentiation between the state and government. The difference between the state and government is often articulated in that the state is beyond the material realm, which is the realm of government. Philip Abrams explains this well:

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> ...the experience if not the findings of both academic and practical political research tends towards the conclusion that there is a hidden reality of politics, a backstage institutionalization of political power behind the onstage agencies of government; that power effectively resists discovery; and that it may plausibly be identified as the state (Abrams, 1988: 63).

As Abrams suggests, that conclusion is mistaken. The state, rather than being that hidden reality of politics, which exists behind the government, is what obscures that reality, making it invisible or unknowable. It is the mystification of political power and social relations. That mystification, is then produced as, or productive of, the state.

The mystification of state power is by design. One of the principal features of the modern state is the depersonalization of political power. In the modern state, sovereign political power is moved from an individual figure such as a king or prince, and is taken up by a depersonalized apparatus, or a set of institutions, a thing we call the state. Thus, we come to the state as something abstract, embodied in certain institutions and maintained by force, but without a real existence. This makes the ideological existence of the state paramount.

Anarchists have been perceptive to the simultaneous concrete yet abstract nature of the state, often conceptualizing the state as an abstract entity held above society, in the likes of God, yet material in its effects, in particular in its violence. For many anarchists, the state is something that humans do. Thus, while seemingly separated from society, with its own powers and interests, the state ultimately is society and society is ultimately the state. Emma Goldman explains this well:

> Yet the state is nothing but a name. It is an abstraction. Like other similar conceptions—nation, race, humanity—it has no organic reality. To call the state an organism shows a diseased tendency to make a fetish of words. The state is a term for the legislative and administrative machinery whereby certain business of the people is transacted, and badly so. There is nothing sacred, holy or mysterious about it. The state has no more conscience or moral mission than a commercial company for working a coal mine or running a railroad. The state has no more existence than gods and devils have. They are equally the reflection and creation of man, for man. The individual, is the only reality. The state is but the shadow of man, the shadow of his opaqueness of his ignorance and fear (Goldman, 1998: 113)

For Goldman, the state is an abstraction, which rules society and the individual from the outside. Yet, the state is embodied by humans, and maintained in their minds and actions. It is something constructed by humans, put above them, which then rules over them. It has a concrete, yet abstract existence, thus obscuring the functioning of its power.

This double existence of the state is one of the fundamental characteristics which allows the state to continue to remain relevant, to continue to exist. Governments can be overthrown, politicians can be changed, but the existence of the state remains much the same. Individual people

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might take a certain position in the government, that is, a certain governmental administration might exercise state power at a particular moment, but that individual or that administration isn't state power. State power remains beyond the material, something that can't quite be located, thus making it difficult to be destroyed.

Taking all this together, we might say that the state is characterized by its disunity, and its elusiveness. It's simultaneous existence, but lack of existence. It's attempts to produce unity out of plurality. In Mexico, it is expressed in the ongoing attempts to articulate the motleyness, heterogeneity, plurality or disjointedness of society. It is the attempt to produce its existence from nothingness, and prove its legitimacy against reality.

The State Against Self-Organization

At the intersections of their theoretical insights and political struggles, it has been anarchists who have been adamant about seeing the state as a form of social organization opposed to the collective self-organization of the people. At the heart of their politics, anarchists have espoused and practiced ideas of self-organization, mutual aid, voluntary association, direct action, and prefiguration, as both the means and ends of their struggles against the state, continually reinforcing the point that a free society cannot be reproduced through the institutions or forms of organization which characterize the state (Graeber, 2009; Milstein, 2010).

Classical anarchists like Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and Michael Bakunin argued in favor of the spontaneous organization and free association of human beings, against the attempts at authoritarian imposition, both from reactionary governments, as well as so-called revolutionaries, who seek to impose certain organizational forms on the masses. Spontaneous free action was both the means and ends of the revolution, and the only suitable way in which true freedom could be achieved (Bakunin, 1993; Proudhon, 2011).

Peter Kropotkin pointed out the practices of voluntary association and mutual aid, inherent to animal and human communities, as pivotal components to their evolution. It wasn't deadly competition that characterized human and animal life outside the state, but forms of cooperation, which made the maintenance of the species possible. This of course contradicted the discourse of the foundational political theorists who painted the state of nature—society without a state—as a place of war of all against all. That is, a violent, disorganized, and uninhabitable place. Kropotkin made the point that mutual aid was fundamental to the survival of animal and human life—a vision opposed to the political and organizational forms of capitalism and the state (Kropotkin, 1908).

Gustav Landaeur, recognized the state as a form of organization that was embodied by human beings. For Landaeur, rather than seeing the state as something separated from society, the state was within society, and could only be undermined by embodying alternative forms of organization. He saw these alternative forms of social organization as the essence of anarchism. Landaeur writes,

> A table can be overturned and a window can be smashed, However, those who believe that the state is also a thing or a fetish that can be overturned or smashed are sophists and believers in the Word. The state is a social relationship; a certain way of people relating to one another. It can be destroyed by creating new social relationships; i.e., by people relating to one another differently (Landauer, 2010: 214)

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Landaeur taught us that the state is a particular relationship between human beings. In that way, the state was not something external to individuals and society, but something directly embedded within them. The state then could not be destroyed, without forms of organization being changed that undermine the forms of organization of the state.

Colin Ward understood anarchism in a similar way, as a form of spontaneous organization that exists beneath authoritarian forms dominant in society, such as capitalism and the state. Something always present, yet hidden and attacked by the politics of state and capitalism. He writes,

> Far from being a speculative vision of a future society, [anarchism] is a description of a mode of human organization, rooted in the experience of everyday life, which operates side by side with, and in spite of, the dominant authoritarian trends of our society (Ward, 1996: 18).

For Ward, anarchism was a mode of human organization that is already in practice in various societies and in various facets of everyday life. The struggle was to strengthen and expand those already in practice forms of spontaneous organization. Ward follows by quoting fellow anarchist, Paul Goodman: "A free society cannot be the substitution of a new order for the old order, it is the extension of the spheres of free action until the make up the most of social life" (Goodman, 2011: 34).

Ward and Goodman teach us that anarchism is a form of social organization which is distinct from that of the state. It is a form of spontaneous organization, where practices and organizational forms emerge from within the social body, according to their necessities, not imposed from without. Contemporary anarchist movements have continued this practical approach, engaging in practices of mutual aid, prefiguration, and voluntary association. David Graeber's analysis of direct action—an integral component to anarchist practice—drives home this point:

> ...direct action represents a certain ideal–in its purest form, probably unattainable. It is a form of action in which means and ends become effectively, indistinguishable; a way of actively engaging with the world to bring about change, in which the form of action—or at least, the organization of the action—is itself a model for the change one wishes to bring about (Graeber, 2009: 210).

For Graeber, and for much of the contemporary anarchist movement, anarchism is a social relation that must be embodied and enacted in the here and now. If the state is a certain type of relationship, characterized by authority, hierarchy, and domination—as is the argument made by anarchists—then forms of collective self-organization have the potential to undermine the state, thus destroying it.

One of the principal expressions of the state in modern Mexico, and one of the principal challenges to the maintenance of state legitimacy, is the state's ongoing struggle to overcome, or make legible, the motley condition of Mexican society, to articulate certain behaviors and forms of organization which coincide with those demanded by the state. Alternative forms of social organization, specifically those grounded in communal and regional autonomy and land defense, must be disarticulated to articulate the strength, power, territoriality, and idea of the Mexican state. This is both a historical as well as a contemporary phenomenon.

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The series of struggles and rebellions which shook Mexico in the early 1900's, culminating in the Mexican revolution, carried with it the motley character of Mexican society. As James Scott suggests, "...the Mexican revolution...was a constellation of local revolutions..." (Scott, 1995: ix), which had a unique geography and didn't develop evenly nor even take place throughout the entire country. It was characterized and shaped more by local histories and geographies, material conditions of land dispossession, exploitation, and outright slavery.

Anarchism was highly influential in the development of the revolution, playing an integral part in the plurality of ideas, forces, and interests which participated in the series of events. Most notable was the *Partido Liberal Mexicano*, or Mexican Liberal Party, which while beginning their political journey as liberals, became staunch anarchists in the course of historical events. They called for widespread expropriation, and the building of a post-dictatorial society based upon principles of voluntary association and mutual aid. They resisted the opportunistic politicians who sought to suppress the revolution, by directing revolutionary energies back into the state form. They also resisted state geography, organizing transnationally, seeking to bring about a global revolution.

Post-revolutionary Mexico was characterized by a great diversity of local powers, historical processes, and material conditions. The task for the statesmen was to unify the motley character of Mexican society following the revolution, to newly construct an integrated state—a government of laws and institutions—against the landscape of local strong men, caciques, and caudillos (Nugent and Joseph, 1994). The formation of the first significant political party in Mexico, Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) was fundamental in this process, seeking to bring together different local and regional powers into a one-party government, with a hierarchical structure and a clear chain of command. The post-revolutionary state also took up a politics of *indigenismo*, seeking to "Mexicanize the Indian," which meant, "...a politics of assimilation and then of integration, with strong hues of colonialist politics..." (Korsbaek, Sámano Rentería, 2007: 204).

Different struggles through the middle years of the 1900's in Mexico resisted the state's attempts at articulation, unification, centralization, rationalization, including campesino, worker, and student struggles. The student and campesino struggles during the 1960's and 1970's were met with extensive state repression, including the Tlatelolco massacre in 1968 which left hundreds of protesting students dead in Mexico City, and Mexico's dirty war which saw forced disappearances and extrajudicial executions carried out by the state against community organizers (Aviña, 2014). Furthermore, the ever-present practices of social reproduction, the forms of voluntary association, mutual aid, and community organization, which reproduce life against its destruction, were maintained throughout the 1900's, continually showing a glimpse of the possibilities of a society without the state (Federici, 2018; Gutierrez Aguilar, 2015; El Apantle, 2019).

The 1980's and 1990's in Mexico were characterized by extensive Indigenous organization, including mobilizations around the 500-year anniversary of the colonization of the Americas, along with the Zapatista uprising in 1994 in Chiapas. The Zapatista uprising was a pivotal moment for resistance movements in Mexico, and was fundamental in giving life to anti-systemic struggle, both in Mexico and across the globe. With the failure of the dialogues between the Mexican government and the Zapatista Army of National Liberation—the government failed to fulfill the San Andrés accords which were signed by the Zapatistas and the Mexican government—the Zapatista movement directed its energy toward building autonomy in practice, rather than negotiating with the state.

Casting a lasting influence on political struggles in Mexico, the Zapatista movement put autonomous politics into discussion in Mexico, directly challenging the unifying aspirations of

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the Mexican state. With the influence of the Zapatista movement, autonomy has become one of the principal expressions of political struggle for Indigenous movements in Mexico. It has been reflected in the struggles for community and municipal autonomy in various parts of the country including most pointedly in the states of Chiapas, Guerrero, Oaxaca, and Michoacán (Gasparello and Quintana Guerrero, 2009; Soriano Hernández, 2009a; Soriano Hernández, 2009b).

Amidst this panorama, it is important to reflect again on the unifying necessities of the state. The construction of the Mexican state and of Mexican society is reliant upon the state in some way dealing with the motley character of the country, of the presence of the multiple, confusing character of both the society and the state. In Mexico, this of course means dealing with Indigenous communities, and in contemporary Mexico, their struggles for self-determination, land defense, and autonomy.

Working from the Bolivian context, Luis Tapia explains how the state develops and articulates itself through the disarticulation, disorganization, and destruction of community forms of organizations. Tapia writes,

> Modern societies are erected on the disorganization of communitarian forms, that were/are forms of totalization of social life. The fragmentation of these totalities, caused by the separation-concentration in some structural spheres, which thus acquire greater importance like the economy and politics converted into the state, leaves other spheres and processes of social life in conditions of disarticulation, marginality and invisibility (Tapia, 2008: 85)

This is the case in Mexico, the articulation of the state as both a material and ideological force, the coming into being of the state, the reproduction of the state, the maintenance of its existence, is reliant upon the disorganization of other practices and logics. In Mexico these other practices and logics are expressed most notably in processes of community self-organization and autonomous struggle, carried out in Indigenous and campesino communities in various parts of the country. The state requires the capture of social life into certain processes which circumvent their free expression.

All Roads Lead Back to the State

Recent developments in Mexico have led many defenders of the state to celebrate. With a turn toward multiculturalism, and the diversification of political parties, many believe Mexico to be a strengthening representative democracy. One would have to ignore the reality of Mexican society, with the assassinations, disappearances, femicides, state violence, etc., to make such an argument, but it has become commonplace. The discourse of Mexico as a strengthening representative democracy has particularly taken hold with the win of Andrés Manuel López Obrador in the 2018 election with his MORENA party, and the idea that Mexico is developing into a multi-party pluralist democracy.

Fundamental to this discourse, is the idea that the Mexican political system is opening up with greater participation from historically marginalized sectors, like the country's Indigenous populations. With more representation in the state, with laws that recognize the cultural and so-

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cial distinctiveness of Indigenous populations, the country is seen as developing a more inclusive political system that represents all social sectors. Inherent to this is the enlightenment idea that that the state is necessarily and constantly improving, and that it is always strengthening democracy, institutions, the rule of law, the legitimacy of the state. The state itself becomes the only terrain where political life takes place. It monopolizes politics, seeking to capture everything.

If we engage more seriously with recent developments in Mexico, with the supposed inclusion of a diversity of sectors into representational spaces in the state, and the extension of new rights to certain populations, we see the way in which they play into the ruses of the state. One of the fundamental tasks of the state, or of the creation of the idea of the state, is the state's intervention into and/or overseeing of the everyday processes of social life. I discussed above the way in which the state seeks to disarticulate self-organization. Part of how that happens is that the state becomes the ultimate enforcer and recognizer of what is legitimate and what is not. The state becomes the ultimate solution and ultimate authority, to the point where even those who resist the state, seek the state's approval in that resistance. The use of rights is fundamental to these tactics of state control. Let's take up some recent examples.

In 1992, Mexico passed an agrarian reform, seeking to beat back gains from the 1910 Mexican revolution, and to set the stage for the inclusion of Mexico into the North American Free Trade Agreement. The 1992 agrarian reform, opened up communal and ejido lands to privatization and developed a legal and judicial apparatus through which agrarian issues were to be resolved. Part of the agrarian reform was a national mapping and titling program (PROCEDE) of all socially held lands in the country, necessary for the development of the new agrarian reality (De Ita, 2019).

Land titles were to be defined clearly by state agencies, and those titles were to be held up by state courts and tribunals. Through the agrarian reform, the state diminished the capacity for collective self-organization on communal lands, and developed a system of laws and bureaucracy that force communities and individuals into the logic, territoriality, and power structure of the state. The 1992 legislation then was directed toward changing the culture of agrarian life in Mexico, to develop another one, more in tune with the necessities of the state. That is, to develop different types of organization, decision-making, and even relationships to land, that fit within the logic of state power.

The production of the state in this way, was done through the construction and institutionalization of individual property rights, of securing land ownership and boundaries through the law, of producing a whole legal and institutional apparatus of which to intervene in the way in which people interact and relate to the land. The legislation was based on implementing cultural change in Indigenous and campesino communities, including the way they relate to their land and make decisions around land-use, seeking to institutionalize decision-making, and put the state at the center of authority. In this way, the agrarian reform of 1992, was a fundamental component to recent state-making in Mexico, and a clear expression of state-making as cultural revolution (Corrigan, Sayer, 1985).

Another example can be drawn from the emergence of the politics of recognition around Indigenous communities and their *uses y costumbres,* or customs and traditions in Mexico. Following widespread Indigenous organization and resistance throughout the 1980's and into the early 1990's—which culminated in the Zapatista rebellion on January 1, 1994—the Mexican state, like many Latin American States at the time, began to move away from the politics of *indigenismo* to the politics of multiculturalism and Indigenous recognition. Rather than seeking to

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eliminate cultural difference by assimilating Indigenous peoples into a cohesive Mexican identity, as a response to heightened social struggle for self-determination and autonomy, the state decided to recognize Indigenous diversity granting Indigenous populations unique rights for which to protect their forms of organization.

The state of Oaxaca, for example, changed its state electoral procedures in 1995 and then in 1998, allowing Indigenous municipalities to elect their municipal authorities according to their customs and traditions without the interference of political parties. While this has been celebrated as a step toward Indigenous self-determination, it must also be seen as a way in which the state seeks to oversee and regulate Indigenous self-determination into non-existence.

The incorporation of Indigenous customs and traditions into the legal apparatus, into the system of laws and rights, brings self-organized processes into the institutional processes of the state. It helps articulate the motley character of Mexican society into something legible, to use James Scott's terminology (Scott, 1998). The state sets certain procedures and temporalities of elections, and carries out extensive oversight and verification. The recognition of Indigenous customs and traditions, is recognized only in so far as the state oversees the entire process, setting the temporalities and conditions of which make the supposedly self-determined decision-making processes legible to the state.

A last example can be drawn from the state of Michoacán. In the 2010's, with the backdrop of a failed war on drugs and expanding insecurity in the country, many towns began to form armed self-defense forces, seeking to provide security where the state had failed to do so. This was initiated by Indigenous communities in the neighboring state of Guerrero, but took on a more widespread character in the state of Michoacán. The armed self-defense forces quickly expanded throughout Michoacán territory.

While at first the state sought to disarm the self-defense forces, claiming the existence of these forces threatened the rule of law and institutionality of the Mexican state, the state quickly realized repression of the self-defense forces wasn't an option. In order to control the situation, the state decided to make a deal with the supposed leaders of the self-defense forces, incorporating them into the state apparatus as *fuerzas rurales*, or rural forces (Gledhill, 2015; Guerra Manzo, 2015). The agreement made it necessary that the self-defense forces register their members and weapons with the Secretary of National Defense. It included more oversight and more cooperation between the state and the self-defense forces, ultimately disarticulating the self-organized character of the self-defense forces and converting them into an apparatus of the state.

These various examples, show the way in which the Mexican state seeks to articulate a diversity of forces, powers, and relationships into the idea and institutionality of the state. Those spaces of politics and social organization that exist outside the state, inhibit the state from fulfilling its mission and its image. The state needs to disarticulate the motley character of Mexican society, in order to flatten out the various forces into this thing we call the state. The state, most fundamentally, needs to disarticulate forms of collective self-organization. It needs to do so because self-organization ruptures the necessary cohesion, articulation, centralization, and rationalization required by the state.

The disarticulation is done through tactics of incorporation and cooptation as expressed above, but also through the use of force, such as police, military, and paramilitary violence. Armed forces are necessary to intervene when subjects don't abide their imposed subjectivity, or when forms of self-organization and territorial defense contrast with those demanded by the state and capitalism. It is also done by movements themselves, who make demands to the state for

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autonomy or justice, upholding and reinforcing the sovereign power of the state. The state is thus reproduced in movements that oppose it. These are subjects for another essay, but they are important points related to the state's reproduction, and its incessant drive to disarticulate anything that is not it.

Conclusion:

The state is grounded on the idea that human beings are incapable of governing themselves, and that there needs to be a sovereign, supposedly neutral authority—the state—to settle disputes and provide protection. Like the state itself, this idea of the inability of human beings to govern themselves is an ideological construction, which seeks to justify the state and denigrate the possibilities of alternative forms of human self-organization.

Regardless of the state's quest to legitimize itself, the evidence seems to point to the contrary. The state has become the marker for a way of organizing society based in authority, hierarchy, domination, and violence. It is a way of organizing society that must disarticulate community forms of organization, all the while justifying, legitimizing, and imposing itself. As Abrams suggests,

> The state, in sum, is a bid to elicit support for or tolerance of the insupportable and intolerable by presenting them as something other than themselves, namely, legitimate, disinterested domination. The study of the state, seen thus, would begin with the cardinal activity involved in the serious presentation of the state: legitimating the illegitimate (Abrams, 1988: 76).

If the state is in the business of legitimizing the illegitimate, it is equally in the business of delegitimizing alternatives to itself. The state is presented as the solution to a variety of horrors, which while continually repeated, have never really been proven. The state becomes the solution to a problem that doesn't exist. Thus, the state is far from a solution, but an attempt to legitimize domination.

In this essay, I have made a series of interventions into the subject of the state. I have tried to show the state's peculiar existence, both as something that exists but doesn't exist, and as something that continually seeks to unify and create itself, by eliminating, controlling, registering, and overseeing forms of self-organization. The state must smash or regulate self-organization into non-existence, in order to produce itself as the state.

In Mexico, this process is an ongoing quest to manage the motley character of society, and to stamp out collective self-organization. It has been challenged most directly by the rise in community struggles for autonomy, which have organized for and embodied, self-determination, land defense, territorial control, etc. The contemporary state has met these self-organized processes with repression and cooptation, to continue disarticulating forms of collective self-organization, and continue bringing social life into the spheres of the state.

The coming years will be telling for the future of the state in Mexico and states across the globe. What seems important is rather than continually trying to justify, improve, and strengthen the state, its idea and its form, we'd be better off cultivating the collective self-organization,

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mutual aid, and voluntary association, already active in human communities. Those practices, as opposed to the state, offer the possibilities for truly alternative worlds.

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