

## ON THE HISTORY OF THE HISTORY OF PEOPLES *WITHOUT* HISTORY

*José Rabasa*

*University of California, Berkeley*

In this account, both the people who claim history as their own and the people to whom history has been denied emerge as participants in the same historical trajectory.

Eric Wolf, *Europe and the People  
Without History*

Nowhere does one find the singularity of the Zapatista insurrection better expressed than in their consideration of Indians as ends in themselves. The Zapatistas articulate a process of social transformation in which indigenous languages and cultures ground the communities' processes of autonomization. Indigenous knowledges and linguistics practices coexist and dialogue with life forms with radically different philosophical backgrounds that for reasons of expediency I will refer to as Western. I understand by *background* the absolute presupposition *against which* and *from which* the members of a given culture make sense of each other and the world (Ankersmith 1994). If inspired by the Zapatistas, I only pretend to provide a reflection that may dialogue with the multiple expressions of Zapatismo. In the process, I will discuss some of the proposals of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's *Multitude*. The objective is not to compare these two projects, rather to juxtapose them while resisting the impulse to subsume one to the other.

To my mind, the singularity of the Zapatista insurrection could not be more striking than when we juxtapose it to Antonio Gramsci's and Mao Zedong's call for the use and trans-

formation of peasant mentality. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri have captured this move in Mao as “the Chinese revolution was really a revolution conducted *with* the peasantry, not a revolution *by* the peasantry” (Hardt and Negri 2004: 124). Further down they add, “*the final victory of the peasant revolution is the end of peasantry*” (ibid, emphasis in original). As for Gramsci, consider the following passage from the *Prison Notebooks*: “For the teacher, then, to know ‘folklore’ means to know what other conceptions of the world and of life are actually active in the intellectual and moral formation of young people, in order to uproot them and replace them with conceptions which are deemed to be superior [*per estirparli e sostituirle con concezioni ritenute superiori*]” (1985: 191; 1975: 3, 2314). If in the *Southern Question* Gramsci denounced the North’s colonialist discourse on the South, for Gramsci the peasantry of the South would be hegemonized by the proletarian North. Even if, as Hardt and Negri remind us, the small-land holdings of the peasantry and its corresponding mode of production are bound to disappear, the denigration of and the use of folklore for the transformation of peasants into a modern mentality is manipulative and elitist. Indian life forms cannot be reduced to the economic structures of small-holding farmers characteristic of the European peasantry. Liberal projects in the nineteenth century sought to turn communal forms of property into individually owned holdings. This process reduced Indians to peons working in large *haciendas* given that very few Indians partook of the new structure of property. The Revolution of 1910 and the constitution of 1917 partially redressed this expropriation of communal lands with the creation of the *ejido* and the restitution of communal holdings.

Strictly speaking, Indians are not peasants, nor should Indians be exclusively identified with rural areas. This is not the place to discuss the long lasting prejudice against peasants that one can trace from Marx’s *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* to Hardt and Negri’s *Multitude*, but also note the equally

long tradition that views peasant communes as having the capacity to proceed directly to communism.<sup>1</sup> Hardt and Negri, for their part, also appeal to Pierre Clastres's analysis of Amerindian "primitive" cultures as "societies against the state":

The history of peoples with a history is, as they say, the history of class struggle; the history of peoples without history is, we should say at least with equal conviction, the history of their struggle against the state. We need to grasp the kind of struggles that Clastres sees and recognize the adequate form in our present age" (Hardt and Negri 2004: 90).

Let's examine this paradoxical statement "the history of peoples without history.."

### **Peoples With and *Without* History**

The binary that constitutes peoples with and without history, writing, and the state dates back to the Enlightenment. As such the binary manifests a particular form of the Europe and its others syndrome. This cultural malaise infects peoples who are constituted as lacking history and by extension the state with an internalization of the terms that leads to a desire to prove the contrary. Ranajit Guha's work on Indian historiography, in particular his essay, "An Indian Historiography of India," offers a most lucid articulation of how history in its post-Enlightenment disciplinary form posed a challenge to Bengali historians that led them to prove to the Imperial historians that Bangla was an appropriate language for history. Guha traces a series of moments in the writing of Indian history in the nineteenth century that go from the initial desire to prove the appropriateness of Bangla, which included a recognition of the gift of history by the English, to the denunciation of the British Empire and the circulation of pamphlets associated with terrorist groups in the 1920s that sought to destroy the Raj. In doing

this Bengali historians worked out the internalization of the colonialist denial of history and State to India. Notwithstanding this process of countering the reduction of India to a people without history and the supposed deficiencies of Bangla for the articulation of Western discourses, the practice of history as discipline continues undisturbed among Indian historians well into our days. From the early *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency* to *History at the Limits of World-History*, Guha has exposed the ways in which historiography subordinates and subsumes subaltern peoples in narratives of Empire, Nation, and Socialism. The exercise of power and State formation is inherent to the practice of history. Thus Ranajit Guja's *History at the Limits of World-History* provides an analysis of Hegel's philosophy of history at the root of the negation of history in India. Guha also underscores the formation of a discipline and its exclusion of Indian texts as the *Mahabharata* as history. Guha has no qualms in accepting a narrow definition of history but also traces the colonialist impulse in historical writing. Following Rabindranath Tagore, Guha calls for re-imagining forms of memory that would capture historicity. When Guha presented his ideas at Columbia University he was attacked by many in the audience, including Gayatri Spivak and Partha Chatterjee, but as far as I know the only published statement is a translation into Spanish of the Persian historian Hamid Dabashi's intervention, "*No soy un subalternista*" (Dabashi 2001). Dabashi criticizes Guha for his ignorance of Persian sources (a subject that I am completely ignorant, hence will abstain from discussing) and for launching a frontal attack on Hegel instead of pursuing a guerrilla tactic that would target Hegel, Modernity, Eurocentrism, and Globalization from plurivocal and plurifocal perspectives. This turn from frontal attack to guerrilla provides elements for the critique of metanarratives. Dabashi, however, finds a transparency of terms when he invokes "history or *itihasa*" in one breath (Dabashi 50). One should wonder if this

gesture subsumes *itihasa* under history, thereby privileging the latter term as a universal concept.

As I have said, I ignore the nature of the Persian libraries Dabashi mentions, but the universality and self-evidence of the term history remains problematic. The rebuttal of Guha's frontal attack on Hegel entails a statement in the line that "we" Indians and Persians have always read the *Mahabarata* as history. I cannot assess the full meanings of *itihasa*, often translated as "thus verily happened" or as "so it was." Nor can I evaluate the equivalence one can draw with errors incurred when one defines the Old Testament as mythology, but it seems to me that the specifics of *itihasa* are lost when paired with history. As if history (and for that matter mythology) were a transparent category and a transhistorical reading/writing practice. To my mind one should attend to the fact that history is a Western invention that dates back to the Greeks of the fifth century B.C., in particular to Herodotus, and the self-conscious differentiation from myth, which was in fact constituted in the process. The ambivalence surrounding the status of *itihasa* as combining myth and history suggests that we should proceed more cautiously in approximating the meanings of this Sanskrit term. Otherwise, the rescue of the *Mahabarhata* will assume the universality of Greco-Abrahamic life forms, rather than understanding the process as the globalatinization of all natural and cultural phenomena.<sup>2</sup> Even if the Persian libraries contained many texts that one could consider history (and for that matter philosophy and literature) because of an importation of these literary practices from Greek culture, the disciplinary form of history entails a break from pre-enlightenment historical writings, which I gather was Guha's main point in speaking of Ramram Basu as a first Indian historian in the disciplinary mode. If Dabashi at first agreed in principle with Guha positioning of *marvel* against *experience*, of *civil society* against the *State*, and the *poetics* of resistance against the *prose* of power, he ends up chastising Guha for pairing the *marvel* of the *Mahabarhata*, with the

*experience* of Hegel. But Dabashi chooses to ignore that Guha was targeting the practice of history among Indians today (not really Hegel), as it becomes evident when Guha introduces Tagore's critique of the poverty of historiography. It all seems to come down to a disciplinary squabble—with implications beyond the academy. Dabashi's insistence on guerrilla warfare remains purely academic as long as "good" history—Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000) has insisted on this in his critiques of Guha—contributes to the formation of responsible citizens for representative democracies. The world of subaltern insurrections is a world ruled by the imagination, marvel, civil society, and poetics, which the prose of counter-insurgency, i.e., history has sought to neutralize in its pursuit of the causes and effects of rebellions.

In addressing the denial of history and state I have emphasized the Enlightenment because the descriptions of Amerindian peoples without States during the sixteenth century limited themselves to societies that in fact did not have States. The complex urban structures of the Andes and Mexico were always understood as societies with States, indeed, with States to conquer and expropriate. These urban civilizations were also conceived as laden with layers of history that had to be understood (indeed, invented as historical) in order to administer them. As such the binary peoples with history vs. peoples without history as formulated by the Enlightenment constitutes a particular form of the Europe and its others syndrome. Pierre Clastres has no qualms in using the term *Savage* or *Primitive* as a descriptive category for societies without States.<sup>3</sup> In fact, his objective is to understand the singular spatial and temporal forms of peoples without State and history. If they are coeval with modernity (to borrow Johannes Fabian's [1983] term), with the time of anthropologists and other observers who communicate with them in a shared present (even if they do not understand each other), the fact remains that their sense of space and time often radically differs from those of moder-

nity. Clastres specifies that the definition of society without a State does not apply to the Andes and Mexico, but we may ask if after the destruction of Andean and Mesoamerican States we don't find societies who, having been stripped of their indigenous States, have resisted the colonial and the national States of the last five hundred years.<sup>4</sup> If it strikes one as dissonant to pair *Savage* dwellers of the tropical forests with settled peoples from the highlands, indigenous organizations today have taken significant steps in overcoming the internal disparaging of the *Primitive*.<sup>5</sup> The destruction of the indigenous states led to forms of collaboration that proved indispensable for the efficacy of colonial and national rule (from the *jueces* and *gobernadores* of the colonial period to the *caciques* of today). In spite of these privileged sectors, Indians have been systematically excluded from the State and history. Exclusionary practices carry an ambivalence that we should not rush to erase by calling for the full integration of Indians into the nation. The "without" may be interpreted as peoples who exist *without* (outside) history and the State, and consequently who define themselves against the State and history.

In this regard the Zapatistas maxim of "*mandar obedeciendo*" (command obeying) and the constant alternation of representatives in the Juntas de Buen Gobierno manifests the conviction not only that their struggles no longer aspire to take over the State, but also that the State must be avoided from within.<sup>6</sup> The paradox of speaking of "the history of peoples without history" would convey the existence of histories of oppression and revolt, of forms of resistance, and of the strategies of survival of the last five hundred years. The objective would not be to have the State recognize these histories and include them into its account of the nation and its pasts, rather to teach these histories to future generations of autonomous peoples who have and will continue to exist *without* history and the State. But this clearly has little to do with the history of peoples with State, with the history of class struggle, as Hardt

and Negri characterized it. Here again we find a paradox in that the oppression of Indians is none other than their oppression as a class even if defined along ethnic and racial terms, but ambivalence surfaces when we posit their struggle not from within the State and the desire for recognition, but as a struggle for autonomization from the desires that seek the recognition of the State. The only recognition sought would correspond to the right to keep the (European) standards of the State from defining the worth of their own life forms. The “Europe and its others” syndrome manifests a cultural malaise that infects those peoples *without* history and the State by an internalization of the negation that leads to a desire to prove the contrary rather than to assert their singularity.

### Singularity

In one of his recent communiqués, “*En (auto) defensa de las jirafas*,” Marcos draws on the giraffe as a trope to speak of those forms of life, of difference, of singularity that the market targets for extinction (Subcomandante Marcos, 2004b). It is no longer a question of the individual being threatened by the communal but of those singular forms that challenge the constitution of homogenous individual(istic) subjects of neo-liberalism. The communiqué extends the struggles of the Zapatistas beyond Chiapas to the rural and urban dwellers in Mexico and the world. This is the kind of cultural politics that enables us to link the Zapatista struggle, as Manuel Callahan asks us to consider, with the “serial protests that gained prominence since Seattle.” In his call for contributions to this volume, Callahan speaks of “broader movements struggling with direct or radical democracy applied towards liberatory politics,” also a staple in the Zapatista communiqués since 1994. My insistence on suspending the outrage of the denial of history, on interrogating the desire to prove “Europe’s others” as historical societies is predicated on the invocation of singular life forms that may challenge the hegemony of *globalatinization*.

For if it is true that neo-liberalism only supports forms of artistic expression that subject themselves to the hegemony of the market, as Marcos underscores in his praise of giraffes (read: singular forms of life that are targeted by economic and military war), it uses a language of love and benevolence that expropriates discourses of freedom. For it is part of the logic of neo-liberalism to recognize only forms of life that conform to the parameters of the West. In this regard, efforts to prove that “Europe’s others” have writing, history, science, and State reiterate the globalatinization that only recognizes forms that it can subsume under its categories. The “history of the history of peoples *without* history” would, then, correspond to the singularity of struggles that the State and its history cannot *recognize* because the discourses that resistance articulates remains unintelligible to those who presume that their categories are universal. The articulation of singularity would resonate with Dabashi’s call for plurivocal and plurifocal guerrilla warfare against Hegel, Modernity, Eurocentrism, Globalization—but we should add history and the State. But in order that this guerrilla not be contained within Academic discourse (regardless of how important it might seem to us academics) it must trace connections and articulations that inform protests, strategies for the expropriation of means of production, direct action, and the autonomization of life. Thus, this guerrilla will create space for knowledge production that invent practices for confronting the State and furthering the *without* history. Autonomization would now be understood as process rather than as claims that privilege institutionalized spaces, viz., the political, the aesthetic, the ethical, the universities, and what not, from economic determinism. As such, the singular partakes of a process and manifests a site of struggle. It is not enough, and in fact, it is contrary to the emphasis on the singular to unveil, to expose the hegemony of post-modernism and post-Fordism, of globalization as the new hegemonic historical moment as if there were no *without* history and the State.

### **Modern, Post-Modern, Not Modern**

In our efforts to upturn the hegemony of the West, we have recently insisted on the fact that modernity is not exclusively an Euro-American invention. As such modernity is diluted of any claim to newness in history. The effort to undermine the West's exclusive claims to science or democracy leads to a subsumption of all singular forms—such as the process of desiring the recognition of history and the State. This entails a logic that excludes practices and knowledges that do not meet the standards of science by confining them to magic, superstition, or obscurantism. Thus, our ancestors end up embodying the values of the Enlightenment and our contemporaries readied—by means of stereotype—for persecution, minimally, for epistemological violence.<sup>7</sup>

In anthropology, Hardt and Negri remind us, the old categories of the savage and the primitive were first displaced by the peasant and more recently by global anthropology: “The task of global anthropology, as many contemporary anthropologists formulate it, is to abandon the traditional structure of otherness altogether and discover instead a concept of cultural difference based on singularity” (Hardt and Negri 2004: 125). This abandonment of otherness, of the primitive and the savage, as object of study, leads to a generalized state of modernity that bears what to my ears rings as a slogan, “equally as modern as, yet different, from Europe” (ibid., 126). This generalized state of modernity conveys the notion that all peoples today, in the singularity of their societies, are contemporaneous. This gesture cannot but be welcomed in that it breaks from the “Europe and its others” cluster and the syndromes that accompany the internalization of its binaries. Yet, it might turn out to be disingenuous in that the values of modernity—the desires to be recognized as modern—remain hegemonic, not unlike the desire for history. Note their definition of the limits of the modern: “Some of the phenomena that pose the strongest challenge for this conception of African modernity and cosmo-

politanism are the forms of ritual and magic that continue to be integral element of contemporary life" (Hardt and Negri 2004: 126). So, "magic and ritual" remain "other," in fact, a challenge, within the new anthropologist's desire to trace modernity globally. Thus, certain forms of life would be excluded as pre-modern, as backward, as life forms that are incompatible with modernity. Subjects would under this logic be expected to police themselves and expel the pre-modern from their soul. Wouldn't the new anthropologist end up reinventing the applied anthropology of post-revolutionary Mexico that devised policies for the integration of Indians into the State (Bonfil Batalla 1996, 1987)? It does not occur to Hardt and Negri that multiple singular life forms may coexist within one subject and society without incurring in a contradiction as has been the case in Amerindian societies from first contact with Europe up to the Zapatistas today (see Rabasa 2003, 1998).

Why do Hardt and Negri fail to be consistent in their call for a multitude made of singularities? There might be modes of the occult that are not of their liking, as they might not be of mine, but to pose a generalization about "magic and ritual" as challenges to the anthropological enterprise, if not of the State, threatens the diversity of Indian forms of life. This positioning entails Enlightened epistemological privileges that inevitably smacks of vanguardism, of a top-down assessment of backwardness rather than a contribution to an horizontal assessment of strategies, debates, and struggles over the meaning of obscurantism that play out within the communities themselves. If Hardt and Negri's critique of the nostalgia for rural life that often accompanies discourses on the peasantry, and if their diagnosis of the eventual disappearance of the peasant forms of property seem inevitable, the transition from peasant to Indians (now rural and urban) entails a passage to communal forms of property and social organization, of which the Zapatista insurgency remains representative. If their efforts to

step out of Eurocentrism are noteworthy, the historical trajectory privileges changes in the European North:

Contemporary capitalist production is characterized by a series of passages that name different faces of the same shift: from the hegemony of industrial labor to that of immaterial labor, from Fordism to post-Fordism, and from the modern to the post modern. Periodization frames the movement of history in terms of the passage from one relatively stable paradigm to another (Hardt and Negri 2004: 142).

### **The Multitude *Without* History**

If the utterance “there is no longer an outside to capital” (Hardt and Negri 2004:102) rings true, it calls for the qualification: *except for all life forms that are constituted as backward, hence condemned to disappear*. In this regard, Capitalism always constitutes its *withouts*. The Zapatistas defined the processes of exclusion as integral to what they call the “*IV Guerra mundial*”, *que se libra por el neoliberalismo contra la humanidad*” [“IV World War” exerted by neoliberalism against humanity] (Subcomandante Marcos 2004c). Capitalism affects all societies globally, but this does not mean that the history and periodization of the evolving tendencies in Western societies should be understood as an all-encompassing single history. Hardt and Negri, but also Paolo Virno, situate the emergence of the multitude as a most recent configuration of the future subject of “political action aimed at transformation and liberation” (Ibid.: 99). They oppose the diversity and plurality of singularities that make up the multitude to the people, which, they argue, always aims at the constitution of the one, of the State.

But let’s turn to Paolo Virno’s *A Grammar for the Multitude*, for a description of the multitude as a redefinition of the One: “It remains clear that the multitude does not rid itself of the *One*, of the universal, of the common/shared; rather it re-

defines the One. The One of the multitude no longer has anything to do with the One constituted by the State, with the One towards which the people converge” (Virno 2004: 42). Virno’s reasoning on what he calls the “*general intellect* or public intellect” that defines the One as a “*sharing* of linguistic and cognitive habits [that] is the constituent element of the post-Fordist process of labor. All the workers enter into production in as much as they are speaking-thinking” (ibid.: 41). This offers an impeccable assessment of the new hegemony of immaterial labor, one that would affect all Western societies (including the metropolitan centers in the Third World), but post-Fordism does not subsume the history nor the condition of all the singularities that comprise the multitude. Unless we want to turn the multitude into a synecdoche that stands for the whole, we ought to understand how this trope would erase the singularities of societies and cultures that never were part of Fordism. These singularities that comprise this minority, which actually corresponds to a majority numerically, would not be disposed to articulate their processes of autonomization in post-Fordist terms, even if the general intellect remains a possibility. In short, the post-Fordism trope does not travel well when taken outside the hegemony of immaterial labor, which in fact constitutes a very limited hegemony outside Western societies. In the context of indigenous struggles, the primacy of post-Fordism hardly qualifies as a form of consent, as hegemonic, rather as a violent coercion into submission when not a war for the extermination of all those others that are considered an error of humanity.

The iron-clad logic of historical tendencies that define the new historical epoch of Empire as the most advanced historical moment reiterates the hegemony of exclusion it seeks to expose. It runs the risk of constituting a vertical imposition that unwittingly may conspire against insurgencies of peoples that for centuries have existed *without* history and the State—in the words of the Zapatistas, “*los muertos de siempre*” [the dead of always], whose history of oppression and resistance informs

the creation of processes of autonomization (Subcomandante Marcos 1995: 2, 44). Our writings as intellectuals should remain vigilant of the epistemic violence we inflict with our slogans, generalizations, and desires to constitute a master model for interpreting the globalization that haunts us all but with different degrees of virulence. If the Zapatista definition of the multitude, of all those who are persecuted by neoliberalism for their singularity, travels well into the metropolitan centers of Europe, the US, Latin America, and elsewhere in the world, we should keep in mind the following assessment of the Zapatistas in Chiapas:

*Este es un territorio rebelde, en resistencia, invadido por decenas de miles de soldados federales, policías, servicios de inteligencia, espías de las diversas naciones “desarrolladas,” funcionarios en función de contrainsurgencia, y oportunistas de todo tipo. Un territorio compuesto por decenas de miles de indígenas mexicanos acosados, perseguidos, hostigados, atacados por negarse a dejar de ser indígenas, mexicanos y seres humanos, es decir, ciudadanos del mundo* (Subcomandante Marcos 2004d). This is a rebel territory, in resistance, invaded by tens of thousands of federal soldiers, police, intelligence services, spies from the various “developed” nations, counterintelligence officials and opportunists of all types. A territory composed of tens of thousands of Mexican indigenous, harassed, persecuted, attacked for refusing to stop being indigenous, Mexican and human beings, that is, citizens of the world (Translated by irlandesa).

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>Hardt and Negri cite Marx's letter of March 8, 1881, to Vera Zasulich (2004: 379-380). Also consider Lenin's view of the communes as a model for the Soviets in the *April Theses* and *The State and the Revolution*.

<sup>2</sup> As Derrida puts it: "*Globalatinization* (essentially Christian, to be sure), this word names a unique event to which a meta-language seems incapable of acceding, although such a language remains, all the same, of the greatest necessity here. For at the same time that we no longer perceive its limits, we know that such a globalization is finite and only projected. What is involved here is a Latinization and rather than globality, a globalization that is running out of breath [essouffée], however irresistible and imperial it may be" (Derrida 2002: 67). The undoing of the universal naming and categorization, hence erasure of indigenous concepts, of the world with a Latin-derived conceptual framework (note that Globalatinization absorbs Greco-Abrahamic cultures) could not merely consist of extending the concepts of history, modernity, and so forth to societies and cultures to which this life forms have been denied. I cannot go into any detail here, but a similar erasure of categories to Dabashi's occurs when scholars insist on proving that Mesoamerican pictorial codices are histories. For instance, Elizabeth Boone (2000) classifies the main genre of historical pictographic writing as annals, *res gestae*, and cartographic histories. Boone cites several entries from Alonso de Molina's 1571 *Vocabulario en lengua castellana y mexicana y mexicana y castellana* where the Franciscan friar translates Nahuatl terms such as *veuetlatolli* as "'*historia antigua*' [old history], *o dichos de viejos* [sayings of elders]." In the section from Spanish to Nahuatl, Molina provides several entries for "*historia*," "*historia de lo presente*," "*historia de día en día*," "*historia de los tiempos antiguos*," but also "*historiador*" and "*historial cosa*," which suggests that for at least this missionary the denial of history was not really an issue. On the contrary, the reduction of all pictographic writing in the colonial period to "history" suggests the neutralization of forms of knowledge that would have threatened the imposition of Christianity as the sole version of the sacred. *Mere* history without myth would be first invented and then expropriated for the administration of the colonial state. This does not mean that the enterprise was successful, rather that we should develop strategies of reading that avoid the reduction of pictographic texts to just history, and go beyond merely recognizing mythic components. Boone also mentions that for Miguel León Portilla the Nahuatl word for history is *ihitloca*, which Boone translates as "what is said about something or someone" (76). No wonder Guha warns us about the poverty of historiography.

<sup>3</sup> Clastres's usage of the terms *Savages* and *Primitives* might strike the reader as dated categories of a former Anthropology that defined itself as the study of primitive forms of life, but his work seeks to debunk the prejudices and stereotypes. The primitive as "societies against the state," to paraphrase the title of his best known book, *La société contre l'état*, has many lessons to teach those of us who are in this volume reflecting on political action that no longer aspires to take over the State. Observe that if Hardt and Negri call our attention to this possibility, they don't develop it beyond this statement: "We need to grasp the kind of struggles that Clastres sees and recognize the adequate form in our present age" (Hardt and Negri 2004: 90). For a most lucid assessment of the new struggles that do not aspire to take over the State, see John Holloway (2002).

<sup>4</sup> Among the Spanish chroniclers of the sixteenth century, the clearest exposition of Amerindian societies with different degrees of social evolution is José de Acosta's classification in terms of savages (those who wander through the forest with no pattern of settlement), *behetrias* (small chiefdoms), and empires (as in the case of the Mexica and the Inca). For a critique of the long history of the policies and hierarchies that have undermined *Savage* peoples in the Americas, see Verdesio (2001).

<sup>5</sup> Let's note, however, that Marcos reiterates commonplaces that convey the effects of an internalization of denial of history and the attribution of backwardness when he assesses the accomplishments and shortcomings of the first year of the Juntas de Buen Gobierno. In speaking of the schools in the Caracoles, Marcos tells us that "*Mariya' ya sabe escribir su nombre y te puede contar que los antiguos mexicanos tenían una cultura muy avanzada*" ["Mariya" already knows how to write her name and she can tell that the ancient Mexicans had a very advanced culture] (Subcomandante Marcos, "Leer un video: sexta parte" 2004a). The language of progress, of "advanced culture" can actually backfire in two ways: one, it could lead to differentiating one's ancestors as advanced with respect to *Primitive* contemporary peoples; two, it could reintroduce the commonplace that today's Indians are shadows of the great civilization of yesterday whose knowledge was much like that of modern science, and, thereby invalidating indigenous knowledge today. Marcos furthers this commonplace when he praises those who "*levantan escuelas y conocimientos donde antes sólo había ignorancia*" [build schools and knowledge where there was only ignorance before] (ibid.). These inconsistencies in Marcos' generally generous evaluation of indigenous cultures *today* repeat the *indigenista* policies that the Mexican State implemented after the Mexican Revolution to integrate the Pre-Columbian past as integral component of the identity of the nation and to conduct literacy campaigns that would bring knowledge to ignorant Indians. Minimally, these statements contradict Marcos's insistence of the right Indians have to exist

as Indians. These are comments made in passing, perhaps, unimportant, but, perhaps, also indicative of a developmentalist mentality that undermines indigenous knowledges.

<sup>6</sup> Last August Marcos wrote an eight part communiqué titled “*Para leer un video*,” in which he assesses the accomplishments and the shortcomings of the first year since the implementation of the Juntas de Buen Gobierno, also known as Caracoles. These communiqués and their translation into several languages can be accessed at: <http://www.fzln.org.mx/>. In this site, you will also find the communiqués that first instituted the Caracoles in August 2003. The term *caracol*, literally, snail, refers to the symbolic political, cognitive, spiritual, and epistemological meanings the structure of sea snails has had in Mesoamerica since precolonial times. Whereas representative democracies build their authority on a concept of the people that subordinates differences to unity, the Zapatista maxim of “*mandar obedeciendo*” calls forth the direct participation of all the members of a given community and thereby affirms the diversity of the multitude. If the first privileges *constituted* power, the latter insures the prevalence of *constituent* power (Rabasa 2003; Negri 1999)

<sup>7</sup> This effort to define the “challenge for this conception of African modernity” risks reproducing the elements characteristic of the persecutory society that, according to Robert I. Moore, emerged in Europe in the 11th century, and has been a continuous characteristic of European society (and others where it extended its colonial power) ever since. Moore argues that if there have been societies that persecute all over the world and history, Europe alone developed a persecutory society. He extends his argument to the differentiation between societies with slaves and (European) slave societies, societies with writing and (European) writing societies (Moore 1990).

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