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Emiliano Zapata: Figure, Image, Symbol

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Abstract

How did an archetype of rebellion become a personification of national identity? Emiliano Zapata (1879-1919), one of the leaders of the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920), has often signified competing elements for varied constituencies locked in ideological conflict. Each narrative seeks to claim Zapata's iconic status as a symbol for what they respectively represent nationally. Hundreds of portraits of Zapata have been fundamental to the construction of each of these competing narratives. My essay addresses the reasons the image of Zapata has been engaged and how its meaning has been altered through time.
Emiliano Zapata: Figure, Image, Symbol

Although known among members of the ruling class in Mexico as a “criminal” during his lifetime, Emiliano Zapata has subsequently come to signify, on the one hand, ruling-class institutions, seamless ideologies, and a unified national heritage. Yet, on the other hand, his name he is synonymous with the Zapatistas in Chiapas, the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN), who contradict all of the above. The difference between the villainous depiction of Zapata by the rural elite of Mexico in 1910 and that of Zapata as a popular icon today claimed by all sides raises many questions regarding the early construction of Zapata as villain, then, eventually as the personification of national identity, cultural heritage, social justice, regional tourism, and now the popular insurgency against the state. What happened to convert an “outlaw,” who had to be eliminated, into a national and cultural symbol cutting across class lines?

The image of Zapata has a rich and complex history that spans nearly a century. During his lifetime, Zapata also shaped his own image to represent different identities and characteristics. In death, Zapata’s image was transformed into a sign that has been and continues to be aligned with various competing and distinct ideologies, which change his public signification. Diverse applications frame Zapata within a variety of contexts and represent him in multiple forms, thus indicating the importance he holds as a symbol. The main objective of my work is to investigate the image of Zapata and the impetus behind some of its many transformations. For the purposes of this essay, I will discuss a select number of images that illustrate the diverse groups that have evoked Zapata and the multiple meanings that have been imprinted on his image.
Zapata and the Mexican Revolution: An Historical Overview

Emiliano Zapata, born in 1879, grew up in the village of Anenecuilco in the state of Morelos. Most members of the community were campesinos or members of the agrarian labor class. The Zapata family was part of a small rural middle class of Anenecuilco. They lived in a home of adobe and stone, rather than a hut of straw, and owned some land and livestock. Neither Emiliano, nor his brother Eufemio, ever had to work as laborers on haciendas.¹ The Zapatas were better off than most in Anenecuilco; however, this did not blind Emiliano to the realities of poverty that so many around him dealt with, nor separate him from the cultural milieu of his village.²

As one of the leaders of the Mexican Revolution, Zapata promoted agrarian reform and regional autonomy in the form of grass roots self-government. Zapata’s involvement in the Mexican Revolution began as a fight for the reclamation of land and resources on behalf of the disenfranchised villagers of his hometown, Anenecuilco. Hacendados, or the owners of large agricultural estates known as haciendas, had methodically expropriated campesino land as they expanded their agribusiness enterprises. As a result villagers were pushed off their lands and forced to work as sharecroppers or as field hands on the haciendas, often suffering as well from personal abuses at the hands of the caciques, or overseers of the haciendas. The wealthy hacendados, also identified as the agrarian elite, lived opulent lives, while most villagers existed in abject poverty under horrid conditions.³

Popular control of local government was also a primary concern for Zapata, as it directly impacted the agrarian issue. Events in early 1909 related to the governorship of Morelos aggravated an already heated situation, thus marking, as John Womack has noted, the beginning stage of the Mexican Revolution. Pablo Escandón was the local hacienda owners’ choice for
governor. Escandón, a member of Mexico’s elite class and a hacendado, was considered easily maneuverable and a perfect ally in the continued “legal” appropriation of resources in Morelos. The Leyvistas, an opposition group to Escandón, supported Patricio Leyva as a candidate for the governorship and began a vigorous campaign. Zapata soon joined the Villa de Ayala Leyvista group. On March 15, 1909, after an unprecedented opposition campaign by the Leyvistas and as a result of intense repression of the opposition, Pablo Escandón took over as governor of Morelos and served to “establish the practice of oppression as policy”.

All across the state of Morelos, villages were involved in land disputes with neighboring haciendas. In September of 1909, Zapata was elected as the president of his village council, after which he took a lead role in defending the villager’s land and water rights. In late spring or early summer of 1910, Zapata gathered armed men and took a public stand. Efforts to farm the land that surrounded their villages were temporarily successful, but events spiraled into a grave situation. Eventually, local rebellion turned to regional revolt.

Although independent movements took place across Mexico in 1910, Francisco Madero's uprising against Porfirio Díaz, the President of Mexico, launched November 20, 1910 has been designated as “the” official beginning of the Mexican Revolution. The civil war involving multiple theaters of conflict continued in various forms until 1920. At one point an alliance with Madero was appealing to Zapata, specifically because of a clause in Madero's Plan of San Luis Potosí that proclaimed restitution of land to Indian communities, which was a bid for the support of rural families who suffered from Díaz's land policy. Agrarian reform was always the focus of Zapata's agenda and was the initial impetus to his rebellion in Morelos. Zapata's Plan de Ayala clearly stated his goals: "popular reforms carried out in the field . . . [so] that dispossessed farming families would recover their lands or receive new grants from expropriated haciendas,
and that not advocates but actual veterans of the struggle would dominate the resulting regime.\(^8\)

In the early month of 1911, Torres Burgos established an alliance between the southern forces and Madero. By March, however, Burgos resigned from his post as chief. In his place, Zapata was elected “Supreme Chief of the Revolutionary Movement of the South,” a title that was eventually recognized by most leaders in the state of Morelos. By April 1911, Zapata was thus recognized as the Maderista commander in Morelos. Zapata, however, was soon denied recognition by more conservative forces and his reputation was marred, since his platform was too radical for Madero (himself a hacendado) and threatened to dismantle the hierarchical social structure established by the rural elite, whether they supported Diaz or Madero. He was depicted by some as a violent and murderous criminal, incapable of leadership, which resulted in loss of legitimacy in certain social sectors.

On May 21, 1911 the Treaty of Ciudad Juárez was signed and Madero’s revolt ended, and by November 6, 1911 Madero took office as President of Mexico. The relationship between Zapata and Madero became increasingly strained between May and November of 1911. In November, Zapata produced the Plan de Ayala, which laid out his general principles for land reform and withdrew recognition of Madero.\(^9\) Zapata remained not only in conflict with Madero until the latter’s death in early 1913, but also came to view Madero himself as a betrayer of the Revolution.

In February 1913 General Victoriano Huerta assassinated Madero and seized the office of President of Mexico in a military coup, which resulted in another call to arms to those who had fought in alignment with Madero. Under Venustiano Carranza and his Plan de Guadalupe, the northern forces of Mexico formed an alliance and denounced Huerta’s rightwing regime. Zapata also fought against Huerta, but would not be included in Carranza’s alliance, which also
defended hacendados. By the summer of 1914 Huerta was removed from power and Carranza positioned himself to be the next President of Mexico.¹⁰

Yet in his attempt to assume power, Carranza violated the Plan de Guadalupe, which displeased his allies, namely, Alvaro Obregón and Pancho Villa. The Convention of Aguascalientes, coordinated by Obregón from October 10 through November 10, 1914, addressed the leadership of the country and the political and social agenda for the post-revolutionary government. The Convention led to an alliance between the Zapatistas and Villa. Carranza refused to recognize the Convention’s decisions and its naming of another person as President. The result was a split between the Constitutionalists, led by Carranza and Obregón, and the Conventionists, led by Zapata and Villa. And although the Conventionists were able to take Mexico City in December 1914, by January 1915 the Constitutionalist forces regained control of the capital and the country. By October 1915 the union between Zapata and Villa had also dissolved, further fragmenting the contending forces.

Zapata was a threat to the more right wing Carrancista government, which undermined any chance of peace. Thus, Zapata was assassinated by federal soldiers on April 10, 1919, an act that was authorized by Venustiano Carranza as President of Mexico. The bloodied body was publicly displayed and the burial became a spectacle with the intention of proving Zapata’s defeat. Public images of Zapata’s death were meant to demoralize those who supported his efforts and to undermine the Zapatista forces. Instead, many myths arose that Zapata was actually still alive.¹¹ Zapata’s martyrdom only served to propel him into the national spotlight, as a part legendary and part mythic figure, who symbolized the people’s struggle against oppression.
As shown above, Zapata’s personal story and struggle are intertwined with agrarian reform and popular revolution. The fundamental meaning of the image of Zapata correlates with the concepts of the egalitarian distribution of land, the decentralization of government, and rebellion in the name of justice. These concepts, however, have been converted over time to mean liberty and social justice for the popular classes. Yet, Zapata’s image has also been an ideal symbol for official politicians who recognize the popularity of Zapata’s platform for land reform, even when they are not really committed to it. Political figures represent themselves as sympathetic to Zapata’s ideology—though their actions demonstrate that they are not—in order to garner support for themselves politically with the popular classes and in an attempt to validate their distinctive agendas. Through an association with Zapata, these politicians attempt in addition to maintain a connection with la Revolución, which has come to represent, “democracy and agrarian reform,” among other things. Zapata has frequently been built up as a symbol of the new government and within this context is portrayed as a National Hero across class lines. Contradicting this official image, though, is the one championed by the EZLN, which sees Zapata as the symbol of an incomplete revolutionary process.

Fundamental to constructing competing national narratives of “La Revolución” have been hundreds of portraits of Zapata by major Mexican artists. In an attempt to induce and/or reassign ideological principles attributed to Zapata, these narratives invoke him in various ways. Each reference is deployed to re-signify. Unfortunately, the tendency in most art historical literature (though there are a few exceptions) has been to reduce Zapata’s image to that of an official icon for the nation-state in Mexico. Yet, competing narratives of the revolution in Mexico disallow such a one-dimensional reading, and deepen the case for the EZLN Zapatistas’ dissenting viewpoint.
For many Mexican artists, Zapata’s image is a signifier of the active struggle for the civil rights of working class Mexican people, especially those of indigenous ancestry in southern Mexico. Thus his image is the personification of the dissident ideals held by many Mexican artists, which explains why Zapata’s portrait would be incorporated within their artwork and elevated as a symbol of their “non-official” values. These compelling illustrations immortalize Zapata, while encoding his image with a new set of meanings. In association with these numerous and varied contexts, Zapata’s image connotes a divergent number of narratives and ideologies.

**Zapata: The First Photographs**

A common statement regarding early photography in general and the Casasola Archive Photographs specifically is that they are objective and truthful. Yet selective reporting, staging, framing, editing, and limited publication presented subjective choices regarding who, what, and how. Therefore, it is not the untainted truth that is captured in the photographs, but rather a carefully constructed image, with varying degrees of truth-value.

The earliest known images of Zapata were photographs. The identities of those who photographed Zapata are usually unknown, with the exception of Hugo Brehme, a German photographer working for the Casasola Agency, who is credited with many of the known photographs of Zapata. Zapata was aware of photography as a method for generating ideological legitimacy. Within each photographic portrait, Zapata engaged and applied various modes of representation, as one would a mask, in order to construct desired attributes in the portraits. Each “mask” is a signifier for a distinct role, whether as charro or as military leader. Today the Casasola photographic collection serves as the primary source for images of the Mexican
Revolution. Through circulation in various formats, Agustín Víctor Casasola is responsible for popularizing the photographic images of Zapata that we have come to know and recognize today.

Although there are multiple photographs of Zapata on horseback, the image identified as “Zapata, Charro, Equestrian Portrait” is the one that is most commonly reproduced. [Figure 1] In this portrait Zapata wears moderately formal charro attire. Equestrian portraits are intended to depict the status of the subject and his abilities. An equestrian portrait alludes to the competence of the rider and promotes an image of skill, valor, and authority. Historically, horses were associated with privilege reserved for a monarch or members of elite society. Riding a horse, hunting, and military activities are linked by their demands of similar faculties. The depiction of a monarch mounted expressed dexterity, military skill, and authority suggesting the ability to govern.

The image of the Mexican charro is a symbol loaded with stereotypical associations related to: one, the Mexican patriarchal and hierarchical social system; two, the Mexican rural lifestyle; and three, national patriotism. In the Americas the horse signifies the conquest and hierarchical social structure established in Mexico by the conquistadores and early Spanish settlers. Additionally, between the sixteenth and mid-eighteenth centuries, the indigenous of the Americas were not allowed to own, ride, or use a horse. Charros are known as skilled horseman and affiliated with cattle and agricultural activities. The period of Porfirio Díaz’ presidency (1876-1910) is considered by some the golden age of the charro. The rural economy during this period was controlled by hacendados who owned large agricultural estates. These haciendas were a vital environmental space for the continuation of the charro and the agricultural activities associated with him.
Figure 1. Photographer Unknown, “Zapata, Charro, Equestrian Portrait,” 1911-1919. © 66158 SINAFO-Fototeca Nacional
The equestrian portrait is evidence of the first character type and narrative Zapata constructed for himself, and it is this identity that first became known as he gained national attention. Zapata held a leadership position in the Mexican Revolution because he was identified as an individual who embodied traits admired in a leader. Military ability, authority, and social status are symbolically represented in equestrian portraits. Zapata, through his identity as a charro usurped attributes commonly aligned with the agrarian elite of Mexico. Zapata recognized and claimed the traits and prestige associated with the charro by wearing traditional charro attire on a regular basis; during the revolution he even transformed this type of dress into his military uniform. As the horse is associated with the conquest of Mexico and the agrarian elite of Mexico, when Zapata took a seat on a horse, as a rider of indigenous ancestry, he inverted the sign of conquest and oppression.

Very early on Zapata struggled to be acknowledged as a legitimate and capable leader within the revolutionary movement. Although he was elected in March of 1911 “Supreme Chief of the Revolutionary Movement of the South” and endowed in April of 1911 with official status as the Maderista chief in Morelos, he would have to struggle continually to maintain his reputation. Even within the southern region of Mexico, where his support was strongest, Zapata had to constantly recruit men and assert his position as General of the Southern forces. There were other men vying for power in the south who regularly challenged Zapata’s orders and leadership. In addition, Zapata was considered by many of his enemies to be a rebellious and vicious bandit, incapable of leadership. Therefore, it was necessary to create and project a clear image of civilized and capable leadership to go along with Zapata’s actual role as a superb leader on the battlefield.
A principal photographic portrait of Zapata as General of the Southern Forces shows him standing next to a staircase at the Mocteczuma Hotel, located in the city of Cuernavaca, Morelos. [Figure 2] This particular portrait was taken by Hugo Brehme, most likely between May 26 and June 10, 1911. The hotel served as Zapata’s lodgings and possibly his headquarters between May 26 and August 1911. Zapata and his men were not outfitted with official uniforms. The southern revolutionary forces supplied their own apparel. This meant that the men wore their daily clothing, which disclosed their social status and manner of earning a living. For the Zapatistas, temporary soldiers and full-time farmers, their uniform was either a version of charro attire or white cotton calzones.

In this portrait Zapata wears a plain black charro costume, usually considered a working uniform, made up of a jacket, vest and pants. The charro dress distinguishes Zapata from his men. Within this particular context, the charro suit is transformed into a combat uniform through the enhancement of bandoliers across the chest, a rifle in his right hand, and the sword at his waist. The sash worn by Zapata is a frequent “badge” for both military and civilian leaders. The hand on the hilt of the sword imitates a conventional military stance.

The manner in which the sash was acquired is significant for its meaning as a symbol of leadership. Ariel Arnal speculates that the sash was possibly given to Zapata by General Manuel Asúnsolo upon turning over the city of Cuernavaca. Asúnsolo’s act of handing over command of the city, as well as his gifting an item from his own personal apparel, enhance the meaning of the sash to signify Zapata’s leadership of the city, along with the legitimacy gained through recognition as Madero’s General of the Southern Army.

The sword particularly denotes European weaponry and had long been part of the standard visual vocabulary of portraiture for leaders and heroes. More specific to the period of
Figure 2. Hugo Brehme, “Zapata, General of the Southern Forces,” May 26–June 10, 1911. © 63464 SINAFO-Fototeca Nacional
the Mexican Revolution, it can be read as a signifier for the overthrow of the regime of Porfirio Díaz, who invoked this symbolic gesture. Díaz instigated a Europeanization of Mexico, which carried over into military dress. He himself donned the European military style attire and was infamously associated with his sword, which became a symbol for his oppressive dictatorship. Zapata’s sword most likely came from a federal soldier acquired either as war booty or possibly as a gift from one of his men. The connoted message the sword emits when worn by Zapata within this portrait is twofold; it evokes the defeat of Diaz’s regime and it designates Zapata as a legitimate leader. Zapata was aware that it was necessary to assert a persona that would motivate others to join the Revolution and follow him. It also became painfully evident that he was not respected or recognized by some as a legitimate leader of the revolution. His solution was to demote the formal guise of military leadership to the level of popular insurgency. In doing so, he visually constructed an image of himself as a worthy and competent military leader of the people, not of professional soldiers.

The portrait of Zapata as General of the Southern Forces encapsulates essential characteristics of leadership and status that became part of the popular narrative of Zapata the military leader. Zapata generates an impression of formidable strength and unquestioned leadership through the composition, his alert pose and matching gestures. Compositionally, Zapata is the focal point, located centrally and in the forefront of the photograph. The full-length format of the image is also one traditionally reserved for heads of state. The three-quarter turned posture is reminiscent of men of uncommon power in post-Renaissance portraiture. The banister of the brick staircase behind Zapata resembles or refers to classical columns, a common motif in portraits of power. Brehme very likely requested or assisted Zapata in invoking established paradigms associated with traditional portraiture. The result is a portrait that exemplifies the
appropriate characteristics and qualities of leadership connected to a forceful figure of the popular forces.

However, this image was not widely circulated by Zapata’s adversaries, as it illustrates exactly the opposite character they desired to project. This photograph was not included in the news journals of the day, as the intent of most urban publications was to represent Zapata negatively. Conversely, the narrative associated with Zapata the military leader, one constructed by Zapata’s enemies, is that of a hostile bandit, incapable of decorum or leadership.

**Zapata: “The Villain”**

During the Mexican Revolution the Mexican press was the main resource for the urban population of Mexico to remain informed regarding ongoing events. Through the pretext of providing factual information, publications were utilized to sway public opinion in favor of a distinct political agenda, often at odds with the interests of the popular classes. Prior to the Revolution *El Imparcial* was the semi-official newspaper of the Mexican Government and it is still considered one of the most influential dailies in Mexico City. When the Revolution began, the newspaper focused on discrediting the revolutionary forces, Zapata in particular. Zapata was a target because of how his platform of land redistribution and localized government posed a challenge to the agricultural capitalists of Mexico, who supported a slander campaign against him. Illustrated magazines that were owned and operated by Mexico’s elite class, such as *Multicolor* founded in 1910, projected an anti-revolutionary message in images towards the 85% of the Mexican population who were illiterate. Caricatures within these “popular” publications added to the disparagement of Zapata. These newspapers marked a particularly interesting phase in the history of Zapata’s image: they provided the first illustrations of Zapata; they used
ethnocentric manipulations of Zapata’s character; and they produced the first mass cultural image of Zapata for the Mexican populace at large.

“Zapata is the Modern Attila” exclaimed the front page headline of El Imparcial on June 20, 1911. A caricature published in Multicolor on August 24, 1911 illustrates this sentiment. [Figure 3] The illustration is entitled “At the hour of the meal” and depicts Zapata gnawing on a human bone. Zapata is identifiable by his sombrero, mustache, the bandoliers across his chest, and the uniform of the agrarian laborer or campesino’s calzone. His hat is embellished with skulls around the brim. Features are grossly exaggerated, the hands are monstrously enlarged and his nails claw-like. The caption below the image reads, “The leg of the hacendado that I ate at lunch was more flavorful.” Zapata’s cannibalistic meal is presented as preceded by a scene of killing and dismemberment, made evident by the machete and knife at Zapata’s feet. The violent and cannibalistic image, which has a colonial antecedent going back to the sixteenth century, is further inflated by the numerous bones in the bowl in front of Zapata, and by the severed hand and foot strewn to his right.29 Across the machete’s blade is a heart with an arrow through it, Zapata’s initial’s, and the statement “I serve my owner.” The butt of a rifle, visible behind Zapata’s left, is also marked with Zapata’s initials. Labeling the weapons as belonging to Zapata implicates him as responsible for the deaths of the poor hacendados being eaten.

Behind Zapata is a dark sky and vultures sitting on a brick wall waiting for any remains of the meal. Next to Zapata stands a miniaturized figure who also wears a campesino’s uniform. His dark skin, large flat nose, and large lips indicate he is of African descent.30 African slaves were imported to Mexico between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries.31 In Mexico, those of African descent were considered inferior and barbaric by the colonial elite, as were the
Figure 3. Anonymous, “A la hora de la comida,” *Multicolor*, August 24, 1911. Collection of the Center for Southwest Research, Zimmerman Library, University of New Mexico.
indigenous people of Mexico who also formed the labor force. Based on these hegemonic beliefs, discriminatory laws were established to deny workers of color their social and political rights. The dark skinned figure in the caricature can be read as representative of all campesinos in the minds of the ruling elite. Thus both ethnic groups are seen as uncivilized and as undeserving of basic rights, nor with any valid claim to social or political justice.

Representations in news publications ascribe political and social significance, which amplifies celebrity. It is necessary to examine the accounts and illustrations of this period because they are what constitute the initial history and narrative of Zapata. Awareness of these early narratives and illustrations of Zapata also magnifies the shift that occurs with the institutionalization of the Revolution, during the 1920s, which re-interprets Zapata as a symbol of national interests.

During the decades that followed the Mexican Revolution leaders of Mexico harnessed elements they found useful for their nationalistic programs. Thus, the Revolution was institutionalized and its narrative was rewritten, with each new administration interjecting itself into it and claiming ideals recognized as popular. In the 1920s and 1930s a government-run campaign to consolidate a national popular culture around the Mexican Revolution, directed towards agricultural communities of Mexico, took the form of educational textbooks, such as Fermín Lee: libro para enseñar a leer a los niños de las escuelas rurales published in 1927. Zapata was a key figure in these types of publications.

Zapata in the work of “the” Mexican Muralists

Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, and David Alfaro Siqueiros are the most well known Mexican painters associated with the government sponsored Mural Program. The Mexican Mural Program plays a significant role in the construction of Mexican national identity
and ideology. It is the first occasion since the Revolution, but not the last, that art making is incorporated into public policy and harnessed to promote political ideology. The project was meant to complement the educational reforms enacted by Alvaro Obregón’s administration under José Vasconcelos, the Minister of Education, as well as to visually establish the institutionalization of the Revolution. Within the murals there was a concerted effort to create a visual language that was easily readable, which resulted in the establishment of new symbols for Mexican history and art. Rivera, Orozco, and Siqueiros were integral to this development, and as such their work is crucial in the overall development of the meaning and symbolism attached to the image of Zapata.

The Mural Program initially began in 1922 with Rivera’s commission and completion of the mural “Creación,” located in the amphitheater of the National Preparatory School. Throughout his career Rivera depicted Zapata over forty times in paintings, drawings, prints, and mural cycles. Rivera’s fame and ultra-leftwing politics unquestionably inflected the way Zapata was interpreted in his murals. The popular narratives of Zapata, as opposed to the “official ones, were often interwoven with Rivera’s very particular representation of Zapata as signifier for “popular mobilization” and key representative of agrarian reform and revolutionary leadership.

**Zapata in the narrative of “La Revolución” as illustrated by the TGP**

The Taller de Gráfica Popular or TGP was founded in Mexico City in 1937 by Leopoldo Méndez, Pablo O’Higgins, and Luis Arenal. The TGP’s graphic work is usually presented and/or perceived as representative of Mexican national history, culture and identity. Issues addressed by the group include: Mexico's heritage and history; the poverty and oppression of the Indian population; the most basic needs of the working and peasant classes—food, education, and
freedom; and workers movements. The legacy of the TGP is of far-reaching cultural significance because their work, which also promoted political and social change on a global level, circulated worldwide and impacted international artists.

In 1947 the TGP produced Las Estampas de la Revolución Mexicana portfolio, which consists of eighty-five prints illustrating Mexican history from the late nineteenth century through the 1940s. The album commemorates the tenth anniversary of the founding of the workshop, and therefore can be read as exemplifying the group’s principles and efforts. The portfolio depicts figures and events associated with the Porfiriato (the thirty year dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz), the ten-year long Mexican Revolution (1910-1920), as well as post-revolutionary governments and their projects of national reconstruction. The TGP made a conscious effort to circulate the portfolio nationally, as well as internationally. To reach the masses the TGP regularly published, during the early months of 1949, prints from the portfolio in El Nacional, a widely distributed publication.

Eight prints that depict Zapata are interspersed throughout the portfolio. Within the context of the portfolio, the TGP revived the notion of Zapata as a representation of the lower classes struggle, undermining the hegemonic line promoting him as a symbol for a unified Mexican populace. The last reference to Zapata is print eighty-two, La Prensa y La Revolución Mexicana (or the Press and the Mexican Revolution) by Alfredo Zalce. The title indicates the theme. [Figure 4]

Two grotesque figures are situated on the left with scattered sheets of paper flying above them. At the top of the right side we see four heads that represent, reading from left to right, Álvaro Obregon, Venustiano Carranza, Emiliano Zapata, and Francisco Madero. The heads appear to float within vegetation that I would identify as either sugar cane, a common crop
grown in Morelos, or corn, a symbolic agricultural crop that has strong significance to the Mexican people that extends to Pre-columbian times. Armed marching revolutionary figures wearing the campesino costume emerge from the vegetation at the bottom of the image.

The image can be read as a direct reflection of the TGP’s stance on the press of Mexico; as newsmen and/or journalists are portrayed, on the left, as disfigured. The suggestion of an alliance, implied by grouping and proximity, between the revolutionary leaders on the right implies they share common ideological values and that they were fighting together during the Mexican Revolution to achieve common goals. The presence of the vegetation and the revolutionary campesinos raises the issue of agrarian land rights. The result of the various visual elements is a constructed narrative about an alliance between the four leaders of the Revolution, and that these figures shared a common position on the issues of freedom of the press and campesino land rights.

In terms of each figure’s relationship with the press, each had their own distinct issues. Madero supported freedom of the press, even at the expense of his own reputation. During his presidency Madero was attacked and belittled by the press. Carranza’s camp generated its own pro-Carrancista publications. After taking over the government, Carranza censored existing publications. Zapata’s relationship with the press was a problematic one. The press, specifically in Mexico City, was engaged by the elite to criticize and defame Zapata, blaming him and his followers for every wrong doing that occurred in relation to activities in the south of Mexico, and labeling him the “Attila of the South.”

In actuality, the four grouped figures each represent a distinct group in opposition during the Mexican Revolution, their objectives remained dissimilar. Zapata demanded immediate attention, which was most likely unrealistic in terms of his objectives for land reform and the
Figure 4. Alfredo Zalce, “La Prensa y La Revolucion” in Las Estampas de la Revolución, 1947. Collection of the Art Museum, University of New Mexico.
political goals of other leaders. A clause in Madero’s Plan de San Luis Potosi motivated Zapata to join forces with Madero with the expectation of land reform. It became apparent that this was not a priority for Madero. Additionally, during the month of August of 1911, Zapata was in discussion with Madero regarding disarmament and disbandment of the southern forces. The federal forces under Brigadier General Victoriano Huerta intent on eliminating Zapata enters and remains in Morelos, which builds tension between Madero and Zapata. As a result of political manipulations and the lack of cooperation on the part of the federal forces the issue of Zapata’s surrender continued from August through November of 1911, which eventually resulted in a break between Madero and Zapata.

Carranza’s authorization to assassinate Zapata makes evident the oppositional relationship between the two. In response to the Huerta’s coup d’etat, Obregón joined the Revolution in early 1912. He fought under Carranza; however, their relationship was one of mutual benefit and mistrust. Obregón eventually became Carranza’s greatest opponent. During Zapata’s lifetime Obregón was affiliated with Carranza, and the two did not have an association. It was only after Zapata’s death in 1920 that Gildardo Magaña, Zapata’s successor, coordinated with Obregón.36

This image is the representation of the institutionalized “familia de la revolución,” which in actuality was a non-existent alliance constructed by post-revolutionary governments beginning with Obregón’s administration, 1920-1924 and Calles. This unified alliance between members of very disparate groups demonstrates the development of a singular, overarching national narrative of the revolution; one in which Zapata played a key role. Zapata’s inclusion within the revolutionary family was a conscious effort to establish and maintain support from the
campesinos of Mexico who represented an important base of support for any political party or leader.

**Zapata in the United States**

Meanwhile, in the United States during the mid-1960s the Chicano Civil Rights Political Movement developed. The Movement addressed multiple issues affecting people of Mexican descent including, but not limited to: the lack of political rights, the violation of civil rights, and limited and/or inadequate resources and opportunities. The Movement also emphasized the importance of Mexican heritage and culture. Chicano art served, in part, as a visual platform for the issues that the Chicano Movement addressed and promoted. Mexican symbols and images, and the work of Mexican artists, provided inspiration and models.

One of the first murals attributed to the Chicano Movement is *The Del Rey Mural* [Figure 5]. Antonio Bernal painted this two-panel cycle in 1968 on the Teatro Campesino Cultural Center, a site where farm workers were gathered to organize. The panel shown includes a number of figures including three that are associated with the Mexican Revolution: La Adelita leads the group, behind her stands Pancho Villa, who is followed by Zapata. Cesar Chavez, a leader of the unionization of farm workers, waves the United Farm Workers flag. Figures tied to the Black civil rights movement are also present: Malcolm X, wears a black panther t-shirt, and Martin Luther King stands at the far right. The image incorporates two forms of resistance, revolutionary resistance is represented by the figures of the Mexican Revolution who carry weapons that represent a call to arms; peaceful resistance is also referenced by the presence of Martin Luther King.

The *Del Rey Mural* illustrates the Chicano Movement’s interest in and dedication to: Mexican history, through its incorporation of figures from the Mexican Revolution; unionization
Figure 5. Mural artist Antonio Bernal, “The Del Rey Mural,” El Teatro Campesino Cultural Center, 1968. Robert Sommer Photographer.
of farm workers, made evident by the activities that take place at the site of the mural, as well as by the presence of Cesar Chavez; other disenfranchised groups, which suggests a willingness to collaborate; and multiple tactics of resistance. Zapata’s importance, for people of Mexican descent living in the United States, as a symbol for identity, culture, and the fight for civil liberties is made evident by his inclusion in one of the earliest murals of the Chicano Movement and throughout numerous images associated with the Movement. Zapata also serves as a cultural signifier that asserts Mexican heritage of Chicanos, and in particular that of the farm workers.\textsuperscript{37}

**Zapata and Mexico Today**

In the 1970s and 1980s Zapata’s image was again co-opted by the Mexican government, this time invoked to support changes to Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution, which ended the government’s obligation to redistribute land and allowed the privatization of communal land, and opening the door for the North American Fair Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which came into effect January 1, 1994. The Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional or EZLN in Chiapas and Oaxaca oppose the unconstitutional changes to Article 27 and declared open rebellion in 1994. Ironically, both the Mexican government and the Neo-Zapatistas simultaneously lay claim to Zapata’s platform and image in relation to his issue. [Figure 6]

Artist Malaquias Montoya asserted his support of the Neo-Zapatista Movement through an illustration that was inspired by the signing of NAFTA. In his silkscreen *Zapatistas ¡Todos!* Montoya emphasizes the tie between the ideals and goals of Emiliano Zapata and the EZLN, or Neo-Zapatista Movement in Chiapas, and its leader Marcos. The color palette of the image is primarily black and white, with the title serving as a red accent. The colors were selected for their dramatic impact, as well as their cultural significance. Montoya associates the red color with the typical red flag of leftist groups.
Figure 6. Malaquias Montoya, “Zapatista! Todos,” Silkscreen, 1995.
The image focuses on the eyes of Zapata. The top portrait refers to Marcos through the knitted black mask, which he wears to hide his identity, which is cuts off below the nose of the figure. However, the eyes that peer through the mask are those of Emiliano Zapata, they are repeated again, incorporated as a rectangular cut out, which comes from the portrait that is included at the bottom of the print. Between the two figures is the title of the work Zapatistas ¡Todos!38 Beneath the vertically stacked set of eyes is a horizontal element that contains two duplicate rectangular cutout photographic images of Zapatistas soldiers. The soldiers are in the midst of battle and wear the white calzone of the Mexican campesino, agrarian laborers of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. Between the cut outs of the Zapatistas is a black and white photographic portrait of Zapata, famously wearing a charro suit and a red scarf around his neck.39 The portrait serves to inform the viewer of the source for the two sets of eyes enlarged above. The multiple references to Zapata serves as a metaphoric reference to the foundational role and impact Zapata has in relation to the Neo-Zapatista Movement’s platform for an autonomous government, land rights, and social justice.40

Conclusion

Symbolically Zapata connotes the Mexican Revolution, land rights, hope for the oppressed, national Mexican ideological values, Mexican culture, and Mexican American/Chicano heritage. What signifies these aspects attributed to Zapata? Through sombrero and mustache Zapata’s Mexican-ness is illustrated. Weapons and crossing bandoliers suggest the Mexican Revolution. Zapata’s piercing stare and confidant pose signify his defiance and leadership. But there is more communicated than what is visible. Roland Barthes maintains: “all images are polysemous; they imply, underlying their signifiers, a ‘floating chain’ of signifieds, the reader able to choose some and ignore others.” Zapata’s image sometimes
operates as a blank canvas or empty vessel that can be filled with distinctive multiple ideas simultaneously. This adaptability and/or flexibility allows the meaning of Zapata’s image to expand and enables it to project numerous ideologies singly or simultaneously. This function owing to the precedents set in place since the Mexican Revolution. The chain of signifiers joins every use, illustration and variation of the original photographs.

Zapata’s ideological beliefs and image were and are employed by his enemies and allies, by the press, by Zapatistas, by the Mexican government, by scholars, by publishers, by artists, and many other groups to numerous to name. Samuel Brunk best describes the manner in which Zapata’s is most accurately invoked: “. . . [Zapata] stands for the lasting ability and willingness of the dispossessed to maintain their dignity and to resist”. Each group has contributed and continues to affect the myths and symbolism attached to Zapata. Samuel Brunk, in his biography on Zapata, best describes the manner in which Zapata is most accurately invoked: “. . . [Zapata] stands for the lasting ability and willingness of the dispossessed to maintain their dignity and to resist”. ¡Que Viva Zapata!
Endnotes


2 Samuel Brunk, ¡Emiliano Zapata! Revolution and Betrayal in Mexico (University of New Mexico Press, 2001) 20.

3 For an indepth history of land issues and oppression in Morelos see Jesús Sotelo Inclán, Raíz y razón de Zapata (Comisión Federal de Electricidad, 1970): 97-439. Or for a brief summary of late nineteenth century agrarian based industries, the hacienda system, and the impact on and oppression suffered by the local people as a result of both, refer to Womack, 1970, 43-52 or Brunk, 2001, 9-13.

4 Womack (1970, 17-19) addresses Escandon’s lack of qualifications for the post of governor of Morelos and his lack of desire for the post. Womack notes the nomination for the governorship was a maneuver by the hacienda owners to aide their political and judicial maneuvering in acquiring land in Morelos. Díaz accepted Escandon as the planters’ choice, although as Womack informs he would have preferred someone with more local popularity.

5 This phrase is borrowed from Womack (1970, 53). Additionally, Womack (53-45) provides examples of Escandón’s operations on behalf of Morelos’ rural elite that include the June 21, 1909 Law for Real Estate and amendments made to the state constitution.

6 Ibid, 61.

7 Article Three of “The Plan de San Luis Potosí” stated: “Through unfair advantage taken of the Law of Untitled Lands, . . . numerous proprietors of small holdings, in their majority Indians, have been dispossessed of their lands—either by a ruling of the Ministry of Public Works or by decisions of the courts of the Republic. It being full justice to restore to the former owners the lands of which they were dispossessed so arbitrarily, such dispositions and decisions are declared subject to review. And those who acquired them [the lands] in such an immoral way, or their heirs, will be required to return them to the original owners, to whom they will pay an indemnity for the damages suffered. Only in case the lands have passed to a third person before the promulgation of this plan, the former owners will receive the indemnity from those to whose profit the dispossession accrued.” (Ibid, 70)

8 Ibid, 129.

9 For a copy of the entire Plan de Ayala see Jesús Silva Herzog, Breve Historia de la Revolución Mexicana (Fondo de la Cultura Económica, 1960) 1; 240-246.

10 For a discussion of the anti-Huerta revolt and the Carranza’s role and attempt to assume power see Linda Hall, Álvaro Obregón, Power and Revolution in Mexico, 1911-1920, (Texas A&M University Press, 1981) 38-58.

11 Womack, 1970, 327-330; see also Brunk, 2001, xii.

12 The question of land distribution was recognized during the Mexican Revolution as an important issue by other revolutionary leaders, but sometimes only as a tool in managing the agrarian masses. It was not their primary concern. Pancho Villa recognized the motivational value of land to be promised as a reward for revolutionary service. Alvaro Obregón recognized land was an important concern for the masses and that it proved useful in satisfying revolutionary groups as a reward for revolutionary service and as a payoff (Hall, 1981, 68). For Zapata, however, land reform motivated regional rebellion and involvement for and against Francisco Madero’s revolutionary movement.
The varied and numerous representations of Zapata were first seriously considered in conversations with David Craven in a seminar entitled “The Taller de Gráfica Popular,” AH 583, Seminar on Modern and Contemporary Latin American Art, Department of Art and Art History, University of New Mexico, Spring 2001. Although Zapata has been and continues to be the topic of countless articles and books, the common format is to consider him as part of a homogenized narrative of the Mexican Revolution, which often recycles and repeats the same material. If and when the image of Zapata is addressed, it is usually within the context of an artist’s oeuvre. This results in a superficial examination of the image of Zapata, rather than a discussion of how Zapata is interpreted by the artist or how any given image ties in or contradicts the body imagery that represents Zapata. However, there are exceptions, which are noted below. Lola Elizabeth Boyd, The Image of Emiliano Zapata in the art and literature of the Mexican Revolution diss., Columbia University, 1965. Boyd’s book is an ambitious attempt to address the image of Zapata within a historical context, in art and literature. Unfortunately, she merely lists and introduces various artists and their artwork, and never truly addresses in any depth any particular artist or image. See also Alberto Hijar, “Los Zapatas de Diego Rivera” Los Zapata de Diego Rivera (Jardín Borda, 1989) 21-32. Hijar discusses Rivera’s image of Zapata within the context of categorized assigned meanings, which serve as a basis for categorizations I apply in defining various character types and narratives portrayed by and attached to Zapata.

In 1924 the Mexican Union of Technical Workers, Painters and Sculptors (SOTPE), whose members include Rivera and Siqueiros, published their manifesto. In this document artists made a commitment to creating art, “that makes people aware of their history and civil rights.” Also within the manifesto the indigenous of Mexico were identified as the, “symbol of the true Mexican.” Alicia Azuela, Alicia, “Graphics of the Mexican Left, 1924-1938,” Art and Journals on the Political Front, 1910-1940 (The University Press of Florida, 1997) 251.

Julián Gállego in Visión y símbolos en la pintura española del Siglo de Oro (Ensayos Arte, 1984) 228-229 notes the significance of the horse in representations of kings.


For the history of horses in the Americas see Jose Alvarez del Villar, Men and Horses of Mexico: History and Practice of Charrería, (Ediciones Lara, 1979) 11-27.


King, 1995, 37.


For a discussion of one of the strongest chieftains that opposed Zapata, Ambrosio Figueroa, from Guerrero, see Brunk, 2001, 34.

Pancho Villa similarly was concerned with his image as a military leader. Villa’s effort to construct, through his attire, an image of himself as a powerful and respectable military leader is well documented in photographs. I will further develop the relationship between Villa and Zapata in future projects. Zapata differs from Villa in that numerous identities are constructed, by him and others.
The Casasola Archive, Fototeca Nacional del INAH incorrectly dates this photograph [#63464] between 1914 and 1918. May 26, 1911 is the date of Zapata’s arrival into Cuernavaca and June 10, 1911 is the date of publication in *El Diario del Hogar* of another photograph of Zapata at the Moctezuma Hotel, recognizable by the brick work in the background, wearing the same uniform, which indicates that both photographs were very likely taken on the same occasion. Ariel Arnal (“Constuyendo símbolos-fotografía política en México: 1865-1911,” 1998, 65) asserts the photographic portrait of Zapata portrayed as General of the Southern forces was taken within May and June of 1911 based on comparison with a documentary photograph of the handing over of Cuernavaca by Manuel Asúnsolo to Zapata. On Zapata in Cuernavaca, see Brunk, 2001, 39-40 and/or Womack, 1970, 93-94.

The colors of the sash are usually representative of national colors or symbolize affiliation with a particular group or organization.


Woodall (1997, 75) asserts wearing a sword was the prerogative of titled aristocracy.

Michael J. Schreffler has established how cannibalism was a construction of the sixteenth century and visually linked to indigenous inhabitants of the Americas, even though it was almost never witnessed, and engaged as a “differencing mechanism.” Illustrations from this period with references to cannibalism and the indigenous Americans constructed an image of a savage and chaotic culture that would ultimately be civilized and governed by European powers. See Michael J. Schreffler, “Vespucci Rediscovers America: The Pictorial Rhetoric of Cannibalism in Early Modern Culture,” *Art History* 28:3 (June 2005) 295-310.

The point in emphasizing this figure’s skin color is to recall a common practice and marker of identity, which can be traced to Spanish colonial caste paintings that served to visually illustrate the categories and social rank constructed for people based on racial distinctions.


See Raquel Tibol, *diego rivera ilustrador* (Mexico: SEP, 1986) 134 for an example of the illustrations. Copies of *Fermín Lee* are held in the library collections of Tulane University, Boston University, and The University of Wisconsin, Madison.

David Craven, *Diego Rivera As Epic Modernist*, (G.K. Hal, 1997) 67-68. For an overview of Obregon’s position on social issues see Hall, 1981.

Zapata is represented five times throughout the murals at the Secretaría de Educación Pública (Ministry of Public Education), painted between 1923-1928; Zapata is in the panel “The Blood of the Revolutionary Martyrs Fertilizing the Earth,” at the chapel of University of Chapingo, painted in 1926; Zapata is depicted twice in the National Palace mural in Mexico City, painted between 1929-1930; and Zapata is illustrated three times in the series of frescoes entitled “The History of Cuernavaca and Morelos” at the Palace of Cortez in Cuernavaca, Morelos, painted between 1929-1930. Stanton L. Catlin, “Mural Census,” *Diego Rivera* (Founders Society, Detroit Institute of Arts in association with W.W. Norton and Company, 1986) 233-336.

See Hall, 1981, 241. Association with the Zapatistas aided the establishment of a new revolutionary coalition and guaranteed support from the campesinos.
Ironically, many farm workers, some of whom were U.S. citizens either by birth or naturalized, were deported back to Mexico as a result of strike activities.

I asked Montoya if there as a connection with the phrase “Zapatista ¡Todos!” and “Todos Somos Marcos”. Frankly, he couldn’t remember if the latter phrase had become as commonly associated with the Neo-Zapatista Movement as it is today. He informed that it is more a reference to common slogans in revolutionary movements of Central and South America. (Personal communication. June 22, 2007).

Both photographic images, the one of the Zapatistas and of Zapata, come from the Casasola Archive. Montoya stated that these are both visual elements that inform him as a Chicano artist, that he has laying around his studion, and that have been incorporated into other works. This is evident in relation to the Zapata image in the 1995 print “Los Ojos de Zapata” and the 1997 print “Los Cuatro Zapatas”. When I asked Montoya why he chose this specific depiction of Zapata over others he said this is just one that he was drawn to.

This significance of Zapata an important figure and model carries over into its association to the Chicano Movement, as Montoya is a seminal artist of the Chicano Movement.

Brunk, ¡Emiliano Zapata! Revolution and Betrayal in Mexico, 2001, 239.


44. Avila, Theresa. “Emiliano Zapata: Figure, Image, Symbol.” July 2007

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2. Davidson, Russ. "A Description of Rare and Important Medina Imprints in the University of New Mexico Library." May 1988.


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