

CELEBRATION OF ZAPATISMO¹

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Zapatismo is nowadays the most radical, and perhaps the most important, political initiative in the world. But the Zapatistas continue to be a mystery and a paradox. Can there be such a thing as a revolutionary group with no interest in seizing power? Revolutionary leaders who refuse to hold any public post, now or in the future? An *army* that fires words and civil disobedience, championing non-violence? An organization profoundly rooted in its local culture with a global scope? A group that is strongly affiliated with democratic principles, and yet is democracy's most radical critic? People profoundly rooted in ancient Mayan traditions and yet immersed in contemporary ideas, problems, and technologies? "Everything for everyone, nothing for us," a principle daily applied in their initiatives, includes power: they don't want power, even within their own communities, where the powers that be don't dare to interfere. What kind of movement is this? Is it possible to apply to them, to their ideas and practices, conventional or alternative notions of Power or power? Do they fit in the archetypal model of the Prince? The expression "national liberation" is included in the name they gave to their movement, but they seem to be radically different from the movements for national liberation of the post war era. How do we deal with their ideas and practices expressing their radical freedom, their fascinating notion of liberty and liberation?

The Zapatistas challenge, in words and deeds, every aspect of contemporary society. In revealing the root cause of the current predicaments, they tear to tatters the framework of the economic society (capitalism), the nation-state, formal democracy and all modern institutions. They also render obsolete

conventional ways and practices of social and political movements and initiatives. In reconstructing the world from the bottom up, they reveal the illusory or counterproductive nature of changes conceived or implemented from the top down. Their path encourages everywhere resistance to globalization and neoliberalism, and inspires struggles for liberation. They also contribute to articulate those struggles.

The Zapatistas liberated hope from Pandora's Box.

The original Pandora, the All-Giver, was an Earth goddess in prehistoric matriarchal Greece. She let all ills escape from her amphora (*pythos*). But she closed the lid before Hope could escape. The history of modern man begins with the degradation of Pandora's myth... It is the history of the Promethean Endeavour to forge institutions in order to corral each of the rampant ills. It is the history of fading hope and rising expectations... The Promethean ethos has now eclipsed hope. Survival of the human race depends on its rediscovery as a social force (Illich 1996: 105).

In liberating hope, the Zapatistas discovered a net of plural paths, as a pertinent substitute for the very western notion of One World, One Truth, One Path, which has been the ideological root of all colonialisms. In so doing, the Zapatistas paved the way for a renaissance. They are still a source of inspiration for those walking along those paths. But they do not pretend to administer or control such a net, which has its own impulses, strength and orientation. We all are, or can be, Zapatistas.

Behind our black mask, behind our armed voice, behind our unnamable name, behind what you see of us, behind this, we are you. Behind this, we are the same simple and ordinary men and women who are repeated in all races, painted in all colors, speak in all languages,

and live in all places. Behind this, we are the same forgotten men and women, the same excluded, the same intolated, the same persecuted, the same as you. Behind this, we are you.²

¡Basta! Enough!

At midnight of 1st January 1994, NAFTA—the North American Free Trade Agreement between Mexico, the US and Canada, came into force. Barely two hours later, thousands of Indians armed with machetes, clubs, and a few guns occupied four of the main towns in Chiapas, a province bordering Guatemala, and declared war on the Mexican government. The rebels revealed that they were Indians of different ethnic groups calling themselves Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN). They appealed for an end to five hundred years of oppression and fifty years of “development,” and expressed the hope that a new political regime would allow them to reclaim their commons and to regenerate their own forms of governance and their art of living and dying. It was time to say “¡Basta! Enough!”

For ten years, encircled by 50-60,000 troops, a third of the Mexican Army, the Zapatistas have peacefully resisted the “low intensity” war waged against them by the government. They have been continually exposed to public attention. In fact, no contemporary social or political movement has attracted more public attention and for more time than Zapatismo.³ But there is continuing debate about the very nature and prospects of their initiatives. Time and again, the constituted powers and both friends and enemies assume that they are history, that they *were* a kind of lightening in the middle of darkness but their best moment and opportunity is over and they are now suffering a kind of agony in a small area in the south of Mexico. Who are they? Are they still alive and well, at the very beginning of their initiative—as they say—or are they history, as many critics observe?

It is evident what Zapatismo is not.

The Zapatistas are not a fundamentalist or messianic movement. Within their ranks, very different beliefs and religions, most of them well rooted in their traditions, harmoniously coexist. They are very open and ecumenical in religious matters. The majority of them are indigenous people, but they did not start an indigenous or ethnic movement. They do not reduce the scope of their initiative to indigenous peoples, to a “minority” or even less to themselves, to their own claims: “Everything for everyone, nothing for us” is not a slogan but a political attitude and practice.

The Zapatistas are not a nationalist, separatist, or “autonomist” movement. They show no desire for Chiapas to become a small nation-state, an indigenous republic, or an “autonomous” administrative district, in line with the demands of minorities in some other countries. They actively resist the modern propensity to subsume local ways of being and cultural differences in the homogenizing treatment given to people classed as “minorities” in the modern nation state – usually another way of hiding discrimination and entrenching individualism.

The Zapatistas are not guerrillas. They are not a fish that swims in the sea of the people, as Che Guevara would define a guerrilla. They are the sea, not the fish: the uprising was the collective decision of hundreds of communities not interested in power. And they are not a revolutionary group in search of popular support to seize power. In exploring this attitude, as I do later in this essay, we can discover one of the most important and challenging traits of the Zapatistas.

Listening While You Walk

“The first fundamental act of the EZLN was to learn how to listen and to speak,” say the Zapatistas.⁴

On the 17th November 1983 a group of six professional revolutionaries arrived in Chiapas to establish a guerrilla centre and base. Their first task was to learn how to survive in the

jungle by themselves. After one year, the person later represented as old Antonio discovered them and introduced them to the communities. Their marxist-leninist-guevarist ideology could not permeate their conversations. "Your word is too harsh," people kept telling them. The guerrillas' "square" ideas were thus not only dented but so severely damaged that they became unrecognizable. The first Zapatistas say that in this initial confrontation they lost—they, those bearing that ideology and that political project, a would-be guerrilla in the Latin American tradition. But out of this intercultural dialogue Zapatismo was born and rooted itself in hundreds of communities.

In the following years, these communities tried every legal tool at their disposal, every form of social, economic or political organization. They organized marches, sit-ins, everything. They even walked two thousand kilometers from Chiapas to the capital, Mexico City, in order to find someone to hear their call. No one listened. Not the society and not the government. They were dying like flies. They thus preferred a dignified death to the docile march of sheep to the slaughter. "The mountain told us to take up arms so we would have a voice. It told us to cover our faces so we would have a face. It told us to forget our names so we could be named. It told us to protect our past so we would have a future" (The Zapatistas 1998: 22). All they had been left with was their dignity. They affirmed themselves in it, hoping that their sacrifice might awaken society; and that perhaps their children and grandchildren could live a better life.

They were the weakest. Nobody was listening. But their uprising was echoed by the "civil society,"⁵ which urged them to try a peaceful and political way. They accepted such a mandate and they made themselves strong in it, changing the form of their struggle. Only twelve days after the armed uprising started, they became the champions of non-violence.⁶

According to the Zapatistas, after the Dialogue of the Cathedral in March 1994 (frustrated after the assassination of

the presidential candidate of the official party) and the elections of that year, they needed to create a different kind of space for dialogue:

We needed a space to learn to listen and to speak with this plurality that we call ‘civil society.’ We agreed then to construct such space and to call it Aguascalientes, since it would be the headquarters of the National Democratic Convention, whose name alluded to the Convention of the Mexican revolutionary forces in the second decade of the 20th Century... On 8th August 1994 commander Tacho, in the name of the Revolutionary indigenous Clandestine Committee of the EZLN inaugurated, before six thousand people from different parts of the world, the so called Aguascalientes and he delivered it to national and international civil society... But the idea of Aguascalientes was going *más allá*, beyond. We wanted a space for the dialogue with civil society. And dialogue means also to learn to listen to the other and learning how to speak to him or her.

When the Aguascalientes of Guadalupe Tepeyac was destroyed by the federal army, in February 1995, other Aguascalientes were born in different Zapatista communities. They served since then many purposes, especially for the relationship with “civil society.”

In December 1995 autonomous municipalities started to be created in the Zapatista area. In them, in spite of the military encirclement and other external pressures, the Zapatistas practiced their autonomy, both within each of the communities constituting every municipality and within each municipality, where the communities organized and controlled a governing council.

After a long reflection on these experiences, the Zapatistas introduced important changes in their internal struc-

ture and in their ways of relating to “civil society.” In order to inform about them, burying the Aguascalientes and giving birth to the Caracoles (snails, seashells), they held a great celebration from 8th to 10th August 2003.

Internally they decided to separate the military structure from the civil organization and to harmonize the activities of the autonomous municipalities in every Zapatista region through Juntas de Buen Gobierno (Councils or Boards of Good Government). These new autonomous bodies were created “to take care that in Zapatista territory those that lead, lead by following.. In each rebel area there will be a Junta, constituted by one or two delegates of each of the Autonomous Councils (of the municipalities) of the area.”

The autonomous communities and municipalities will thus continue functioning with their own structure, but now they will also have these Juntas de Buen Gobierno, articulating several municipalities. The Juntas will attend to conflicts and difficulties of the autonomous municipalities within the jurisdiction of each Junta. Anyone feeling that an injustice has been committed in his or her community or municipality, or that things are not being done like they ought to be done, according to the community will and the principle of “command by obeying,” may have recourse to this new instance. These juntas will also be in charge of any dealings with “civil society” and if needed with government agencies.

Why call the new political bodies *caracoles*? The Zapatistas offered different explanations.

The wise ones of olden times say that the hearts of men and women are in the shape of a *caracol*, and that those who have good in their hearts and thoughts walk from one place to the other, awakening gods and men for them to check that the world remains right. For that reason, who keeps vigil while the others are sleeping

uses his *caracol*, and he uses it for many things, but most of all as not to forget.

They say here that the most ancient ones said that others before them said that the very first people of these lands held an appreciation for the symbol of the *caracol*. They say, that they say, that they said that the *caracol* represents entering into the heart, that this is what the very first one's called knowledge. They say that they say that they said that the *caracol* also represents exiting from the heart to walk the world, that this is what the very first called life. And not only, they say that they say that they said that with the *caracol* the community was called together for the word to travel from one to the other and thus accord were born. And also they say that they say that they said that the *caracol* was a gift for the ear to hear even the most distant words. This they say that the say, that they said.

The *caracoles* will be like doors to enter into the communities and for the communities to come out; like windows to see us inside and also for us to see outside; like loudspeakers in order to send far and wide our word and also to hear the words from the one who is far away. But, most of all, they will remind us that we ought to keep watch and to check uprightness of the worlds that populate the world.

At the celebration that buried the Aguascalientes, and birthed the Caracoles, the Zapatistas announced that in their territories the Plan Puebla-Panamá—a neoliberal scheme for Southern Mexico and Central America—would not be applied. They proposed instead the Plan La Realidad-Tijuana that “consists in linking all the resistances in our country, and reconstructing Mexico from the bottom up.”

As these highlights of the very complex story of Zapatismo illustrate, the Zapatistas do not enclose themselves in a body of doctrine, in an ideology, which usually starts as a guide to action and ends transmogrified into a rigid and authoritarian straightjacket. They have changed continually, enriching their statements and ways, according with changing circumstances and following their intense interaction with other groups and organizations. They listen, learn from others and apply in each step a healthy self-criticism. Yet this is not mere pragmatism. They continue to be solidly attached to certain principles of behavior and they possess a splendid moral integrity. They also possess the strength of character that emanates from a well rooted, open and hospitable dignity.

There are few things more distinctive of the Zapatistas than their capacity to listen... and to change, according to what they heard, operating profound mutations in their movement. What some people see as chameleonic behavior or betrayal to sacred principles or doctrinaire statements, is instead an expression of vitality, flexibility, openness and capacity to change. This is the challenge in describing Zapatismo. You need to allude to the mutations of the subject itself and its attitudes.

Desperately Seeking Marcos

Many people still insist on reducing Zapatismo to Marcos. This looks like racism. An educated white man is surely manipulating those poor, illiterate Mayas. They cannot say what he is saying and even less conceive such a movement. This looks like racism.

But, what about the crowds? In 2001 Subcomandante Marcos and twenty five Zapatista commanders traveled to Mexico City. For the first time, millions were able to see and hear them. Time and again the crowds did not allow the other Zapatistas or local indigenous leaders to speak. "Marcos! Marcos!" they demanded. No one else. They wanted to listen to him. Were they also racists?

In the plaza of Tepatepec, Hidalgo, a new legend started. For two years not a drop of water had fallen in the region. The very minute Marcos started his speech a torrential rain began. "Of course," said an old woman; "This man is turning our political system upside down. Why shouldn't he command the rain?" Was she racist? Or just an innocent searcher looking for hope incarnated in a charismatic leader?

And what about the millions collecting the Zapatista communiqués penned by Marcos, his stories, his interviews, his letters? What about the editors publishing with impressive love and care his "selected writings"? (Subcomandante Marcos 2001) The book, with a Foreword by Saramago, celebrates him as one of the best Latin American writers of all times. Norman Mailer writes, in the cover of that book: "Marcos has earned his indignation like few men alive." Are these admirers racists as well?

Should we think, alternatively, that the "system" performed its usual operation and did not wait thirty years to sell Marcos T-shirts? (Benetton offered him one million dollars to include his face in its collection.) Or should we accept the view that he really is the timely savior that the world was waiting for; an icon that globaphobics can now use to express their dissent; the new flag for rebellion in these desperate times?⁷ Is Marcos the romantic revolutionary, a living substitute for Che? Is he really an extra-ordinary leader, as wise as he is heroic, awakening us out of confusion and conformity, and thus deserving trust and subordination?

No doubt, the person behind the mask is extra-ordinary. Who can deny his literary talent? Even the very anti-Zapatista Nobel Prize winner, Octavio Paz, recognized it. No one can question his political savvy. Loved and hated by many people, Marcos, like the Zapatistas, remains a mystery and a paradox, a puzzle. Does he really fit into the image of a new revolutionary archetype? Unquestionably, he has charisma. He enchants both the crowds and his readers. But, is he really a

leader, romantic or not? And even more pertinent to the point, is he the very core of Zapatismo, as Mao was for Maoism and Che for Guevarism? Is this particular poet-writer-strategist-rebel-revolutionary what many of his followers and readers seem to assume him to be?

During the Zapatista March to Mexico City, Marcos experienced for the first time his mesmerizing impact on the crowds.⁸ He candidly declared afterwards that the Zapatistas did not foresee this problem. Marcos became their spokesperson by accident, at the beginning of the uprising. Observing his effectiveness, they used him extensively in that role. The mask, used to avoid personality cult, became counterproductive. His transformation into an iconic image took them by surprise.

I do not want to minimize his role as a spokesperson. It has been critical to overcome one of the main challenges for the Zapatistas. Fully rooted in their own culture, they were keenly aware that their radical otherness was an obstacle to convey to others the spirit and meaning of their movement, without betraying their unique view of the world. How to avoid misinterpretation? How to be truthful without colonizing others with their brand of truth? How to share an attitude whose “global” scope derived from its deep cultural rootedness in Chiapas?

Few Zapatistas are proficient in Spanish; none, but Marcos, masters it. But the challenge for effective interaction was not only a question of language. It was associated with the very conception and orientation of the movement, whose radical novelty comes from both its ancient cultural roots and its contemporary innovations. Their views, fully immersed in their own cultures, seemed impenetrable for people of other cultures. Their political stance, strictly contemporary, was conceived outside the modern political spectrum. It has no clear precedents. There were no words to talk about it.

This challenge was evident since the uprising started. The Zapatistas needed to draw a line to differentiate themselves from other armed movements in Latin America, the narco-guer-

rillas, and classic peasant rebellions. Through very effective images, using both ordinary language and the epic tone of some predecessors, they appealed to people's imagination. Many analysts took the document with which they introduced themselves for a delirious and politically insane declaration. Instead, the people received it as a sign of hope, inspiring and awaking them. In a matter of hours the Zapatistas established themselves in a new domain, outside the spectrum of classifications that scholars, analysts, and reactionaries would try to pigeon hole them in.

After ten years of clandestineness, well trained in the intercultural dialogue through which Zapatismo was born, the Zapatistas and Marcos himself discovered his function as a cultural bridge, in order to open a dialogue with "civil society" and spread the contagion of dignity and hope. Instead of a cold, abstract ideology, frozen in seductive slogans, Marcos uses images, stories, metaphors, and characters like Durito and old Antonio.⁹ He was not selling any political code or ideology "to plug everyone into." In this way, his masked voice became the voice of many voices.

Marcos himself explained "the futility for scientists and the police of speculating over who is behind the criminal nose and ski mask" (Gilly et al. 1995, Marcos 2001: 249). The Zapatistas show themselves by hiding and hide by showing themselves. They are the face that hides itself to be seen, the name that hides itself to be named. It is futile to look both for the individual "author" of plans and conceptions, or for the "real" individual self behind the nosed ski mask. Marcos, born on January 1st 1994, will soon vanish. It will no longer be needed; it will not, like Cid or Che, win battles after death; it will not be used as a credential legitimizing power.

Today, the Zapatistas are a source of inspiration, not of guidance. Zapatismo escapes all "isms." They do not ask the people to affiliate themselves to a church, a party, an ideology, a political strategy, or plan. They inspire dignity, courage, and self-

respect. They nourish with their moral strength and political imagination non-violent initiatives against neoliberalism and globalization.

Both the system and its discontents use Marcos. By criminalizing or idealizing the “individual” behind the mask, they dissipate precisely what they try to take hold of. They are thus unable to see with new eyes the Zapatistas’ radical stance.

Many others, however, derive continual inspiration from them. They do not need to desperately seek Marcos and idolize him. They know that we all are Marcos, in our own way and place, with our own face and dignity, in our own struggle. As the participants in the Zapatista Encuentro of 1996 declared, “The rebels search each other out. They walk towards one another... They begin to recognize themselves... and continue on their fatiguing walk, walking as is now necessary to walk, that is to say, struggling” (The Zapatistas 1998: 43).

Walking at the Pace of the Slowest

All the “revolutionary vanguards” are obsessively focused on keeping their position of leadership and command. They must be at the top and control, by all means, the “masses.” And they always are in a rush. They have to be the first to arrive in the Promised Land, which usually means seizing Power. Once in Power, they think, they will be able to lead the people in the realization of their revolutionary project.

The Zapatistas are instead focused on seeking consensus and walking at the pace of the slowest. No important political decision is taken by a small group of leaders. As a consequence, the decision process is slow and complex. It requires long and convoluted forms of discussion and consultation. They do not speed it up through the method of voting, which always leaves a balance of winners and losers, majorities and minorities. And the march itself, walking the consensual path, is unavoidably slow.

Such search for consensus rejects the assumption of homogeneity in the understanding of social subjects or issues, as well as in the basic attitudes of the assembled people, implicit in conventional “democratic consensus.” The ballot box for referenda, plebiscite, and elections are not only exposed to manipulation and control; they are also based on the assumption that everyone shares a common understanding of the matters to be voted for and that the voters also share some basic attitudes determining the “democratic consensus” constructed through their votes. Fully aware of the many differences in the plurality of interests, perceptions, attitudes, and voices of the real world, the Zapatistas try to identify by consensus the paths to be walked. And in walking them, once agreed upon by everyone, they adjust the pace of the walk to those lagging behind. The slowest, on their part, have been accelerating their pace, as they see the institutional roof falling over them.

At the same time, while walking that path, the Zapatistas are resorting to legal and political procedures, in order to construct another level of consensus. They seem convinced that those procedures, integral to one another, are the best way to protect the structure of freedom they are creating.

For ten years, the Zapatistas have repeatedly challenged the state of things and its legal form, as both *refuseniks* and outlaws, and each time, in the same operation, they have appealed to political and legal procedures. The best example is that on 1st January 1994: the Zapatistas framed their declaration of war to the Mexican government within the Mexican Constitution, whose article 39 establishes that “all public power is originated in the people” and “the people have at all times the inalienable right to alter or modify the form of government.” But it is in fact a pattern, observed in the “revolutionary laws” illegally applied in the Zapatista territories, in the Accords of San Andrés (the most important: a Constitutional reform) or the Juntas de Buen Gobierno.

From the *Leyes de Indias* imposed by the Spaniards onwards, the law has been used against the indigenous peoples. It has been, for 500 years, a tool to oppress and marginalize them. And this background is now compounded by “judiciary inflation”: more and more, every personal or collective conflict is brought to court and transmogrified there into an illusion of justice. It is entrusted to professionals, who derive dignity and income from using and abusing the law for individual gain. Such professional expertise is clearly detached from any consideration about the common good, people’s will or real justice. Seven of every ten living lawyers live in the US, where they are legally forced to use the law for the benefit of their clients (who often are criminals) even if in doing so they are manifestly going against the principle of justice. The case of O.J. Simpson is now becoming paradigmatic. To know what is good or bad you now need professional assistance—increasingly corrupt!

The horrors of the judiciary system, supposedly dedicated to the administration and delivery of justice, are increasingly evident. Justice does not appear to be a theme of any Supreme Court, even though they usually have the word in their name. The notion of justice has been reduced to the mechanical and formalist application of unjust laws. The judicial authorities appeal to the law, when they practice their despotism in show tribunals. They may or not recognize the increasingly evident aberrations of the law, but as long as it is standing—they say—they must apply it. They thus wash their hands about the atrocities, mistakes and nonsense of the judiciary system, which also seems to be beyond the field of responsibility of the legislative powers.

Far from abandoning this mined territory, given its terrible condition, the Zapatistas vindicate it. They do not throw the baby out with the bath water. They seem fully aware that having resource to formal structure, recorded in the history of a people, permits to denounce the cancerous hypertrophy of the dominant regime and to tell the truth, showing the aberra-

tion of this modern form of idolatry. In spite of its fragility, the word, the verb, the formal expression of legal and political procedures, can gather the multitude of men and women, what we call a people, in order to leave behind such state of things and continue with the task of reconstruction.

The concept of Law keeps all its force, even where society makes access to legal machinery a privilege, or where it systematically denies justice, or where it cloaks despotism in the mantle of show tribunals... The structure of political and legal procedures are integral to one another. Both shape and express the structure of freedom... Law can be used as the most dramatic, symbolic and convivial tool in the political area (Illich 1974).

To protect the formal structure of freedom the Zapatistas continually appeal to the legal and political procedures, fully aware of what such procedures are and have been, in the history of a people, in spite of the distortions and perversions imposed on them by successive structures of domination.

The Zapatistas insist that they are rebels, not revolutionaries. Perhaps they are right. The true revolutionaries would be those ordinary men and women mobilized by the dignified rebellion of the Zapatistas. They are producing a radical change at the grassroots, all over the world. For the most part, the change has not yet crystallized in enduring institutions, but it seems to have very solid foundations. It is perhaps the first social revolution of the XXI century: the revolution of the new commons (Esteva and Prakash 1998, Esteva 2000).

Presence and Representation

During their First Intercontinental Encounter for Humanity and Against Neoliberalism, in July-August, 1996, Subcomandante Marcos explained, in an informal intervention, the attitude of the Zapatistas about power when they were preparing the uprising:

We thought that we needed to reformulate the question of power. We will not repeat the formula that to change the world you need to seize power, and once in power you will organize it the way it is the best for the world, that is, what is the best for me, because I am in power. We thought that if we conceived a change in the premise of the question of power, arguing that we did not want to take it, this would produce a different form of politics, another kind of politicians, other human beings who could make politics very different to the one practiced by the politicians we suffer today along the whole political spectrum (EZLN 1996: 69).

On 1st January, 1996, in their Fourth Declaration of Selva Lacandona, the Zapatistas invited everyone to explore at the local level what the people can do without political parties and the government. For the Zapatistas, the question is not who is in Power, or how any person, group or party got a power position (through elections or other means), but the very nature of the power system. They do not believe that the improvement in the electoral procedures, which seem to need everywhere a complete overhaul, will be able to address the problems embedded in the very structure of the “democratic” nation-state. They do not think that the needed changes should, or can, come from above. They think instead that those changes can only be realized with the transformation of the society by itself, from within, in people’s social fabric in communities, *barrios*, municipalities.

Democracy, in fact, can only be where the people are, and not “up there” at the top of the institutions, no matter how perfect the procedures to elect representatives who will shape and operate those institutions could be. Instead of putting their trust in the constituted powers, whose legitimacy they question, the Zapatistas deposit their hope in the “constituent force,” the force constituting the constituted powers, the one that can give, or not, life, meaning and substance to them.¹⁰ Zapatismo has been, from the very beginning, an open appeal to this “constituent force” of the society, an invitation to those forming it to directly and consciously deal with social transformation, not through their supposed representatives.

It is increasingly evident, everywhere, that the constituted powers are not respecting the people’s will. The voices of 30 million people, for example, occupying the streets everywhere on February 15th 2003, attempting to stop the war in the Middle East, were not heard. This situation generates increasing disenchantment with formal democracy. It produces a feeling of impotence. Many people react with apathy, indifference, even desperation. Both to vote, or to abandon the ballot box, may be useless or counterproductive. The recent presidential election in the US may be a case in point. There was intense and extensive social and political pressure to vote. Both Republicans and Democrats considered that this was a critical, very important election. The turnout, however, was not really higher than the historical low level of the post-war era.¹¹ Many people recognized the importance of the episode, but did not consider it useful to participate in the exercise. In the capital of the state where I live, Oaxaca, the new Municipal President took office (January 1st 2005) with 12% of the electorate (5% of the population); 70% of the electorate did not vote, in spite of the importance of this specific authority for them and this election in particular, due to their fundamental disenchantment with the system.

The Zapatistas created an alternative path—a political *force*, instead of a political party, which transforms social and political reality at the grassroots and can enclose the enclosers, encircling and controlling the powers that be. The Zapatistas know very well that their current struggle occurs within the legal and political framework of the Mexican State. But they are not trapped in the perverse illusion that the State is the only general political reality or a privileged form of political activity. Politics, for them, is a commitment to the common good, as expressed in common sense, the sense held in the community. They take away from the State and the market the function of defining the good life and reclaim it as a faculty of “civil society,” i.e., the people.

The radical critique of the Zapatistas to the representative system is not reduced to the current conditions of democratic procedures in Mexico or the world. It embraced the very nature of the system. They are challenging the principle of representation, which hides under the democratic appearance of the modern constituted powers in the nation-state the authoritarian tradition of their monarquic predecessors. Within the design of the nation-state, social and politic power, constructed on the unity of men, is concentrated in the hands of the sovereign, in the head of the state. Hobbes saw this clearly:

A multitude of men, are made one person, when they are by one man, or one person, represented; so that it be done with the consent of every one of that multitude in particular. For it is the *unity* of the represented, that maketh the person *one*. And it is the representer that beareth the person, and but one person: and *unity*, cannot otherwise be understood in multitude (Hobbes 1839, vol.III: 151).

Hobbes clarifies that “an actor may be many men made one by plurality of voices,” like in a modern Congress. The fact that

the constituted powers in the modern “democratic” states are many and they are exposed to many checks and balances, including in some cases the principle of recall, does not change their very nature as a structure of domination. “The instructions of the State are formulated in the name of the will of all, since it is assumed that the constitutive assembly is the bearer of the social will” (González Pedrero 1993: 157).

The Power becomes a will to command; the subjects should obey. Those in Power may decide against the explicit will of the majority of the governed: that is within their power, their legal capacities. Their subjects have surrendered to them their will. This is precisely the experience that is producing increasing disenchantment with democracy everywhere.

Perhaps we need a whole new language to express the new attitudes, supported in an old tradition, to create an alternative to this structure of domination until now called democracy.

“Autonomy,” said Don Gregorio, an old Yaqui Indian, speaking during a recent meeting of indigenous peoples in Oaxaca, Mexico, “is not something we ought to ask for or that anyone can give us. It is something we have, despite everything. Its other name is dignity.” Indigenous peoples in Mexico are now practicing autonomy in their communities. While its momentum comes from the past, it acquired new vitality and meaning with the Zapatista uprising. Autonomy includes their own ways of regulating community life.

In Mazateco the word for person, *shu* symbolizes “a walking flower.” The *shu-tashá*, “a walking flower in the hands of the people,” is the supreme authority for the Mazatecos, one of the many indigenous peoples of Oaxaca. No one would dare to defy it. This authority deals with marital problems and conflicts between communities. It has no power to enforce its will or opinion, but it has the authority bestowed on it by the community. The people are free to consult him or not. He rules by obeying, as the Zapatistas put it, in his search for the common

good rooted in harmony. The people see wisdom in him, not power.

In thousands of indigenous communities, whoever commits a transgression to the customary rules and tradition is seen as a person in need of comfort, not punishment. People in the village may tie him to a tree, but only to wait for the elders to come. Once the elders bring him back from his supposed delirium (the assumption is that he committed the crime when he was out of his mind) they untie him from the tree. The point then is to compensate the victim and re-establish harmony. Whoever kills someone must support the family of the victim for the rest of his life. There are no lawyers, judges or prisoners. The killer is free. And he usually becomes a very good citizen, given the economic burden he carries on his shoulders. He may even go to the US, to earn dollars for his two families. To flee from his grave responsibility would be worse than death or jail.

One of the best traditions of these indigenous communities and peoples is the tradition to change the tradition in a traditional way. Each generation inherits customs and rules that govern their community life, but each changes them autonomously, adapting them to the times and learning from others. By refusing to break with the past—to escape to the future as the “moderns” do—they maintain their historical continuity.

Political activists and market boosters take turns trying to co-opt them and many other people disenchanted with democracy. They pressure them to participate in broader political initiatives, in elections, in struggles to occupy seats of Power, or at least to have a piece of them. They recognize the value of what the people are doing, but observing that they won't get anywhere this way. They consider such struggle to be sterile and they warn them that they will just keep wearing themselves down under police repression and economic colonization, until global forces wipe them from the map or turn them into their servants.

Some people within their own ranks share that concern. They observe that in their own communities they might win, but on the outside they will lose battles, as threats and repression escalate, while the schools and the media conquer the hearts of their young people. These people form political groupings, accept positions in the government or candidacies in the parties—both conceded to seduce those communities and peoples—and they pester them to take part in elections. (Their absence could be dangerous, they say; despots and the far-Right will win if the democratic people abandon the ballot box). Others seek to complement the representative regime with popular initiative, referendum and recall, to enrich the democratic elements in the society.

Many people are not closing their ears to those voices, but they continue learning from experience. Every time some of their people win political office, even as the result of a collective struggle, they get lost in the logic of the governmental and party system. They don't understand the obsession with political office, under the conviction that to occupy it will contribute to the common good. The Zapatista uprising allowed the indigenous communities and peoples of the neighboring state of Oaxaca to win legal recognition for their political autonomy and a new kind of legal respect in 1995 and 1998. Since then, graffiti appears regularly in their villages: "No political parties allowed, least of all the PRI" (the dominant party). Parties split them, they dissolve their communal bonds—their way of living in community—they divide them and subordinate them to forces beyond their control.

More and more, people discover that modern democracy is a regime in which a self-appointed small minority reproduces itself in order to control and dominate everyone else. Within each party, a small group determines the candidates and formulates the "platform." A minority of the people decides which party will take office and a tiny minority writes the laws and takes all the important decisions.

The Zapatistas are also fully aware of the current debate about the situation and prospects of the nation-state itself. Nowadays it is a conglomerate of economic and professional corporations. Each one promotes its products and services and takes care of its own interests. Periodically, the parties bring together all the stockholders—business people, union leaders, professional associations, churches, corporations—to elect a board. Democratic process is conspicuously absent inside the parties. Electoral victories are determined by marketing techniques in a media circus. Once legitimized by the vote, the winners barely take note of people's opinions. That's what leads to disenchantment with the ballot box, which attracts fewer and fewer voters.

The Zapatistas observe that the nation-state, within which the economic society was organized and promoted in both capitalist and socialist forms, is now exposed to a two-pronged attack by transnational forces and institutions, or by internal groups with ethnic, religious or ideological claims. They seem clearly interested in the different notions of nation and state, abandoned after the creation of the nation-state, which different groups are now reclaiming. They appreciate the efforts attempting to transform the homogeneous state (monocultural or multicultural) into a plural state, according to diverse conceptions.¹² But they have not committed their will or their discourse to any specific political design, suggested as a substitute for the "democratic" nation-state. They seem convinced that "society as a whole" (the general design of a society) is always the outcome of a multiplicity of initiatives, forces, and impulses—not the fruit of social engineering or theoretical designs. They appeal to sociological and political imagination, while emphasizing that what is really needed is the full participation of everyone, particularly those until now excluded, in the concepts and practices that will give a new shape to the society and its political regime. One critical aspect in this attitude is that it associates the initiative to the living present, instead of linking

it to any design or conception of the future, thus hanging people's lives from promises and expectations about an abstraction associated with social engineering.

This attitude is increasingly shared by other groups. The Congress of Ecuarrunari, for example, the largest organization in the Indigenous peoples network CONAIE in Ecuador, recently broke its alliance with the government. Its president, Humberto Cholango, pointed out:

We have always been autonomous from all governments, and of course from the current one that has swindled the people by imposing neoliberal policies... The principles of the indigenous movement are more important than any post of minister of undersecretary, and that fact can't be revoked (Esteva 2003, 22).

At the Latin American conference on "Indigenous Movements: Resistance and Alternatives," held in Mexico City at the end of May 2003, the participants repeated this message over and over again. José Naín, Mapuche from Chile, said: "On the road to self-determination we do not wish to be inside the state, rather we wish to surround the state" (Esteva 2003: 22).

The indigenous movement underlined the Aymara from Bolivia, Felipe Quispe, must have two arms: one framed within the state and the other outside it. Félix Patzi, also from Bolivia, observed:

They say that democracy is not perfect but it is the best system. We say that the communal system isn't perfect either, but it is better than democracy... In the communal system, political leadership, the administration of justice and decision-making do not lie within an individual or a group, rather in the community. The vested authority is the expression of community decision-mak-

ing. The system is based on truth, trust and commitment. What is said is what is done (Esteva 2003: 22).

In their own regions, where they are in control, the Zapatistas seem to be clearing a path in which democracy means presence, rather than representation.

Beyond Both Universalism and Relativism

The idea of *One World* is an old western dream, project and design, whose origins can be traced back to the parable of the Good Samaritan and the Apostle Paul.

The Enlightenment secularized this heritage and turned it into a humanist creed. Neither class nor sex, neither religion nor race count before human nature, as they didn't count before God. Thus the universality of the Son ship of God was recast as the universality of human dignity. From then on, 'humanity' became the common denominator uniting all peoples, causing differences in skin color, beliefs and social customs to decline in significance (Sachs 1992: 103).

Accepting the assumption that there is a fundamental sameness in all human beings, the construction of *One World* was adopted in the West as a moral obligation. It became a destructive and colonizing adventure attempting to absorb and dissolve, in the same movement, all the different traditions and forms of existence on this planet. This old project, supported by all the forms of the cross and the sword, is now carried on under US hegemony. At the end of the Second World War, such hegemony used the emblem of development (Esteva 1992). The emblem of globalization substituted it at the end of the cold war, to promote with more violence than ever a universal culturicide.

The current global project is economic in nature: it attempts the transmogrification of every man and woman on Earth into *homo economicus*, the possessive and competitive individual born in the West, who is the social foundation of capitalism (and socialism), what makes possible the social relationships defining it. This economic project has a political face: formal or representative democracy. And a moral or ethical face: human rights. (When the economic project requires it, these “faces” are abandoned) (Esteva and Prakash 1998).

“*Enough!*” said the Zapatistas to all this. For centuries, their communities entrenched themselves in their own places, resisting colonizers and developers. Such cultural resistance often expressed forms of localism or even fundamentalism. Through atrocious experiences, the Zapatista communities learned that in the era of globalization no localism will survive and no cultural resistance is enough. They also learned that capitalism now has more appetite than ever, but not enough stomach to digest all those that it attempts to control. Millions of people, as a consequence, and clearly most indigenous people, are becoming dispensable.

The Zapatistas transformed their resistance into a struggle for liberation. They remembered the experience of Emiliano Zapata, who gave them their name. In 1914, when the peasant and indigenous armies occupied Mexico’s capital, after the defeat of the dictatorship bringing them to extinction, Zapata and Villa, the two main leaders of the revolution, fell into perplexity. Their uprising was not to seize power and govern the country. They wanted Land and Freedom. They thus came back to their own places, dismantled the *haciendas* of the big landowners exploiting them and started to enjoy the land and freedom they conquered through their struggle. Four years later, both of them were assassinated. True, thanks to the revolution most peasants and indigenous people got some land, but step-by-step they lost freedom and autonomy in the political regime established after the armed struggle.

Today's Zapatistas, as the former, are not interested in seizing power and governing the country. But they learned the lesson of their predecessors. They are clearly interested in the kind of regime to be established in the country. It should permanently and fully respect their land, their autonomy, their freedom, their radical democracy. They do not attempt to impose on others their own conceptions and ways. They only hope that such a regime would be really conceived and constructed by *all* Mexicans— not only a few, not only the elite or a revolutionary vanguard. And that such a regime can be defined by the harmonious coexistence of different peoples and cultures.

This position challenges the assumption that there is a fundamental sameness in all “human beings.” There are *human invariants*—what distinguishes us from other species—but not *cultural universals*: each culture perceives and conceives the world and even those invariants in a different way. This radical rejection of all forms of universalism does not imply to surrender to the risky adventure of cultural relativism. It assumes instead, firmly and courageously, cultural *relativity*; the fact that no person or culture can assume or represent the totality of human experience; that there are not one or many truths (truth is incommensurable); that the only legitimate, coherent and sensible attitude before the real plurality of the world is radical pluralism (See Panikkar 1995, 1996, and Vachon 1995).

The Zapatistas resisted the secular, liberal temptation, of “liberating” themselves from their own culture in order to adopt some “universal” ideologies or values. Well affirmed in their own cultures and communities, they opened themselves to wide coalitions of the discontented. Their *localization* is thus radically different to both globalization and localism. It invites those still searching for a change in the frame of *One World* to create a whole new world, in which many worlds can be embraced. It is an invitation to go *más allá* (beyond) mere cultural resistance or economic or political claims (in a struggle for a bigger piece of the existing cake), towards an epic of transfor-

mation open to many cultures. It is an invitation, not preaching or instructing. It is not a sermon or a lesson, but a gesture.

The Zapatistas are fully aware that in the current situation any local reality is directly and immediately global, in the sense that it is exposed to interaction with global forces and processes. To be deeply immersed in strictly local affairs, to rigorously deal and cope with them, in the way everyone wants and can do, implies dealing with the intertwining, interpenetration and interdependence of all localities. This kind of awareness has compelled many of the discontented with the neoliberal shape of the global project to conceive alternative globalizations. The Zapatistas resist such temptation. They are fully and deeply committed with the articulation of all resistances, with wide coalitions of the discontented, with the gathering of all rebellions. But they do not attempt to subsume all the struggles in a single definition of the present and the future, in a single doctrine, slogan or ideology. They are aware that the shared construction of a real *por-venir* (the world to come) for all those discontented, increasingly dispensable for capital, can only be realized in a world in which many worlds can be embraced. They know that the time has come to bury forever the dream and project of constructing *One World*, which has been the pretext of all colonialisms and today nourishes forms of fundamentalism whose level of violence has no precedents. What is emerging, instead, can be expressed in the formula "One No, Many Yeses" (Midnight Notes 1997, Kingsnorth 2003).

Zapatistas and Zapatismo

The record of the Zapatista impact until now is pretty impressive.

- The Zapatistas were a decisive factor in the dismantling of the oldest authoritarian regime in the world, Mexico's *ancién régime*. They created an option in the profound social and political transformation which started after the collapse of that regime.¹³ Autonomous municipalities, in different parts of Mexico, and other initiatives inspired by the Zapatistas have now increasing visibility and political space. Their convening power grew from the few thousands of the first week of 1994, to the three to four million for the national and international consultation of 1996, to the more than 40 million (40% of Mexican population), for the 2001 March.
- The situation in Chiapas changed dramatically; thousand of peasants, mostly indigenous, got the land they have been struggling for and a new balance of political forces is redefining the social fabric.
- In the territories occupied by the Zapatistas, in spite of military encirclement and continual paramilitary threats, they have been doing what they said from the very beginning that they wanted to do: after reclaiming their commons, they are regenerating their own forms of governance and their art of living and dying. They have been able to operate autonomously, improving their living conditions, without any kind of services or funds from the government. They are in fact living beyond the logic of the market and the State, beyond the logic of capital.

- All over the world, there are gestures, changes, mobilizations, that seem to be inspired by the Zapatistas. The highly visible social movements against globalization, neoliberalism, or war, quote the Zapatistas as source of inspiration and support them. Thousand of committees, which call themselves “Zapatista committees,” operate across the world. They were founded as an expression of solidarity with the Zapatista cause. They are still ready to offer such solidarity and some of them are actively engaged in doing something with or for the Zapatistas. Most of them are rather involved in local or issue struggles: *for* their own dreams, projects, initiatives, or *against* a specific or general development or injustice: a dam, a road, a dumping ground, a McDonalds... or a war, a policy, a government...

One must go back very far in history to find another political initiative with similar global repercussions. Wallerstein found in Gandhi and Mandela points of comparison.¹⁴ But a real historic equivalent would require going much farther back.

While the Zapatistas affirm today that Zapatismo is stronger than ever, the political classes, the media, many analysts, even some sympathizers, are beginning to consider that the Zapatistas are history. Parallel to the extensive celebrations organized around the world for their 10th and 20th anniversary, there were many attempts to organize their funeral. It was said that they failed as a social and political movement. That far from an improvement, the material conditions of the Zapatista communities have deteriorated under their leadership and control. That the Zapatistas are now increasingly isolated in four municipalities in Chiapas, and are basically irrelevant in the national or international political scene.

The Zapatistas have frequently used a very noisy “strategy of silence” which usually generates wide bewilderment, and suspicions about their political death. They have radically aban-

doned the conventional political arena. They openly reject all political parties and refuse to have any contact with the government, both for its services or funds—which they reject—or for a dialogue—since the government has not honored its word and signature in the San Andrés Accord.¹⁵ They refuse to participate in the electoral process. All these elements contribute to explain the conventional, reactionary or even sympathetic perception that the Zapatistas are history, that the peak of their movement and initiatives is over. On January 11, 2005, President Fox declared in Chiapas that “Zapatismo is already falling behind” (*quedado en el pasado*). The very noisy public reactions he provoked with such a statement showed that it is Fox, not the Zapatistas, who is falling behind, becoming earlier than expected a lame duck. “We are just beginning,” Commander Abraham said recently (Muñoz 2003: 77). He is probably right. The depth of the radicality of the Zapatistas, and at the same time their amazing restraint, make it particularly difficult to appreciate their situation and prospects.

Words are windows of perception, matters of thought. Depending upon the words we use, we see, we think, we act. They form the statements with which we govern ourselves and others. Words always enfolded in their behavior have been the main weapon of the Zapatistas. Using brilliantly and effectively their words, they have been dismantling the dominant discourse. They continually undermine the institutional system of production of the dominant statements, of the established “truth.” They thus shake, peacefully and democratically, the very foundation of the existing Power/Knowledge system.¹⁶ While this system hides within spectacular shows of strength its increasing fragility, the Zapatistas exploit for their struggle its profound cracks, denounce it as a structure of domination and control, and begin the construction of an alternative.

The importance of Zapatismo derives from its grassroots radicality (Esteva and Prakash 1998). It operates as a riverbed for the flow of growing discontent with conventional

organizations, political parties, and governments, particularly to resist the neoliberal globalization as the current form of capital expansion.

The Zapatistas opposed globalization when it was universally perceived as an ineluctable reality, a necessary path, a historical fact. By revealing, before anyone else, that the emperor had no clothes, the Zapatistas awakened those intuiting the situation and yet not daring to recognize it. In showing an alternative, they created an opportunity to escape from the intellectual and political straitjacket in which the dominant “truths” had trapped us.

The radical promise of the Zapatistas is not a new ideological construction of possible futures. It is continually self-fulfilled in their deeds, in their daily behavior, as a redefinition of hope. Their position is not equivalent to expectation, as the conviction that something will turn out well. It expresses the conviction that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out. “Hope is that rejection of conformity and defeat” (The Zapatistas 1998: 13).

Such attitude, defining Zapatismo, is called dignity by the Zapatistas. “Dignity is that nation without nationality, that rainbow that is also a bridge, that murmur of the heart no matter what blood lives it, that rebel irreverence that mocks borders, customs, and wars” (The Zapatistas 1998: 13). They are fully aware that “the expanding dignity of each man and each human relationship must necessarily challenge existing systems” (Illich 1972: 18). Their localization is a feasible and effective alternative to both localism and globalization. Their autonomy challenges the centralism of the state, marginalizes the economy and resists modern and capitalist individualization promoted by both internal and external colonizers. Rooted in their dignity, the Zapatistas have been erecting some landmarks and signposts in what looks as a net of plural paths (Zapatismo). Whoever walks by these paths can see, with the diffuse and intense quality of a rainbow, a large range of political perspectives that

herald a new social order, beyond both modernity and post modernity (Esteva and Prakash 1998), beyond the economic society (be it capitalist or socialist), beyond formal democracy and the nation state. *Más allá* (beyond) the current conditions of the world and their intellectual, ideological and institutional underpinnings.

The Zapatistas seem increasingly to be ordinary men and women with an extraordinary behavior. They are one of a kind, and at the same time they are typical: they continue inspiring hearts and heads but only exemplify thousands of initiatives now being taken at the grassroots everywhere. The Zapatistas are no longer the Zapatismo circulating in the world.

At the Intercontinental Encounter against Neoliberalism in 1996, the Zapatistas told all the participants that they were not together to change the world, something quite difficult if not impossible, but *to create a whole new world*. The phrase was received with fascination and enthusiasm... but also skepticism: it appeared unfeasible and romantic. Step by step, however, as soon as many people started to escape from the dominant intellectual and ideological straightjackets, they discovered in themselves a dignity similar to that of the Zapatistas and started to walk their own path.

Today's Zapatismo is no longer in the hands of the Zapatistas. And it may ignore its original or current source of inspiration.

The Transition to Hope

I was talking with Doña Trinidad, a magnificent old woman of Morelia, one of the Zapatista communities most affected and harassed by both the military and the paramilitary. I wanted to know how they were feeling in such difficult conditions. She told me, smiling: "We are still hungry. We are still threatened and harassed. But now we have hope. And that changes everything." I can imagine the terrible feeling of living under such atrocious oppression and thinking that your children and grand-

children will continue suffering it. If you can see the light at the end of the tunnel, if you can nourish some hope, restrictions become bearable and life livable.

The Zapatistas have brought *prosperity* to the communities, if we reclaim the original meaning of the word: from the Latin *pro spero*, according to hope. For ten years they have organized their own life with no dependence on the State, whose services, proposals, programs or projects they reject, and they have kept the market at their margin, instead of hanging from it their very existence. They are still dealing with too many restrictions, none of which is a novelty for them. But they have found the path that allows them to overcome one by one of those restrictions, as they walk their path.

Hope is the very essence of popular movements (Lummis 1996). Nonconformity and discontent are not enough. Neither is critical awareness enough. People mobilize themselves when they think that their action may bring about a change, when they have hope, when they share the conviction that something makes sense.

With words and deeds, with amazing talent, imagination and courage, the Zapatistas brought a new hope to the planet. Millions of people seem now to be sharing and nourishing it. In celebrating the tenth anniversary of the Zapatista uprising and the twentieth anniversary of the original initiative, we all are really celebrating the *beginning* of Zapatismo.

Endnotes

¹ Edited version of an essay written for Multiversity & Citizens International.

² Welcoming words by the Comandancia General of EZLN, at the First Intercontinental Encounter for Humanity against Neoliberalism, spoken by the respected major Ana María, on 27th July, 1996. *The Zapatistas 1998*, 24.

³ Zapatista communiqués are published timely and regularly in a dozen languages. They immediately appear on many internet web pages. (There are thousands of web pages about the Zapatistas and hundreds of thou-

sands of references. Google cannot stop when you click Zapatistas. I am including in the References a list of the main web pages). The books containing communiqués and other materials generated by the Zapatistas are published in multiple languages and fill several meters of a library shelf. The books, essays, and articles published *about* the Zapatistas may fill a whole middle size library. News about the Zapatistas appear regularly in the media, which continually attempt to forget them but are forced to bring them back to the front page every time they take an important initiative.

⁴ Unless indicated otherwise, all the quotations come from Zapatista communiqués of July and August 2003.

⁵ The theoretical and political history of the expression “civil society” is complex and convoluted. During the last twenty years the people redefined its meaning and uses. It was used in Poland, the Philippines, Argentina and other countries to dismantle authoritarian regimes. It was also used to allude to the “third sector,” organisations existing outside the market (capital) or the State. And it basically expressed the autonomous action of the people, at the grassroots. In Mexico, the epic of the victims of the Mexico City earthquake in 1985 and the Zapatista uprising would be the key episodes giving new content and meaning to the use of the expression. See Aubry (1994) and Esteva (2001).

⁶ Such mutation can be examined in Gandhian terms. For Gandhi, “non-violence is the greatest virtue, cowardice the greatest vice.” The weak may have no option but violence or passive resistance, the non-violence of the weak. What is needed, assumed Gandhi, is the non-violence of the strong. He did not see any reason for 300,000 Hindus to be afraid of 150,000 British. Being the strong, they should resort to non-violence. (See the section on Non-violence in *Gandhi: Essential Writings*, Ed. by V.V.Ramana Murti, (New Delhi: Gandhi Peace Foundation, 1970), particularly pp. 170-174 and 198). With this approach, it is possible to see how the Zapatistas were using violence when they were weak and resorted to non-violence when the uprising of the “civil society” made them strong.

⁷ The neologism “globaphobics” is usually used to allude to people, movements and initiatives organized against globalization itself or against the neoliberal shape of globalization. They got increasing visibility after their mobilizations in Seattle. The World Social Forum is the best, current expression of “globaphobics,” using the slogan: “Another World is Possible.”

⁸ This impact is in fact mysterious. He speaks in a very low voice, without exaltation, mocking himself all the time, always ending his speeches in an anti-climactic way. He looks as the opposite of any leader or demagogue. In person, it becomes very evident how much he abhors a power position. Would this be the secret of his fascination for an audience tired of the rhetoric and attitudes of politicians and publicists?

⁹ In the literature generated by the Zapatistas, through their spokesperson, allusions to legends and stories often appear. Don Durito de la Lacandona, an audacious and enlightened beetle who gives contemporary meaning to Don Quixote (the *Subcomandante* would be his Sancho Panza), was “a memorable literary creation” for Octavio Paz, the Nobel Prize winner. The fictional encounters with “old Antonio” allow us to follow, through his stories and allegories, the threads of indigenous communal wisdom. They operate as a bridge that allows the urban modern mentality, more or less westernized, to take a look at the mystery of alternative worldviews which are beyond its conceptual system. One advantage of a bridge is that it allows walking in both directions.

¹⁰ I am borrowing the expression “constituent force” from Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2000), who have renovated its meaning, while taking a critical distance of the book, which, for example, seems unable to grasp both the nature and deeds of Zapatismo. The notion can only be understood as the counterpart of the constituted powers, as the force constituting them. In that sense, it seems inappropriate to describe what the Zapatistas are saying and doing. The “political force” they are talking about should control the constituted powers and in time marginalize and dismantle them, not to constitute them. In spite of this, I am using the expression to underline the fact that, even in the “democratic” structure of the nation-state, the people themselves are the only source of legitimate “power.” The Zapatistas do not use this expression, for good reasons.

¹¹ Since November 3 it has been said time and again that it was the highest turnout. It was, in absolute terms, given the demographic increase. In the 1960s, the percentage was above the 60s: 63% in 1960, 61.9% in 1964 and 60.8% in 1968. The following years it was in the lower 50s, with the highest in 1972 (55.2%) and 1992 (55.9%) and the exception of 1996 (49%, the lowest). The turnout of 2004, (59.1%), is thus in the rank of the postwar era. (Figures of the Federal Election Commission as disseminated by Associated Press).

¹² The notion of multiculturalism does not modify the homogeneous character of the nation-state. It is based on the idea of sameness (the possessive individual, *homo economicus*, as the fundamental atom of the social structure). It relegates to a secondary condition, adjective, cultural differences. Instead of solving the problem, multiculturalism aggravates it. The *plural* state (not merely multicultural) is a step in the appropriate direction, in spite of its limitations. See Villoro (1997, 1998) and Esteva (2001).

¹³ Mexico had the oldest authoritarian regime in the world. A Mafia-like group, the “revolutionary family,” the heirs of the 1910 revolutionaries articulated in the PRI—the “official” party- governed the country for seventy years. It was a kind of renewable monarchy, substituting the king every

six years through manipulated and fraudulent elections. Such regime is over. The current government follows the same neoliberal orientation of its predecessors, but to implement its policies and programs it can no longer use the tools of the *ancient régime*, which in fact is dead. There is no real substitute. What is now at stake is the character of the new regime that will emerge after the current transition. Restoration seems impossible, even if the PRI wins again in what now may be “clean” elections. Conventional democratic competition between political parties—a novelty in Mexico—is compounded with often ferocious struggles between the several Mafia-like groups remaining in the PRI. No one can take for granted that the dominant forces will succeed in consolidating a “neoliberal republic,” in the US model. The Zapatistas created an option.

True, the regime change cannot be fully or exclusively attributed to the Zapatistas. Many different forces struggled for years for what they called the democratisation of the country, i.e., rooting in it a formal, representative democracy. But the fact is that the Zapatista uprising produced a dramatic change in the political balance of forces. The political opposition got in a month, after the Zapatista uprising, more concessions from the government than in the previous fifty years. The situation of the former President Salinas illustrates the situation. In December, 1993, he was at the peak of this glory. “We will be in power for the next 25 years,” his government told a high level commission of Japanese investors in those days. “I did not commit the mistake of Gorbachov,” Salinas explained. “The economic reform should be fully implemented, before starting the political reform.” Salinas was universally recognised as a global leader, who understood the direction of the new global winds and was bringing his country out of underdevelopment. He was thus *the* candidate to be the first director of WTO, the organisation quintessentially defining globalisation. A few months later, Salinas was forced to live in a kind of exile in Ireland. His brother is still in jail. His policies, once universally celebrated, are now considered fundamentally wrong, while Mexico confronted what the IMF Director called the “first financial crisis of the XXI century.”

¹⁴ The comparison of Gandhi-Mandela-Marcos (Wallerstein 2001) emphasises the element of non-violence and offers some interesting angles of reflection. However, in fundamental ways this comparison distorts the analysis of Zapatismo, reducing it to Marcos.

¹⁵ The San Andrés Accords, signed after the tense and complex negotiations between the Federal Government and the Zapatistas, defined a new social and political relationship between the indigenous peoples and the Mexican state and society. (See Aubry 2003, Esteva 2003 and Hernández 1999).

¹⁶ See the works of Michael Foucault, for a good description of this system, its role on the construction of modern society and its regime of power, and the current shapes of the rebellion of “subordinated knowledge” as political uprising. See, in particular, (1980, 1984, 2002).

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Some Zapatista Web Pages

¡Ya Basta! Página oficial del Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN). <http://www.ezln.org/>

FZLN Página oficial del Frente Zapatista de Liberación Nacional. <http://www.fzln.org.mx/>

Rebeldía La revista Rebeldía publicada por el FZLN *on line*. <http://www.revistarebeldia.org/main.html>

Acción Zapatista <http://www.humboldt.edu/~mc92/accionzapatista/>
Zapatista Net of Autonomy and Liberation www.actlab.utexas.edu/~zapatistas/

Indymedia Chiapas <http://chiapas.mediosindependientes.org/>

Zapatista Index <http://flag.blackened.net/revolt/zapatista.html>

Introduction to México and the Zapatistas <http://flag.blackened.net/revolt/mexico/begindx/>

EZLN Chiapas Battalion www.geocities.com/ResearchTriangle/Lab/5225/bzalx/plalxbz.html

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