Summer Reflection

I am still processing this summer…

When people ask me about my summer in Mexico, I say “It was amazing! I learned a lot.” The next questions tend to be about what I did and where I was and the answers I give are uninspiring, they include the words/phrases internship, research, and “100 miles from the Guatemalan border”. None of these come close to being descriptive of what I experienced in Chiapas. After 2 months of constant reflection there and almost a whole month since I’ve been back stateside, I have yet been able to adequately describe the experience in any articulate way. What I have been able to do is identify thoughts, ideas, memories, and question that have, for some reason or another, stayed with me. These “moments” are what I would like to present as my reflection. As disjointed or “horizontal” (possessing little depth) as they may seem, there is a central theme underpinning each of them: context.

ONE

During the two week trip at the very start of my stay in Chiapas, we had the opportunity to meet Don Rene, a creole maize farmer, and his family to discuss the impacts of NAFTA, among other things. Don Rene was insightful, he had an incredible breadth of understanding about his system (milpa), greater transnational phenomena, and his place within each of these. However, what stole the show for me were his two granddaughters. These girls, ages 5 and 8, were astonishingly aware. They knew that jatropha was used to fence in the cattle, which ejido member owned the tractor, which of the bulls was American bred, and the future of their grandfather’s fields. The older of the two sisters was interested in science, she said she wanted to be a vet. The younger one was eager to follow around her grandfather in the field and was quite interested in the
cubelets of dirt I was making. Needless to say I was very impressed by how sharp these two children were, talking to them made me feel so much joyous and hopeful for the future of our world. It wasn’t until later when the older sister asked one of the other girls on the trip if she could translate some text from Spanish to English that I realized how radical these girls were. The Cornell students in this situation sort of naturally assumed that the girl was simply asking for help on some of her school work but, this was not the case. She wanted the translation for her own purposes, she knew absolutely no English and wanted to have this translation as a learning tool. Her ambition and courage inspired me and made me think about the likelihood of these girls living out their academic dreams without access to the necessary education (in no way am I saying that knowing English is necessary). It also made me question the likelihood of ever crossing paths with them again. What does the future hold in store for these girls or, for that matter, any little girl living in rural Mexico?

TWO

At some point during my stay in San Cristobal de las Casas someone had mentioned to me that the indigenous that do their buying and selling in the urban core did not have the right to walk on the side walk until 1994. Simply the thought of something so painfully unjust existing in my lifetime exemplifies how persistent these social inequalities have been and speaks to the plight of the indigenous on so many levels, unfortunately, their value as human beings is the first of these.