Mexico: Indigenous Resistance and Neoliberal Re-colonization in the *Fourth Transformation[[1]](#footnote-1)*

Gilberto López and Rivas[[2]](#footnote-2)

I thank my dear colleague Kin Chi, and the entire team of Lingnan University in Hong Kong, for their kind invitation to be at this important forum, noting that my participation is based on a commitment to the resistance of indigenous peoples and, in particular, to the National Indigenous Congress - Indigenous Council of Government and the Zapatista Army of National Liberation; resistances from below and to the left in order to confront this storm with civilization-based implications that constitutes the current capitalist globalization, and that is expressed in a recolonization and war of conquest of territories, natural resources, human beings considered disposable, destruction of nature, pandemics, which are leading the human species, and the known forms of life, to the drifts of their possible extinction.

The COVID 19 pandemic, which has impacted the lives of millions of people around the world, is showing not only the lethal effects of this viral disease, but also the profound damage to public health services, which have been privatized and neglected by neoliberal governments, as well as the negligence and criminal conspiracies of these governments, which prevent the adoption of responsible and effective health policies in the face of the pandemic, mainly because they do not want to affect the economic interests of the dominant groups and their own political image.

It is surprising to see the parallels of the situation created by the current health emergency, in which we are immersed, with what Carlos Taibo wrote in his book **Collapse: Terminal capitalism, ecosocial transition, ecofascismo**, (Buenos Aires: Libros de Anarres, 2017), in which he explores precisely the causes of a systemic collapse of global character, emphasizing climate change and the depletion of raw materials. It emphasizes that, unlike in the past when the main threats of disasters were associated with natural phenomena, from the 20th century onwards, human action is decisive and fatal. Taibo, like other authors, prefers to talk about climate change and not global warming and, according to his data, it will be impossible to avoid a rise of 2 or 3 degrees in the average global temperature, so that its consequences, outlined briefly, correspond to the global reality that we are already experiencing: rising sea levels, disappearance of ice at the poles, extinction and mutation of species, desertification, deforestation, increase in the frequency and intensity of hurricanes, growing difficulties in food production, unprecedented and forever flooding of inhabited land on coasts and islands, and the emergence of new diseases! , as has happened with the COVID - 19.

A return to the reading of this impactful, disturbing and inescapable work helps us understand the urgent and constant calls of the Zapatista Maya to organize ourselves in the face of a storm that is neither metaphorical nor symbolic, and that alludes not to an apocalyptic vision or millennial prophecies, but to the real and scientifically founded possibility of a catastrophe on a global scale in the ever nearer future, which Taibo calls a *collapse,* that is, the general and massive collapse of the dominant system, manifested in substantial reductions in industrial production; the simultaneous and combined collapse of a financial, commercial, political, social, cultural and ecological nature, due to its own contradictions and verifiable realities, in synergy with diverse and severe foreseeable and already progressively manifested implications of the mentioned climate change (see Emiliano Hersch González: <http://enelvolcan.com/84-ediciones/059-octubre-diciembre-2019/629-crisis-climatica-que-hacer> ).

In Mexico, it has been significant, in the midst of the pandemic, to issue a presidential decree published on 23 April in the *Diario Oficial de la Federación* (Official Federal Gazette), which cuts the budget of numerous state secretaries by up to 75%, including that of Culture, with the exception of 38 programs that the Federal Executive considers "priority", among which, in addition to assistance-based, individual and client-based programs, are the controversial mega-projects considered by the National Indigenous Congress, Indigenous Government Council, EZLN, and numerous community, regional, social, trade union, academic, and social research organizations -- among many others -- as a virtual declaration of war against the indigenous peoples and the peasant communities and urban populations that are going, and are being, affected by the mega-projects: Sowing Life, the Mayan Train, Development of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, the Morelos Integral Project (through the modernization of plants and hydroelectric power stations), in addition to the Free Zones on the northern border and the repeated commitment to oil, with the rehabilitation programs of six refineries and the construction of the one in Dos Bocas, despite the morals about climate change that the pandemic is leaving in the world, and despite the multifactorial crisis that afflicts the capitalist system worldwide.

The decree leaves no room for doubt as to the hierarchy of resources to be distributed by the Ministry of Finance and Public Credit, which Article VII clearly specifies: "The Ministry of Health, the National Guard, and the Ministries of the Navy and National Defense will be given exceptional treatment”. During this health emergency, prioritizing the Ministry of Health is a measure of evident and urgent need, in order to face the COVID-19 and save the greatest number of lives, but to equate health with what is destined for the armed forces is not only offensive, but unjustifiable, especially in a context where despite the health emergency, the public safety problems are more than evident with a constant average of intentional homicides per day of around one hundred, and that on April 20, in the middle of phase three of the health emergency, the most violent day in deaths caused by organized crime has been recorded so far this year. In addition to monitoring the southern and northern borders, in order to prevent migration, in accordance with the needs of *our good neighbor*, we are building airports, bank branches and other functions not established in the Constitution, such as public security.

Thus, the decree is the expression of policies typical of militarized accumulation, with the thinning of the State and the imposition of developmental mega-projects that are encountering the firm resistance of peoples and workers, who yearn for a world different from that offered by capitalism.

That is, the current struggle of indigenous and non-indigenous peoples is situated in the dichotomy of taking a stand for life or death. Rosa Luxemburg, who did not live the nightmare of Nazi-fascism, nor that of the current form of criminal, necropolitical and militarized capitalist accumulation, posed more than a century ago the disjunctive between socialism and barbarism. Despite the collapse, visibly in development, necropolitical capitalism uses the pandemic in favor of its class interests, with the complicity of the states at its service. It is up to the people to resist together and to organize for the life and future of the generations to come.

The CNI - CIG - EZLN have forged, throughout these decades, a strategy of resistance against capitalism, which is autonomy, which institutes a practice of government and politics radically different from what we know, without bureaucracies, intermediaries, professional politicians and Bonapartist warlords. Despite the structural precariousness, the counter-insurgency war of attrition, the paramilitaries, organized crime, repression and the criminalization of their struggles, and now the pandemic, these self-governments have shown their capacity to organize the people in a process of reconstitution, awareness, and participation of women and youth, strengthening of ethnic-cultural, national and class identities, through the collective and autonomous appropriation of community security, the provision of justice, health, education, culture, communication and economic and productive activities, as well as the defense of the territory and its natural resources.

It should be noted that Mexico appears to be the paradigm of all the violence and social damage caused by the policies of militarized accumulation and dispossession put into practice by neo-liberal globalization. The process of integral recolonization of countries, pointed out by the Peace with Democracy Group in 2007, led Mexico to a limit situation, of such nature, that, according to the Institute of Strategic Studies of London, our country is considered the second most lethal country after Syria, in what was qualified as "an unrecognized armed conflict". This daily violence, which crosses all rural and urban areas and has affected the lives of many Mexican families, was a major cause of the electoral implosion of 2018.

Thus, the arrival of Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) to the presidency of the Republic, and the triumph of MORENA, his political party, as the first force in the Congress of the Union, numerous governorships, mayoralties and municipal governments, requires reflection, from critical thinking, on the scope and limitations of the so-called fourth transformation. It is necessary to characterize the current government, its economic, social and political projects considered a priority, as well as the new correlation of forces that is being formed, in the economic and political spheres, and also in the academia, and the intelligentsia in general, in order to have tools that allow us to think about and characterize these policies of the new government and to better prepare ourselves to respond to the new hegemonic forms with which capitalism is reconfiguring itself.

It is necessary to analyze the bases that support the so-called fourth transformation, distinguishing the phenomenal and epidermal from the structural. The fight against corruption, without a break with the developmentalist model that capitalism had established, does not lay the foundations for thinking that we are on the verge of a change in the historical dimensions of the struggle for national independence, reform, and the social revolution of 1910. To deny the application in Mexico of the class struggle, as Andrés Manuel López Obrador does, to situate oneself as the supreme arbiter of social conflicts and to pretend to base the transition only on the thinning of the State and its transformation into an effective redistributive apparatus, is not sufficient to achieve the transcendental ends of the historical change of the Republic.

Precisely, neoliberalism is characterized by seeking to have the State act as an expeditious mechanism of intermediation that facilitates the process of recolonization of the territories, and, in this direction, the fight against corruption and the thinning of government structures, although always positive in the national imagination and indignation at the impunity of the ruling class in plundering the public treasury, they undoubtedly constitute a factor in Mexico's favour within the national States competing for a smooth implementation of neoliberal projects, such as those undertaken by the 4 T.

A list of these priority economic projects: Special Economic Zones, Tren Maya, development of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec or dry canal, planting of fruit trees on one million hectares, construction of 300 roads in rural territories, refineries, airport system in the metropolitan area of Mexico City; free zones on the northern border, continuity of mining projects, the repeated affirmation of respect for contracts, the independence of the Bank of Mexico, the perspective of its chief of staff, of "making Mexico an investment paradise," and the initiatives of MORENA in Congress, among others, to modify the Mining Law and the Agrarian Law, that reinforce the mechanisms of privatization of ejido and communal lands, as well as the recent entry into force of the Free Trade Agreement, with the United States and Canada, confirm the continuity of economic policies in the logic of the capitalist system, of the neoliberalism that it claims to overcome.

The metaphor of Subcomandante Moisés is that "the stewards and foremen change, but the owner of the farm remains the same. The rejection of these projects by the EZLN, the National Indigenous Congress - Indigenous Government Council, numerous independent indigenous and peasant organizations, academics and specialists in various disciplines, as well as the criticism of the consultations carried out by the new government for not meeting the minimum conditions established in the Constitution, the ILO Convention 169, the UN Universal Declaration of Indigenous Rights, that these are consensual, prior, free, informed, culturally appropriate and binding, have not received the attention of the current government and, on the contrary, were the object of scornful treatment by President López Obrador.

In the political sphere, the creation of the National Institute of Indigenous Peoples is a return to the old indigenism established by the PRI, clientelist and corporate regime, which was denounced as a State policy for indigenous peoples, mediatized, and whose funerals were held in the San Andrés dialogue between the federal Government and the EZLN. The establishment of 130 offices of the new INPI in indigenous peoples' territories, with officials who speak the respective language, with government resources and projects, is a direct attack on the processes of autonomy and the movements in defense of the territories and against corporate invasion. In the current circumstances, particularly in the territories where more profound autonomy processes are taking place, related to armed conflicts, such as the Zapatista region, or that defend indigenous peasant territories, the INPI participates, in fact, in counter-insurgency work and, in tasks of "conflict engineering" that mining companies put into practice to overcome resistance in the territories.

Similarly, the formation of the National Guard, which was eventually integrated with elements of the military police, the naval police and the federal police, along with another decree, also in the midst of a health emergency, conferring public security tasks on the armed forces, are observed by specialists in security issues and human rights defense bodies as a new form of militarization of the country, without having undergone a thorough review of the continued repressive nature of the armed forces, including their involvement in State crimes against humanity.

The ways to effect systemic transformations, or mere alternations between narco-corporate party elites, can always be camouflaged or limited to formal or circumstantial issues imposed by the entelechy (especially in the context of a criminal state like Mexico's) of representative democracy, citizen rights and the legality of institutions, in this case, allegedly hijacked by corrupt guilds and organizations.

Marcos Roitman had already pointed out that party democracy, finally defined by the capitalist state, is detached from practice and social subjects and ends up being a mere procedure for elite election, a "technique" in which there can be alternation, but not alternatives for social change. In this context, parties sooner or later become "offers" of technical management of the established order. (**Systemic thinking, the origins of social conformism.** Mexico: Siglo XXI - UNAM, 2003). Also, Roberto Regalado points out that a new concept of democracy is being imposed on neoliberal transnationalization: "neoliberal democracy, capable of 'tolerating' left-wing governments, as long as they commit themselves to governing with right-wing policies.

In the framework of the crisis of the forms of representation of the **tutelary, low-intensity or counter-insurgent democracy** that capitalism favors in its current phase of globalization, in which these parties, once in government, lose all capacity to challenge and transform; they are incapable of escaping the logic of power, given its effectiveness in co-opting their leaders and officials, who finally assume a role in legitimizing the political system based on capitalist inequality and exploitation. We have the Mexican examples, of the pathetic case of the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD), and the path followed by MORENA, whose leadership focuses its concerns on the struggle for office. We can also observe the mutations in this direction of the Brazilian Workers' Party, governing sectors of the Frente Amplio del Uruguay and many other parties and organizations that, once in government, their central concern is not the development of diverse forms of popular power, the formation of autonomous subjects and the creation of conditions for a break with the capitalist model, but rather the permanence of their cadres in government and the instances of popular representation, the reproduction of their bureaucracies and their entry into a political and economic elite divorced from the contentious social movements.

Regalado rightly emphasizes: "It is not a matter of denying or underestimating the importance of the institutionalized spaces conquered by the left, but of understanding that these triumphs are not in themselves the “alternative”. It follows that the priority of the left cannot be the exercise of government and the search for a permanent space within the bourgeois neoliberal alternation, but rather to accumulate politically with a view to the future revolutionary transformation of society". ("Reform or revolution", in **Rebelión**, 9 January 2006).

The electoral systems have been considered by the liberal theory itself as the mechanisms through which all kinds of economic, social, political and cultural conflicts can be solved. In this sense, the classic Marxist theory, conveniently forgotten by the institutionalized lefts, affirms that the capitalist societies have a dichotomous formation: on one hand, a conflicting and contradictory reality result of the exploitation and domination of class and, on the other, an illusory equity and harmony result of the ideological-mediatic apparatus that tries to legally, politically and culturally equalize all the individuals as citizens.

For capitalism and its system of state parties, democracy is limited to the formal, electoral aspects and the play of political parties within the system. However, in the history of Latin America there are examples that show that even this type of democracy is instrumental to the dominant classes; that is, it is functional to their interests and, consequently, democratic legality is annihilated by the dominant classes when through it an anti-systemic left, or truly democratizing or nationalist forces achieve an institutional break and question their dominance. Proof of this are the repeated coups d'état by the classic route or the parliamentary and judicial version put into practice in Brazil, Honduras and Paraguay and, recently, in Bolivia, the methods of harassment and violence used by the coups, media attacks and paramilitary conspiracy and threats of military intervention that are currently being applied to destabilize and overthrow the constitutional government of Nicolás Maduro in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

The electoral processes taking place in countries whose ruling and oligarchic groups assume a position of subordinate compliance with the neoliberal capitalist globalization model represent heteronomous mechanisms through which the dominant classes, the coercive and ideological apparatuses of the State and the factional powers impose on the candidates to guarantee the reproduction of the system, and this imposing action is carried out with the legitimizing action of ideologically unarmed oppositions, which have renounced, or do not consider the struggle against capitalism, much less against imperialism (what a horror! ), becoming privileged strata that make the electoral environment the form of their permanence in power and the exclusive purpose of their "struggles" and "movements".

The indigenous proposal, on the contrary, is based on the remarkable ethical congruence of its positions. Both the EZLN and the CNI have practiced for decades what they preach, and have made real the principles of not selling out, not giving in, not betraying, not supplanting or taking advantage of the struggles of others. The "for all, everything, for us, nothing", is a proven practice throughout all these years. These organizations have been establishing the people's power of command by obeying, without asking anything in return, and despite the difficult conditions of life, they have been in solidarity with all possible struggles of those on the bottom.

Let us remember that the people have faced the racism of the Mexican state and society. Since the beginning of the Zapatista Mayan rebellion in 1994, the indigenous have been classified as guinea pigs manipulated by the visible mestizo of the insurgent group, Subcomandante Marcos. That was the perspective held by Mario Vargas Llosa and the Enlightened Right in those years, which returns recurrently, but now expanded into the anonymity of social networks.

This racist thought does not register, for example, that currently the spokesperson for the Zapatista group is Subcomandante Insurgente Moisés and that there is a General Command made up only of indigenous people, with the exception of Comandante Contreras, our esteemed colleague Pablo González Casanova, and hierarchically superior to the two Subcomandantes. It is also intended to ignore the permanent process of consultation in assemblies on every important political step of the EZLN, and the possibility of a direct and mass participatory democracy of the indigenous peoples in many ethnoregions.

After centuries, it is still thought that indigenous people can be controlled politically, and that there can only be submission and obedience to ideas and orders coming from non-indigenous people. Thus, for example, at the beginning of the uprising, in the academy itself, it was even stated that the indigenous people were not capable of sustaining national perspectives, so that it could be ruled out that the 1994 rebellion had an indigenous matrix.

Another way of making these prejudiced perspectives visible is to consider that the indigenous people should not and cannot break into the spaces considered exclusive to a political class organized in the dominant party and mestizo democracy. In doing so, they become "envoys of Salinas," "dangers for real change," "allies of the right," "conservatives," "divisionists of the left," among other disqualifications. The disrespect for the agreements taken collectively in organizational forms that bring together numerous indigenous peoples shows this fear of losing a supposedly unique representation of the institutional left. According to this vision, of course, it is conceived that the "unity of the left" can only be achieved by uncritically and subordinately joining a government or a political party, and it excludes the possibility of a unity around projects of new political subjects.

Also, during these years, against the tide, and in spite of the wear and tear of a counter-insurgency war, the Mayan peoples grouped in the EZLN have given an example of proactive resistance by building their autonomies, now expanded to 43 autonomous municipalities and 11 caracoles, strengthening their governments, and in which thousands of women and men have prepared themselves to be authorities of a direct and participatory democracy. The girls and boys, young people of both sexes, have been socialized, educated and trained based on the seven Zapatista ethical principles: to serve and not to serve yourself, to represent and not to supplant, to build and not to destroy, to obey and not to order, to propose and not to impose, to convince and not to conquer, to go down and not to go up; a conception of the world and of politics, which is situated at the equidistant pole of the individualistic narcissism of the *selfie* generation and of the political class.

The organizations, communities, and peoples that make up the indigenous movement independent of the State have not stopped fighting, each in its own space, way, and time, against the extractive corporations that range from mining companies to organized crime, including wind farms, tourism, pharmaceuticals, and water monopolies, and against the State that represents them, independent of the government in power. The difference is that now, the aim is to move to another level of this anti-capitalist struggle, to transcend its particularities; to establish links that go beyond the indigenous, the local, the regional and even the national.

Also, in the anti-hegemonic struggle, the groups of power do everything in their power to prevent or hinder the formation or strengthening of historically autonomous subjects. When these emerge, they immediately seek to neutralize and even exterminate them. To this end, they directly employ the repression of their military, police and intelligence apparatuses, or the clandestine actions of their paramilitary and/or criminal groups. Also, a **renewed indigenousism** is used to co-opt, mediatize or neutralize the organizations that manifest autonomist and rupturist tendencies of the dominant hegemonic system. A very helpful way is to seek their fragmentation, internal division or implosion, offering budgets, supposedly disinterested aid, programs such as sowing clientelism, and others that are given individually to promote the personal interest of those who receive them and fragment the communities.

The indigenous peoples grouped together in the CNI CIG endorse the strategy of autonomy as an inalienable path. The way in which the EZLN-CNI-CIG has assumed the autonomy process is extraordinary, and the strengthening of the so-called autonomous subject is a predominant reality in the national territory. IN THIS CONTEXT IT IS A POLITICAL DISTORTION to continue to consider original peoples as victims and passive subjects of historical happenings.

The political position of the EZLN-CNI-CIG in relation to the current government is clear and unambiguous, and I quote: "Words are superfluous when the Binniza, Chontal, Ikoots, Mixe, Zoque, Nahua and Popoluca peoples of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec are threatened with their Transisthmian projects and the expansion of the Special Economic Zones, and the Mayan peoples with their capitalist train project that strips and destroys the land in its path. Words are superfluous in the face of the announced planting of a million hectares with fruit and timber trees in the south of the country, the illegal and rigged consultation for the construction of the New Mexico City Airport, or the offer to continue investing by the mining companies that have large extensions of indigenous territories under concession. Words are superfluous when, without consulting our peoples, the government imposes the creation, in the style of the old indigenism, of the National Institute of Indigenous Peoples, commanded by the deserters of our long struggle of resistance. Words are superfluous when we see the cynicism with which the peoples of Mexico are delivered to the interests of the United States through the Free Trade Agreement, which the López Obrador government promises to ratify. In one of his first speeches, he did not hesitate to confirm the continuity of the current monetary and fiscal policy, that is, continuity in the neoliberal policy, which will be guaranteed with the military corporations in the streets and with the pretense of recruiting 50 thousand young people for the armed ranks that have served to repress, deprive, and sow terror throughout the nation”.

In short, for those of us who, out of political conviction and vocation for life, have opted to defend the rights of the original peoples of their territories, natural resources and processes of autonomy, the first two years of the current government have meant a continuation and even, in some aspects, a deepening of the process of re-colonization of the territories through the mega-projects that are being imposed, with the violence typical of militarized accumulation, through the National Guard, and the increasingly frequent use of mafia crime as a clandestine armed device for conflict engineering, population displacement, territorial control and looting, and, by way of terror, confronting resistance and executing opposition leaders.

This situation refers back to the debate on how social science can become either an instrument of domination at the service of the State and the corporations, following the logic of power or, from the opposite perspective of *the logic of resistance*, as a liberating tool for subjects who fight against dispossession and for life, ideologies aside. We start from the idea that social scientists are first and foremost intellectuals, in their essential sense of "*individuals with critical capacity or antagonism in relation to any type of power, and what distinguishes them is their radical anti-conformist behavior*" (*Baca Olamendi. Léxico de la política, FCE, 2000*). Marx argued: "he doubts everything". Norberto Bobbio also states that criticism is one of the defining attributes of the intellectual; while Gramsci distinguishes between the intellectual of power, the traditional intellectual, and the organic intellectual who performs in the interests of the subordinate classes and social change.

Samir Amin put it this way:

"We have people who argue that our society is in dire need of critical thinking that provides an understanding of the mechanisms of change, thinking that can in turn influence that change in a direction that frees society from capitalist alienation and its tragic consequences. To the extent that this is the responsibility of the vast majority of humanity (the peoples of Asia, Africa and Latin America), this need is vital, since these peoples are currently experiencing capitalism as a pure and simple form of depredation. Therefore, I propose to distinguish between those I call mental operators, who serve the established ideological apparatus, and those who can be considered genuinely part of the intelligentsia" (Capitalism in the Age of Globalization. Paidos, 1999)

*The dilemma remains: social science for power or social science for people*

1. Talk for: SSFS7 Climate Change, Global Crisis and Community Regeneration, 8-17 July, 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Doctor in Anthropology (Utah University, 1976), Professor – Researcher of the INAH – Morelos, National Researcher, columnist in *La Jornada*. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)