

# STREET ART AS A DISCURSIVE SITE FOR NEGOTIATING PLURICULTURAL GOVERNANCE: A CASE STUDY ON THE OAXACA COMMUNE

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## Street Art as a Discursive Site for Negotiating Pluricultural Governance: A Case Study on the Oaxaca Commune

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### Abstract

The Oaxaca Commune, a popular uprising that grew into a broad-based movement for social justice, erupted in June 2006 in the capital of the state of Oaxaca in southern Mexico. In this article, I analyze various forms of street art created in the Oaxaca Commune, including graffiti and print media, to examine how these formations created a matrix of visual discourse mapping the political terrain of the Oaxaca Commune onto the spatial terrain of Oaxaca City. Artist collectives mobilized the aesthetics of Mexican graphic agitprop, revolutionary iconography, and religious traditions to create a site for dialogue and negotiation among civil society about key issues of the movement, the development of a popular assembly, and the future of Oaxaca's democracy.

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## Introduction

In this case study, I analyze street art created by artist collectives during the Oaxaca Commune, an uprising and social movement that erupted in Oaxaca City, Mexico, during the summer of 2006. I examine how graffiti and print media created a matrix of visual discourse mapping the political terrain of the social movement onto the spatial terrain of Oaxaca City. Presenting this case study as such offers a timely argument for exploring the interdisciplinary and global scope of public interest communications (PIC) as vital for analyzing social movement visual culture in the Global South. If PIC pertains to “strategic communications with the goal of significant and

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sustained positive behavior change or action on an issue that transcends that of any single organization” (Christiano & Niemand, 2017, p. 38), then PIC analysis is particularly germane to visual and material culture emerging from broad-based social justice movements. Further, its implementation in analysis of material outside of the European-U.S. context proffers ongoing opportunities to expand the breadth of PIC methodologies on a global scale.<sup>1</sup>

Toward that imperative, this study aims to bridge the fields of Visual Studies and PIC through a methodology that roots analysis of visual and material culture from the Oaxaca Commune in the overlap and integration of these two theoretical frameworks. Like PIC, Visual Studies is an emergent field and inter-discipline that draws from diverse academic areas to address the complexities of multiform human communications and expressions along with their effects. This article brings the fruitful cross-pollination of these two fields together. The result is an investigation of the ways in which artist-activists in Oaxaca mobilized strategic public communications in the form of street art to launch a call to action and to galvanize Oaxacan citizens around building an inclusive, consensus-based space for grassroots political participation.

Johnston and Gulliver (2022) describe PIC as “fundamentally about finding ways to work through issues of social justice, manage public problems, and enable public debate” (p. 7). They advocate for thinking of PIC as a “dialectic...where it is as much about the process of debating and discussing interests and issues as it is about finding the best solution or outcome” (Johnston & Gulliver, 2022, p. 8). Artist collectives supporting the Oaxaca Commune created a PIC dialectic enabling public debate by mobilizing street art as a discursive space. They marshaled the aesthetics of Mexican graphic agitprop, revolutionary iconography, and religious traditions in graphic artwork to create a site for dialogue and negotiation among civil society about key issues of the movement, the development of a new model for participatory politics, and the future of Oaxaca’s democracy.

## The Oaxaca Commune

The Oaxaca Commune began as a popular uprising responding to the state governor’s attack on an encampment of striking teachers. Oaxaca’s Local Section 22 of the national teachers’ union, Mexico’s *Sindicato Nacional de los Trabajadores de la Educación* (SNTE)<sup>2</sup>, is one of the largest and most active union locals in Mexico (de la Luz Arriaga Lemus, 2015; Dillingham, 2021; Rincones, 2008). Section 22 is also part of a dissident union faction, the *Coordinadora Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación*<sup>3</sup>, which stands in opposition to the SNTE’s corporatist union model and its entanglement with the Mexican government since its inception. Section 22 has

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<sup>1</sup> This research began as a section of my doctoral dissertation and has been expanded and edited for the current volume (see Affourtit, 2020b).

<sup>2</sup> National Union of Education Workers

<sup>3</sup> National Coordination of Education Workers

been at the forefront of a strong nationwide Democratic Teachers' Movement since 1980, marshaling a three-pronged plan to democratize the teachers' union, national education, and ultimately the country (O. Olivera Espinosa, personal communication, October 3, 2018).

Section 22 organizes an annual teaching strike during the summer months, with sit-ins and encampments in Oaxaca's central plaza and the surrounding streets. Strikes had historically ended when the state responded to the teachers' demands with incremental adjustments for living wages and increased resources for students (Magaña, 2017; Norget, 2010). On June 14, 2006, however, instead of negotiating with the union, Governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz (hereafter Ruiz Ortiz) sent in paramilitary police units in the middle of the night to evict the teachers from their encampment using tear gas and brutal physical force (Arenas, 2011; Norget, 2010).

The response to the governor's repressive attack was swift. More than 300 Oaxacan civil society organizations gathered with Section 22 to agitate for the Ruiz Ortiz's deposal, forming the *Asamblea Popular de los Pueblos de Oaxaca* (APPO)<sup>4</sup> in just three days. With the strength of APPO, the Oaxacan people finally had the opportunity and the means to express their dissent against Ruiz Ortiz and to address long-standing sociopolitical inequities in the state. On the national scale, political rhetoric in Mexico promised a transition to democracy after the country's long period under a one-party regime. The *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI)<sup>5</sup> had come into power at the end of the Mexican Revolution and then consolidated a dictatorial one-party state ruling Mexico from 1929-2000. The election of President Vicente Fox in 2000 ended 70 years of PRI rule, but the promise of progressive changes proved empty for the country's most minoritized citizens and strained against the reality of continuing government corruption and impunity. And although the PRI had been ousted from national government, in the state of Oaxaca, Ruiz Ortiz was overseeing the eighth decade of PRI monopoly.

APPO galvanized Oaxacan citizens to develop their own democratic transition from the grassroots, proposing what I term *decolonial democracy*: participatory democratic politics based in Indigenous<sup>6</sup> communal practices, self-governance, and forms of resistance to colonialism and its heirs—imperialism, global capitalism, and neoliberalism. I have introduced this term and definition (Affourtit, 2019) with inspiration from Mignolo (2011) and his discussion of the Indigenous Chiapas-based Zapatista National Liberation Army project to decolonize democracy; Kelley (2015), Davis (2010), and Lipsitz (2004) in their varied interpretations and invocations of W. E. B. DuBois' (1998/1935) conception of abolition democracy; Rafael Magaña's (2020) invocation of decolonial anarchism to describe APPO; and Oaxacan scholar Esteva's (2007) description of APPO as a form of radical democracy. What each of these terms have in common is an attempt to consider alternative models of governing in the context of what is now widely considered a global crisis of democracy (Applebaum, 2020; Przeworski, 2019; Runciman, 2018; Slaughter & Isakhan, 2014; Urbinati, 2016). This case study on the Oaxaca Commune

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<sup>4</sup> Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca

<sup>5</sup> Institutional Revolutionary Party

<sup>6</sup> I capitalize the term Indigenous when referring to political and historical peoples and communities, as well as their cultures, societies, practices, and lifeways.

investigates the inner workings of one such alternative model and how it was built by the Oaxacan people.

## Street art

I argue that APPO's model for decolonial democracy was envisioned and shaped through its visual culture and media. The very first visual culture project that APPO supporters introduced into the public sphere was street art, including graffiti and print media. Oaxaca already had a thriving community of *talleres*<sup>7</sup> prior to 2006, which was in large part due to the influence of Shinzaburo Takeda, a Japanese-born printmaking instructor at the *Universidad Autónoma "Benito Juárez" de Oaxaca*.<sup>8</sup> Takeda taught many generations of artists during his more than 30 years at the university and claimed to have brought the very first woodblock printing tools to Oaxaca when he arrived in the 1970s (S. Takeda, personal communication, August 28, 2013). Mario Guzman, who studied with Takeda, explained that many of Takeda's alumni started their own print workshops in Oaxaca and developed political consciousness both through their teacher's urging and based on the long history of Mexican graphic agitprop stretching from the Mexican Revolution on (M. Guzman, personal communication, September 2, 2013).

Therefore, graphic artists already working together in *talleres* when the Oaxaca Commune began were able to expediently respond to the social movement with street art. Street art offered the unique ability to produce visual forms of public discourse rapidly and cheaply, and to create endless repetitions and combinations of images and slogans with spray paint, stencils, and print media on craft or tissue paper adhered to city walls with wheat paste. Artists were able to create palimpsests on city surfaces, incorporating and extending one another's works into new compositions and attesting to the scope of collaborative action by artist assemblies uniting under APPO.

In what follows, I consider various forms of and approaches to street art created by artist collectives supporting APPO. During the Oaxaca Commune, public art proliferated to an astounding degree. The images I have chosen to analyze represent but a small portion of the street art that was disseminated, but I have taken care to select works that attest to the diverse forms that street art took in the Oaxaca Commune, the breadth of visual discourse generated through street art formations, and the range of pressing issues around which street art carved a space for dialogue and debate.

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<sup>7</sup> print media workshops

<sup>8</sup> "Benito Juárez" Autonomous University of Oaxaca

## Reclaiming public space and establishing ungovernability

A key aspect of the Oaxaca Commune and the struggle against the governor's repression was the reclamation of public space. Not only had Ruiz Ortiz brutally evicted the teachers from their sit-in, but privatization and control of public space had been part of the governor's political strategies since his inauguration in 2005. Within his first hundred days, the governor had launched an initiative, without consulting city residents, to renovate Oaxaca City's *zócalo*.<sup>9</sup> Ruiz Ortiz relocated government offices from the central buildings around the *zócalo* to suburbs outside of the city center, converted the government palace and other buildings into museums, removed trees that were hundreds of years old, and replaced sections of cobblestone with concrete (Poole, 2008). Many city residents saw the renovation as indicative of increasing privatization of the city's historical and cultural heritage. Further, they believed that the governor's principal aim was to discourage the political dissent that had historically taken place outside of the buildings that housed state representatives (Poole & Rénique, 2008). Ruiz Ortiz's violent eviction of the teachers from his newly renovated *zócalo* transformed the city's public spaces into sites of struggle.

### Figure 1

*Montage of Graffiti Denouncing Ulises Ruiz Ortiz, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, 2006*



*Note.* Photographs by Itandehui Franco Ortiz.

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<sup>9</sup> public square

Works of street art that appeared in the first days of the Oaxaca Commune were denunciations of Ruiz Ortiz and the paramilitary police he had sent to suppress the strike (Figure 1). The graffiti featured representations of the governor as odious animals, such as a rat, pig, donkey, or raccoon, often accompanied by slogans: “¡Fuera Ulises!”<sup>10</sup> and “¡Ulises Asesino!”<sup>11</sup> This first resounding “NO!” to Ruiz Ortiz’s repression in the form of street art was critically important for the solidarity necessary to cohere APPO.

To succeed, APPO had to bring together a dissident teachers’ union that was often unpopular with the general public due to its radical tactics, diverse groups from all over the sociopolitical spectrum, and citizens who had not previously participated in local politics. Initial graphic interventions underscored this vital coalition-building based on a collective rejection of Ruiz Ortiz’s authority. Moreover, the graphic denunciations supported APPO’s campaign to depose Ruiz Ortiz by establishing a state of ungovernability in Oaxaca City, the condition allowing for citizens’ legal right to call for the governor’s removal. According to Muñoz:

Literature on governability in Latin America defines it as the maintenance of governmental/ institutional stability (Abente Brun, 1996; Coppedge, 1996; Foweraker, 1998). Governability is often contrasted with ungovernability, characterized by social chaos or political power vacuums demonstrated in cabinet crises, legislative stalemate, violent protest, armed rebellion or military coups [...] Coppedge advances a broader definition, linking governability to the relationships between ‘strategic actors’ with the capacity to ‘disturb public order or economic development.’ Such actors include political parties, state-powers, and various social actors such as indigenous [*sic*] people. (Muñoz, 2004, p. 426)<sup>12</sup>

The extralegal nature of graffiti in Oaxaca, backed up by laws designed to protect the city’s status as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, bolstered APPO’s campaign to establish ungovernability by highlighting the governor’s lack of authority and control over his jurisdiction (Arenas, 2011).

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<sup>10</sup> “Ulises Out!”

<sup>11</sup> “Ulises Murderer!”

<sup>12</sup> Many sources are now capitalizing the term Indigenous when it is used as a proper noun, as I do in any sections of this text that are not from direct quotes.

**Figure 2**

*Two-Part Stencil Graffiti Piece by Arte Jaguar, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, 2006*



*Note.* Photograph by Itandehui Franco Ortiz.

In the call and response of their inscriptions, Oaxacan artist collectives made use of the dereliction and decay of the surfaces on which they installed their graphic works. This street art piece by the collective *Arte Jaguar* (Figure 2) employs a hole in the plaster façade of a city building, revealing the brick underneath. The two-part stencil piece combines a denunciation of Ruiz Ortiz with a declaration of ungovernability. Ruiz Ortiz as pig observes his paramilitary police-robot with helmet and broom, poised to clean city streets of dissidents and their graffiti. The irony of a grotesque pig demanding militarized political repression and sanitation, delivered through the very form of graffiti that signifies the dissent the governor remains inept at preventing, is the precipitating message of this piece.

Mattern (2016) draws on Wright (2010) and Holloway (2010) to analyze how forms of popular art, including graffiti and street art, “exemplify anarchist principles and commitments that, taken together, prefigure deeper forms of democracy than those experienced...in today’s liberal democracies” (p. 1). Figure 2 provides a visual paradigm for Mattern’s provocation that the anarchic prefiguration of democratic futures takes place in the cracks and interstices of capitalist formations. According to Mattern:

Pursuing an interstitial strategy entails identifying existing cracks and fissures [in dominant institutions], while opening new ones where possible. Over time, these cracks and fissures can be widened, drawing new and more participants into them...This strategy focuses on the present, but with an eye to the future of gradual emancipation. (Mattern, 2016, p. 5)

Street art’s exploitation of super-structural surface inconsistencies—the figurative and literal cracks in the dominant order and the structures that contain it—ultimately exposes how architecture deemed sacrosanct both by the United Nations as cultural heritage and the Mexican



state as means of tourist revenue accumulation stand as the material evidence of the ongoing and unyielding entanglements of colonialism and capitalism.

## Advancing collectivity through visual grammar

While the first works of graffiti denouncing Ruiz Ortiz appeared on city walls without attribution to specific artist collectives and assemblies, street art evinced growing internal cohesion and organization under APPO in the months following. As this happened, graphic art also demonstrated internal practices of collectivity in artist assemblies that mirrored the ethos and principal structure of APPO, in turn actively adapted from Indigenous communal governance as a central goal of the movement. Members of the *Asamblea Revolucionaria de los Artistas de Oaxaca* (ASARO)<sup>13</sup> explained:

Our structure is not vertical but horizontal. This manner of organizing ourselves is based on the APPO's example, an example which itself retook the model and method of organization of the indigenous [*sic*] communities of Oaxaca. For us, this way of organizing ourselves works in the following way: when there are important issues to discuss, a meeting is convened and all members who can participate come to our workshop and sit in a circle. In order to make our jobs easier, we have formed commissions who are in charge of various tasks inside ASARO. The principal commissions are those of organization, press and propaganda, political formation, and finances. In general, someone from these commissions convenes the assembly. Once together, information is shared topic by topic and what to do and how to do it is discussed for each issue. At the assembly, everyone has a right to speak and to give their opinion until, in the end, when all proposals for a particular issue have been opened up, we vote for each proposal and the one that has the most votes defines our subsequent course of action. Whether a new or old member, each vote counts equally. Decisions made are thus those of everybody and the resulting art is everyone's—that is one of the reasons why the art is signed as ASARO and not individually. (“ASARO, Art by the People and for the People,” 2008, n.p., in Arenas, 2011, p. 351)

This passage clearly delineates how the social organization of artist assemblies like ASARO closely followed that of the larger assembly, APPO, forming smaller-scale models for the decolonial democracy that APPO was building. Artist groups thus operated collective action via street art formations as a mode of assembly and an example of the movement's in-process goals.

Oaxaca city artist collectives that had already been established prior to the Oaxaca Commune were able to adapt their practices of sharing space, equipment, and resources to the assembly model under APPO. In effect, street art in the Oaxaca Commune visually testified to the collaborative work of artist assemblies in horizontally organized collectives whose membership was heterogenous and inclusive. Images produced by the artist assemblies incorporated visual markers of shared resources and collaborative production. The repetition of

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<sup>13</sup> Assembly of Revolutionary Artists of Oaxaca

logos, stencils, and slogans provided points of visual convergence formulating a collective message while also revealing how collective work in popular assemblies offered strategies for creative political dissent.

**Figure 3**

*ASARO Logo Grafitti, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, 2007*



*Note.* Photograph by Itandehui Franco Ortiz.

ASARO's logo appeared in their street art, pamphlets, flyers, and prints (Figure 3). The logo is a strategy of shared attribution, signaling the importance of collective work by upending the tendency to tag works with individual artists' names. The logo's design also sends a powerful message about ASARO's methodology, collective work, and alliance with APPO. The logo features the barrel of a gun pointed at the viewer with a finger on the trigger. However, the gun is loaded not with a bullet but with a symbol of APPO—a red star, as if it will imprint the viewer with the APPO icon. While the Oaxaca Commune was a primarily nonviolent movement, the aggressive visual logic of the logo provocatively employs symbols of violence but inverts the message to suggest combating state violence by weaponizing art (i.e., using art as a tool to fight back). The logo invokes the dual meaning of making an impression as both the act of creating a visual impression through the print media process and the concept of impressing upon the viewer the ideology of APPO. It therefore portends the viewer's allegiance with APPO through the symbolic act of donning the red star. In creating a logo for the artist assembly that imprints the viewer with the APPO star, ASARO situated itself under the umbrella of the larger popular assembly, poised to galvanize APPO members, not necessarily ASARO members.

ASARO and other artist assemblies also repeated images, slogans, and concepts across a wide range of graphic work, creating a visual grammar for APPO's movement and attesting to internal organizing principles of collectivity and collaboration. These street art pieces by ASARO (Figures 4-7) each feature an enigmatic figure crouched on the ground. Individually, the

images are ambiguous, but read together they speak to the vulnerability of individuals and the strength of groups in solidarity, particularly in reference to the minoritized populations that APPO brought together for collective action. Upon first glance, a viewer might wonder—are these figures crouching down or about to get up? For the most part, their gazes are cast downward and their expressions wistful. They seem at rest on the ground and yet somehow relegated to that posture outside of their own control.

**Figure 4**

*El Revolucionario Verdadero*,<sup>14</sup> ASARO, 2006



*Note.* Courtesy of the Center for the Study of Political Graphics, Archive 26721. Photograph by the author.

Figure 4 is a four-color stencil print on craft paper, a test print for a stencil graffiti piece that was spraypainted on Oaxaca City walls in 2006. In the print, a young boy in street clothes and sandals appears to be drawing something on the ground in front of him with an outstretched finger. A young girl behind him is pointing to the words stenciled above her head in red lettering: “*El revolucionario verdadero esta guiado por grandes sentimientos de amor*,”<sup>15</sup> one of Argentine Marxist revolutionary Che Guevara’s most famous sayings. Below that floats drippy white stenciled lettering spelling out “ASARO.” The spacing and depth of the composition,

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<sup>14</sup> The true revolutionary

<sup>15</sup> “The true revolutionary is guided by great feelings of love.”

along with the intermingled shadows of the two figures, suggest that they are situated in an outdoor space next to a wall bearing the stenciled message. Thus, the theme of graphic intervention and social movement messaging is doubled in this graffiti piece within a graffiti piece.

### Figure 5

*Street Art by ASARO, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, 2006*



*Note.* Photograph by Itandehui Franco Ortiz.

A variation of the previous stencil, here spray-painted directly on the wall of a city street in Oaxaca, features just an image of the boy (Figure 5). His posture and downward gaze are nearly identical, but his right finger is no longer extended in a gesture of drawing. The omission of the extended finger changes the significance of the image. No longer involved in a specific action of inscription, the crouching boy gazes inexplicably downward. It is unclear whether he has been struck to the ground and is potentially hurt, or if he is resting, waiting, or about to rise from the ground with a rock in his hand.

**Figure 6**

*Street Art by ASARO, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, 2006*



*Note.* Photograph by Itandehui Franco Ortiz.

In the next variation (Figure 6), the squatting figure is legible as an Indigenous woman, probably from the Mixe region of Oaxaca, based on her clothing, *rebozo* shawl, and *huarache* sandals. A bandana covers her nose and mouth and she carries a bag over her right shoulder. With her right elbow on her right knee, her posture at first appears as one of restful pause in a stooped position. However, the woman's downward gaze seems mournful and her posture reads as doubled over with the weight she bears on her back. She has the appearance of a mother figure mourning something lost, perhaps a child or spouse. Both the shawl and the type of bag she holds are often used to carry infants. In this case, both are without human cargo, which supports the tone of loss.

**Figure 7**

*Street Art by ASARO, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, 2006*



*Note.* Photograph by Itandehui Franco Ortiz.

A final variation (Figure 7) presents another Indigenous female figure, a young woman identifiable as *Tehuana*<sup>16</sup> in a traditional flowered dress with a pocket at the front and a bandana covering her nose and mouth. Sitting on the ground with her legs behind her, the figure supports her weight with arms on either side of her body. She faces away from spray-painted letters that read, “*14 de Junio no se olvido*”<sup>17</sup> a reminder of the violent repression of the teachers’ encampment that started the uprising. Haphazardly and unevenly sprayed white zigzagging lines overlapping her figure propose a movement or dynamism that is antithetical to her posture’s stasis, creating an uneasy tension.

Given that Figures 4-7 appeared at varying but close-in locations throughout the small capital city and with likely overlaps in the time and duration of their installations, it is useful to consider the accretion of meanings in the nuances and variation of details among the images. The figures in these pieces, as isolated and individual figures, appear to be crouching down in suspended animation, burdened abjection, or sorrowful longing. If we look at the figures instead as a not-yet-assembled group, they might read as both ducking down *and* about to arise. The figures’ action of rising up suggests participation in collective resistance, while the tension of stasis and dynamism in the compositions presents potential energy about to explode into kinetic.

### Visualizing *el pueblo*:<sup>18</sup> Unity in diversity

Oaxaca has 16 officially recognized ethno-linguistic groups, each with many subgroups, amounting to an estimated 10,000 Indigenous communities across the state. In order to be as diverse as the state it aspired to galvanize, APPO had to coalesce its membership across social, political, ethnic, cultural, linguistic, gender, age, and class differences. Unity in APPO had to be shaped and promoted as unity in diversity. This message was solidified in street art establishing the demographic APPO hoped to bring together in the movement as “the people,” while actively cohering that community in a fluid, flexible, and ongoing manner. One of the first strategies manifesting APPO’s unity-in-diversity was street art messages with repeated movement slogan variations about who was being convened as the people of Oaxaca. Slogans such as “*somos uno*,”<sup>19</sup> “*somos pueblo*,”<sup>20</sup> and “*todos somos APPO*”<sup>21</sup> alongside images highlighting solidarity effectively visualized APPO’s aspirational membership.

In Spanish, the term *el pueblo* means both “people” and “village/ town,” both a social entity and its place of residence. Arenas (2011) considers how spatial practices of social movement mobilization interpellated *el pueblo* as a collective political subject: “The community of *el pueblo* is constituted primarily through the direct embodied relations and performative rituals of assemblies, marches, sit-in strikes, and barricades” (p. 129). Arenas’ analysis follows new social

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<sup>16</sup> from the Istmo de Tehuantepec region of coastal Oaxaca

<sup>17</sup> “Don’t forget the 14<sup>th</sup> of June.”

<sup>18</sup> the people

<sup>19</sup> “we are one”

<sup>20</sup> “we are the people”

<sup>21</sup> “we are all APPO”

movement literature, which stresses that one of the key modes of social mobilization is the creation of collective political subjects or collective identities (Jasper, 2001; Melucci, 1989; Polletta & Tourain, 1985).

### Figure 8

*Somos Pueblo*,<sup>22</sup> ASARO, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, 2006



Note. Photograph by Itandehui Franco Ortiz.

A woodblock print by ASARO (Figure 8), wheat-pasted on a city wall as street art, suggests unity among the different entities involved in the Oaxaca Commune by hailing APPO as the collective political subject of the people in a simplified cartographic representation of the urban space of Oaxaca City. The print features the dominant lettering “*somos pueblo*”<sup>23</sup> floating above a matrix of gridded city streets. Lettering carved inside the lines of one of the highways represented on the map urges, “*no te pierdas—todos somos APPO.*”<sup>24</sup> A closer look reveals that the print actually presents two superimposed maps. The foreground is a zoomed-in and crudely rendered cartography of the city center where it meets the highways connecting to the rural areas and Indigenous communities of the state. This map also includes some of the salient features of the rural geography—lines marking hilly or mountainous terrain across the top of the print and wavy lines for bodies of water at the bottom left. The background offers a zoomed-out map

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<sup>22</sup> We are the people

<sup>23</sup> “we are the people”

<sup>24</sup> “do not get lost—we are all APPO”

perspective: in the central portion of the print, an ominous eye peeks out from behind the grid of city streets and a faint outline of Central and South America, cut off approximately where Mexico meets the United States, floats in the dark undefined spaces underneath the more concretely rendered edges of the city. The map-print is festooned with tiny dots, representing perhaps the people who inhabit these lands and spaces or some evidence of their presence there.

Given that the Oaxaca Commune was an urban-based movement, this two-part scale of the map is a key suggestion that APPO's movement had reach beyond not only the state of Oaxaca but also beyond the borders of Mexico, stretching across Latin America to anywhere people identify as "*el pueblo*." The wording in the phrase "do not get lost—we are all APPO" renders a call for widespread communities to remember the symbolic unity and solidarity that they already possess as the people, and to further anchor that connection to allegiance with APPO. With visual cues related to assembling under common goals, ASARO's map-print suggests that the collective political subject of the people in the Oaxaca Commune crystallizes in the collaborative political work of building APPO. Further, the map gestures to the idea that this imagined community has a much broader historical and geopolitical scope, preceding the Oaxaca Commune and stretching far beyond the borders of Oaxaca and of Mexico to other Latin American communities in struggle.

If Oaxaca Commune street art consolidated the political subjectivity of "the people" in APPO, but with ancient roots and extensions well beyond the local, it also constructed this subject across other boundaries more specific to the region of Oaxaca through a visual focus on the intrinsic diversity of Oaxacan citizens.

## Figure 9

*La Comuna de Oaxaca*,<sup>25</sup> ASARO, 2006



*Note.* Courtesy of ASARO. Photograph by the author.

<sup>25</sup> The Oaxaca Commune



Figure 9, another woodblock print, is one of the most reproduced images from the ASARO archive, and it presents diversity as the strength of APPO. A crowd of people advance in a megamarch seen stretching far into the background. The most legible figures in the foreground read as people of various sexes and age groups, indicating a diverse demographic across the entire march. One figure holds the side of a banner reading *Asamblea Popular de los Pueblos de Oaxaca*, while another foreground figure holds an APPO flyer with the signature star. The text across the top of the print reads, *La Comuna de Oaxaca 2006*.<sup>26</sup> Another figure reading as older and male in the foreground carries a torch, while far off in the distance behind him a banner reads “*Venceremos!*”<sup>27</sup>

The naïve, unpolished style of this print speaks to the range of technical skill in the artist assembly ASARO, which in turn posits Oaxacan artist collectives as spaces for diverse voices and visions in APPO coalition-building. One of ASARO’s core principles was to focus on the political expediency and activist possibilities of print media rather than overt concern for precision or aesthetic virtuosity. Therefore, seasoned graphic artists and novices worked together to create political graphics. This mixture of technical know-how and emergent talent in ASARO and other artist collectives prioritized the potency of the political message and the momentum necessary to disseminate the work in public spaces, where the uprising was taking place.

Unpolished graphic art disseminated with collective attribution alongside more sophisticated artworks bespoke the inclusivity of artist assemblies. Far from being spaces of elite culture or exclusive training, art collectives convening under APPO brought together all the creative people who wanted to use art to express their demands, grievances, and goals as part of the social movement. Graphic art that was popular in style and diverse in aesthetics, while still cohesive and legible as the work of the collective, developed a visual language for the social movement that evinced some of the key principles of APPO, namely horizontality through non-hierarchical organization and heterogeneity through diverse membership and participation.

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<sup>26</sup> The Oaxaca Commune 2006

<sup>27</sup> “We Will Overcome!”

**Figure 10**

ASARO Flyers, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, 2006



*Note.* Photograph by Itandehui Franco Ortiz.

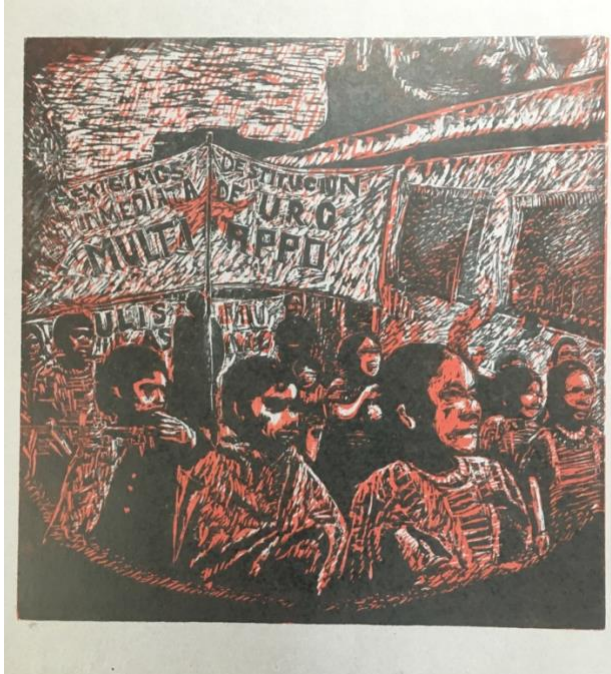
This installation of several prints attributed to ASARO on the same public wall (Figure 10), displayed as wheat-pasted flyer reproductions with superimposed slogans and ASARO logos, created continuity across this broad selection of works with different visual styles and ranges of technical proficiency, with equal attention to both seasoned and emergent styles.

## Negotiating Indigeneity and gender

While diversity in APPO membership was in some ways an intrinsic outcrop of the demographics of Oaxaca itself and the assembly's incorporation of many different sociopolitical groups, it was also in active construction and deliberation throughout the Oaxaca Commune. Two particular aspects of fierce critique and negotiation were Indigenous inclusion and gender equity.

**Figure 11**

*La Marcha*,<sup>28</sup> ASARO, 2006



*Note.* Courtesy of the Center for the Study of Political Graphics, Archive 28755. Photograph by the author.

In this woodblock print by ASARO (Figure 11), a small crowd of people, many of whom clearly present as Indigenous in their style of dress and hair, march with a sign bearing the red APPO star and reading: “We demand the immediate removal of Ulises Ruiz Ortiz! MULTI. APPO.”

According to Stephen (2013), *The Movimiento de Unificación y Lucha Triqui Independiente* (MULTI)<sup>29</sup> is a regional organization of Triqui peoples, an Indigenous community from the southwestern Mixteca Baja region of Oaxaca. MULTI formed in 2006 in the wake of APPO’s movement as an independent offshoot of the *Movimiento de Unificación y Lucha Triqui* (MULT),<sup>30</sup> a primarily land-defense organization that had been active in the Mixteca regions of Juxtlahuaca, Tlaxiaco, and Putla in Oaxaca since the 1980s. MULTI formed to agitate for Indigenous rights and autonomy for the Triqui municipalities. They participated in the APPO Mixteca, a regional APPO assembly representing several Indigenous communities, which took part in the larger APPO forums during the movement (pp. 210-215). The figures represented as marching under the banner in ASARO’s print bear markers of Triqui culture. This is most notable in the female figures, with their long braids tied back and Triqui style *huipiles*.<sup>31</sup> The

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<sup>28</sup> The march

<sup>29</sup> Independent Movement of Triqui Unification and Struggle

<sup>30</sup> Movement of Triqui Unification and Struggle

<sup>31</sup> a loosely fitting tunic garment that is traditionally worn by women in Indigenous communities

print attests to urban-rural collaboration and pan-ethnic Indigenous organizing within APPO, under the umbrella goal of Ruiz Ortiz's removal. MULTI was instrumental in bringing Indigenous communities into partnership with APPO and in modeling Indigenous women's organizing in APPO.

Graphic art in the Oaxaca Commune also delivered messaging about APPO and the social movement to multilingual communities and populations with variable literacy. Expedient messaging in the visual realm, accessible to those who spoke an Indigenous language and did not also speak Spanish, was vital for securing Indigenous support of and participation in APPO. Indigeneity in Oaxaca is a pervasive, undeniable reality, in the sense that the majority of Oaxacans have Indigenous ancestry, including those who live and work in Oaxaca City. However, indigeneity also remains a complicated class issue. Rural Indigenous peoples generally make up the peasant classes, surviving either through immersion in the communal practices of mutual aid and farming in the villages, remittances from family members who have migrated for work, or, in the case of communities closer to cities, hours-long travel by bus every day to the urban area to work as domestic staff or in the margins of the tourist trade, selling trinkets, artisanal crafts, food, or begging for money in the streets. Lighter-skinned Oaxacan *mestizxs*<sup>32</sup> generally live in the city and hold wage-earning jobs.

A Section 22 teacher (O. Olivera Espinosa, personal communication, October 3, 2018) explained that jobs in primary and secondary education offer rare opportunities to cut across the raced and classed lines between Indigenous survivance and wage-earning professions in Oaxaca. Teachers' union membership allows for instructors in Indigenous communities to teach in their own rural villages, make a decent wage, and have the possibility for advancement. But the teachers' union has had to fight to hold on to these rural schools and teaching positions in the face of increasing standardization of education and lack of fundamental resources to keep the schools going, a struggle that was also integrated into APPO's goals in 2006. Union teachers' presence in every Indigenous community across Oaxaca state supported APPO mobilization in rural areas. However, Indigenous communities' participation in APPO was complicated by the geographic isolation of their villages and their lack of access to urban-based events, news, and assembly meetings.

Gender inequities in Oaxacan politics and in Section 22 of the teachers' union were initially reified in APPO as well. According to one of the women who eventually participated in a feminist transformation within APPO to increase women's leadership in the movement, although women made up the largest demographic of teachers, APPO's rotating leadership was initially male-dominated. She also reported that APPO meetings overwhelmingly featured the voices of men until women began to demand more active roles and to agitate for equal representation (I. Santiago Galacia, personal communication, July 5, 2016). The vital role of women in the Oaxaca Commune was officially cemented in August 2006 when a group of APPO women occupied the Oaxaca state radio and television station, CORTV (Affourtit, 2020a). In the months leading up to this historic transformation of gender roles within APPO, street art had a critical role in the

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<sup>32</sup> of mixed Indigenous and Spanish heritage

debates about the entrenched gender stereotypes in Oaxacan society and the need for gender equity and parity in the developing popular assembly.

**Figure 12**

*Sexo Débil?*,<sup>33</sup> ASARO, 2006



*Note.* Courtesy of the Center for the Study of Political Graphics, Archive 26719. Photograph by the author.

In a stencil print on craft paper by ASARO (Figure 12, a practice print for street art stenciling), two female figures wearing long skirts, braided hair, bandanas over their faces, rifles on their backs, and ammunition crisscrossed over their chests are flanked by wording along the edges of the print: “ASARO” on the right side and the provocative rhetorical question on the left side, “*Sexo Débil?*”<sup>34</sup> At its most basic level of messaging, this image targets critics or doubters of feminine political power and confronts them with the spurious nature of the assumption that women are not strong enough to be revolutionaries. The subtler messaging of the print operates through its representation of the historical figures of *soldaderas*<sup>35</sup> from the Mexican Revolution, the country’s first major peasant and working-class insurrection starting in 1910.

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<sup>33</sup> The weak sex?

<sup>34</sup> “The weak sex?”

<sup>35</sup> female soldiers

The term “*soldaderas*” was given to the women who followed revolutionary soldier camps, taking care of the domestic tasks of the camp as a contribution to the struggle and assistance to their fighting lovers, husbands, and brothers (Mendieta Alatorre, 1961; Salas, 1990). *Soldaderas* also frequently engaged in armed battles when all available militia were required at the frontlines (Arce, 2016; Soto, 1990). But as Arce (2016) points out, *soldaderas* “mark the limits of the rhetoric of the nation state and their very nomenclature debases the real worth of female participation in the war” (p. 41). The representation of *soldaderas* first in the photographic record and then across a wide range of popular culture, Arce says, highlights “the very paradoxical nature of the *soldaderas*’ historical invisibility and yet figural ubiquity” (p. 41). In other words, despite the fact that women did fight alongside men in the revolution, their contributions were distilled into tropological caricatures such as the “adoring Adelita” waiting for “her Juan,” i.e., the “idealized female companion of the Mexican revolutionary soldier,” or as a catch-all “symbol for women’s participation in different struggles...far beyond the Mexican border” (Linhard, 2005, p. 91). It is the *soldaderas*’ appearance in the cultural-visual imaginary that renders her a “slippery signifier” and a “palimpsestic figuration” of a real historical phenomenon (Linhard, 2005, p. 91). ASARO’s stencil print carries in the very same terrain of female revolutionary tropes in visual culture, trading on its legibility and familiarity to throw light on the actual issue of gender roles and stereotypes in the Oaxaca Commune. Therefore, it is also a reflection, I would argue, of ASARO and APPO’s own shallow, perfunctory, and underdeveloped approach to gender inequity at the beginning of the movement.

At the start of the Oaxaca Commune, the membership of Oaxaca City artist assemblies was almost exclusively male even though they were ostensibly open to female artists. Even now, Oaxacan artist collectives are still notoriously dominated by young, politically left-leaning men, and can be, based on my own observations and reports by others in Oaxaca’s art community, unsafe spaces for women and LGBTQ+ individuals—due to *machismo*, or more infrequently, blatant homophobia, misogyny, and sexual harassment or violence. ASARO incorporated the growing dialogue about gender inequality in Oaxacan politics and in APPO into their artwork, but what the images reveal is both the nascence of that dialogue and the need for a more radical feminist movement within APPO, led by women.

**Figure 13**

*Cuando una Mujer Avanza... No Hay Hombre que la Detenga,*<sup>36</sup> ASARO, 2006



*Note.* Courtesy of the Center for Southwest Research, Archive 2010-005, Drawer 93, Folder 3. Photograph by the author.

This ASARO woodblock print (Figure 13) appeared later in the Oaxaca Commune, likely after the women’s media takeover, though the exact date of its creation is unknown. In contrast to the earlier stencil print that queries, “The weak sex?,” this print makes a strong and definitive statement inspired by the feminist movement within APPO: “*Cuando una mujer avanza, no hay hombre que la detenga.*”<sup>37</sup> The print itself is carved in an emergent, unrefined style, but its message is powerful. The central female figure leans forward with her back to the viewer, using her weight and strength to physically detain a gigantic black boot poised to squash her underneath it. Her resistance is symbolized in the carved lines radiating out from her hands as they push against the sole of the boot; these extend into lines of light radiating all around her. The shadow she casts in this light does not double her figure; instead, it appears as an outstretched arm and raised fist of solidarity, suggesting that the figure does not act alone but as part of a collective of women.

From the stencil in Figure 12 early in the uprising to the print in Figure 13 several months later, the dialogue around gender inequity and women’s leadership in APPO’s movement had been transformed. ASARO’s graphic art both reflected and disseminated these sociopolitical changes as APPO achievements. ASARO took its place in shifting the dialogue by mobilizing street art and print media as broadcast tactics and strategies of public dialogue. However, in Figure 13, the protagonist’s sheer dress and oddly over-defined buttocks beneath it create a

<sup>36</sup> When a woman advances...no man holds her back

<sup>37</sup> “When a woman advances, no man holds her back.”

strange incongruence. The message of female strength is somewhat diluted when it is imaged via eroticized feminine embodiment. In this way, Figure 13 reflected the unfinished nature of the feminist transformation within APPO and the ongoing need for changes regarding gender norms in the Oaxaca Commune. Highlighting these inconsistencies was a crucial contribution of the dialogue ASARO's graphic art created, whether intentional or not.

## From revolutionary icons to religious iconography

While the inclusion of revolutionary icons like the *soldaderas* in street art would have been legible to most sectors of Oaxacan society, the associated message appealed more to radical leftists than it did to slightly-left-of-center progressives. But the latter were just as crucial to the survival of APPO and the potential for its installation as a permanent governing body. Therefore, alternative means of engagement in graphic art and street art were required, involving images and messages that would motivate other sectors of society to participate in building APPO. To this end, and in deference to the Catholic traditions that undergird Oaxacan society, artist collectives engaged with religious iconography, transforming Catholic symbols into powerful imaginaries of political change.

### Figure 14

*Virgen de las Barrikadas*,<sup>38</sup> ASARO, 2007



*Note.* Photograph by Itandehui Franco Ortiz.

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<sup>38</sup> Virgin of the Barricades



The “*Virgen de las Barrikadas*”<sup>39</sup> (Figure 14) was introduced through street art as one of the patron saints of APPO’s movement. She is a modified version of Mexico’s patron saint, the Virgin of Guadalupe. Head bent forward and hands in a gesture of prayer, the APPO saint wears a gas mask on her face and a cloak decorated with burning tires, fastened by a length of barbed wire crossing her neck. The visual depiction of an ethereal glow radiates from all sides of the saint, but it also resembles sharp spikes, suggesting protection from outside threats. The virgin is presented as a saint capable of watching over APPO members at the barricades, who are in turn dedicated to protecting the city and its citizens. At the bottom of the print, the text reads: “*Protegenos Santisima Virgen de las Barrikadas.*”<sup>40</sup>

During the Oaxaca Commune, over one thousand barricades blocking the interior roads of the city center went up every night for nearly six months. They were created using cement blocks, bricks, tires, wood, and other scavenged objects, lit with bonfires, and guarded by neighborhood residents supporting APPO (Arenas, 2011). The barricades served many purposes during the movement—barriers preventing police or military vehicles from entering the city, watch points for citizens to alert one another of potential dangers, spaces of discussion and organization among movement participants, and social environments of conviviality for the various sectors of Oaxacan society participating in APPO (Arenas, 2011). Thus, the patron saint imaged here serves as a protector for those who took on considerable personal risk to guard the barricades at night. However, as Serna points out, ASARO missed an opportunity in its quotation and adaptation of the Virgin of Guadalupe for anything that we might consider a feminist critique:

Such male-defined political iconography emphasizes anticapitalist, antiracist resistance, but does not always liberate La Virgen’s icon from heteropatriarchal constraints. For instance, although the artists depict [the virgin] with the visual attributes of combatants (the bandana and gas mask), [she] keeps her hands posed in gendered supplication and prayer, thus representing a ‘revolutionary’ female figure that functions within her socially prescribed role as a caretaker and desexualized mother. These activist iterations of La Virgen do not challenge the heteronormative gaze that dominates in male-defined social movement rhetoric or in the uneven division of gendered labor within social movement activism. (Serna, 2007, p. 59)

Despite these limitations in advancing critiques of gendered and heteronormative imagery in religious iconography, ASARO’s Virgin of the Barricades became an important icon of the movement and has appeared repeatedly in graphic art and print media since its creation. The creative adaptation of the Virgin of Guadalupe opened a space of public dialogue that acknowledged both the importance of traditional Catholic iconography and the necessity to revolutionize from all sectors of society for collective action, solidarity, and protection during the Oaxaca Commune.

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<sup>39</sup> “Virgin of the Barricades”

<sup>40</sup> “Protect us Holy Virgin of the Barricades”

## Conclusion: APPO as a public space for building new democratic options

Oaxaca City's *zócalo*, as the frontline in APPO's battle to contest the rights to and regulation of public spaces, was a vital location for street art installations that would agitate for civic dialogue around APPO's movement.

### Figure 15

*El Grito*,<sup>41</sup> Stencil-Based Street Art by Arte Jaguar, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, 2006



Note. Photograph by Itandehui Franco Ortiz.

### Figure 16

"El Grito," (Detail), Stencil-Based Street Art by Arte Jaguar, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, 2006



Note. Photograph by Itandehui Franco Ortiz.

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<sup>41</sup> The cry

A large-scale stencil-based street art piece by the collective *Arte Jaguar* (Figures 15 and 16, detail) framed key dialogues that were taking place within APPO around its development of a new form of democratic governance for state politics in the urban sphere. The piece features a depiction of nineteenth century Mexican Catholic priest Father Miguel Hidalgo in the moment of his historic *grito*<sup>42</sup> for Mexico's independence from Spanish colonial rule on September 16, 1810, in the town of Dolores, state of Guanajuato. The event is now celebrated annually as Mexico's Independence Day. In *Arte Jaguar*'s rendition, Father Hidalgo stands on the balcony of the church ringing the church bell. He addresses a large crowd of people depicted, in the tradition of legendary Mexican graphic artist Jose Guadalupe Posada, as a sea of *calavera*<sup>43</sup> faces, with the battle cry: "Muera el PRI!"<sup>44</sup> In the background, banners read "Fuera Ulises Ruiz de Oaxaca!"<sup>45</sup> and "Viva la lucha Popular!"<sup>46</sup>

*Arte Jaguar* installed this piece on an exterior wall of Oaxaca's Cathedral of Our Lady of the Assumption (built in 1535). Often referred to as the Oaxaca Cathedral, it is the center of religious life in Oaxaca City and sits in the middle of the *zócalo*. In invoking the nineteenth century call for revolution against the Spanish, *Arte Jaguar* re-sited the historic struggle by superimposing it with the Oaxaca Commune's call to depose Ruiz Ortiz and placing it on the exterior wall of the Oaxaca Cathedral. The image suggests that the Oaxaca Commune was another site in the long history of popular struggle against tyrannical rule, and that Ruiz Ortiz and the PRI government, while internally appointed, operated with oppressive tactics tantamount to those of an external colonial invader.

### Figure 17

*El toreador*,<sup>47</sup> Stencil-Based Street Art by Arte Jaguar, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, 2006



Note. Photograph by Itandehui Franco Ortiz.

<sup>42</sup> cry

<sup>43</sup> skeleton

<sup>44</sup> "Death to the PRI!"

<sup>45</sup> "Ulises Ruiz Out of Oaxaca!"

<sup>46</sup> "Long Live the People's Struggle!"

<sup>47</sup> The bullfighter

Another *Arte Jaguar* piece (Figure 17) installed on an exterior wall on one of the main streets in downtown Oaxaca enlists humor and lightness in a satirical depiction of the struggle between the popular power of APPO and the repressive governmental power of Ruiz Ortiz and the state. In this elaborately detailed stencil-based street art piece, Ruiz Ortiz is imagined as an absurdly flamboyant and hubristic bullfighter. Dressed in the attire of a Spanish *toreador*,<sup>48</sup> Ruiz Ortiz contorts his figure, with his body facing the bull and his enormous head turned toward the viewer as if to show off his skill and virility, seemingly unaware that the bull is about to catapult him into oblivion with two fierce horns. In the background, large blue letters spell out “APPO.” Aler, one of the three main artists in the collective *Arte Jaguar*, explained that the bull represents the Oaxacan people (personal communication, July 14, 2016). The stencil piece suggests that APPO’s movement is not just an ideological struggle; it is a physical fight against oppressive powers. The Oaxacan people must activate their bodies as one united body in order to oust the governor and his “*mal gobierno*.”<sup>49</sup> Ruiz Ortiz, cast as bullfighter, is once again aligned with the oppressive colonial interests of Spanish invaders. He also fatally underestimates his enemy. The people of Oaxaca, brought together in APPO, are the strong, stubborn bull.

A showdown between a bullfighter and a bull is in the first place a contest for territory. *Arte Jaguar*’s piece appeared on what is generally considered the final official day of Oaxaca’s uprising, November 25, 2006, which culminated in an hours-long standoff between APPO and federal police. Ruiz Ortiz had “declared that he was initiating the operation of a plan which would obtain control of the city before the first of December,” and it ended when federal police forces brutally suppressed the APPO with paramilitary tactics, resulting in “165 political prisoners, tens of disappeared, hundreds of wounded and injured, as well as several deaths” (Davies, 2007, pp. 190-193). Street art confronted repressive state authorities and called attention to their blockading of public spaces as inimical to political expression. *Arte Jaguar*’s bullfighter image registers APPO’s strength, even in the face of this repression, in struggling to reclaim Oaxaca City, its public spaces, and its governance as the domain of the people. The piece establishes this struggle as an embodied fight over the rights to territory—both physical (public space) and political (democratic space)—and above all, claiming the dignity of mattering in those spaces.

Thus, the foreclosure of public spaces, including eviction of the teachers’ encampment from the city center, paramilitary occupation of the city, and sanctions on public art, also reflected the obstruction of a more immaterial form of public space—a space of political participation accessible to all citizens. Street art, graphic art, and print media created as part of the Oaxaca Commune recuperated and reclaimed contested rights to public space. Installing stencil-based wall and street artworks on UNESCO-protected colonial architecture, disseminating prints that negotiated the terms of APPO’s popular assembly model, mobilizing revolutionary icons and historic struggles, and transforming religious icons into models of creative resistance, artist collectives opposed state regulations mobilized to tamp down dissent.

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<sup>48</sup> bullfighter

<sup>49</sup> “bad government”

APPO's incentive to develop an inclusive and diverse political space, inspired by the horizontal, consensus-based processes of Indigenous communal governance, was couched in the argument that Oaxacan state politics had not made space for diverse voices, participation from minoritized citizens, or opportunities for democratic transformation. In 2006, when the PRI was still in power in Oaxaca, this struggle was immediate, pressing, and had a tremendous amount at stake, given the state's ethnic diversity, desperate poverty, and significant Indigenous population. The repressive tactics of PRI Governor Ruiz Ortiz transformed the rife frustration over the lack of access to a true democratic process into all-out ire.

This case study provides an effective example of PIC in action. Christiano outlines five elements of effective PIC campaigns:

1. They're visual, and even when the tactics they use are not explicitly visual, they rely heavily on visual metaphor to communicate core concepts.
2. They connect with the values of their target audience.
3. They use stories that engage new constituents in their cause.
4. Their calls-to-action are concrete, focused, and have an obvious connection to the goal.
5. They make use of emotion in surprising ways. (Christiano, 2017, p. 12)

As demonstrated through this analysis, APPO's graphic art initiatives employed all of these strategic elements. Street art in the Oaxaca Commune denounced the governor for his appropriation and misuse of public spaces and his inability to properly govern his people. Graphic art promoted the popular assembly and the movement to install it as reclamation of these threatened public spaces toward the creation of a new public space of participatory politics. This meant imaging APPO as a diversely composed movement and a proposal for a new form of politics capable of better serving the people, which in the context of Oaxaca meant in particular the inclusion of women and Indigenous peoples. Artist assemblies operating under the umbrella of APPO's movement channeled their critique of the state toward APPO's proposal for a different kind of governing at the level of grassroots. In broadcasting the political and ideological debates, dialogues, developments, and fault-lines of APPO's movement, PIC in the form of street art sketched the space that APPO offered for renegotiating the operation of political power.

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