

Visions, voices, and practices of the zapatistas



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Universidad de la Tierra Oaxaca

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Introduction

The World Social Forum has been trying to renew itself for quite some time. It seeks to attract different participants and audiences than those which it has typically attracted. In this context, Lau Kin Chi, from the Global University of Sustainability in Lingnan, took the initiative to organize a special session focused on the Zapatistas during the Forum's meeting in 2021. To accomplish this feat, she collaborated with the Universidad de la Tierra in Oaxaca, México.

On January 29, 2021 the session titled “Miradas, voces y prácticas de los zapatistas” or “Visions, voices, and practices of the zapatistas” took place. In this session a group of people close to them attempted to show, simply and directly, the contemporary meaning of zapatismo and its renewed importance given the world’s current circumstances. This book highlights the voices that participated in that session.

Gilberto López y Rivas began the session with a precise description of the context in which the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) was founded and which led to the insurrection on January 1, 1994. He explained how the EZLN sought dialogue with the government, which took place despite all sorts of obstacles, and persisted along a path of peaceful construction even when the authorities failed to honor the accords reached through dialogue. López y Rivas also described the ongoing consequences of the zapatista movement,

who continue to be a source of inspiration for revolutionary initiatives across the globe.

Jorge Santiago subsequently reflected on the zapatista strategy, which defined the conditions of the uprising and the subsequent transformation of their modes of resistance, and by extension, ways of life. In his intervention, Santiago includes a large array of texts from the six official statements released by the EZLN between October 5, 2020 and the Declaration for Life on January 1, 2021. In the sixth statement they announced that they would journey to the five continents to listen to others, who also refused to bow in the face of ongoing oppressive circumstances. The declaration for life highlighted the important role played by women, who will lead the trip, and announced that it would begin in Europe.

While reviewing the zapatista initiative in a celebratory spirit, David Barkin details the immense number of organizations arising from the grassroots social base, which he calls the “revolutionary communitarian subject”. He showed the way in which these increasingly large and vigorous organizations occupy a substantial portion of the planet. Moreover he describes how these groups carry out the extremely important job of triggering a decolonization process and of protecting and regenerating nature, which has been damaged by neoliberal imperialism. Barkin clearly shows us the significant promise of the new zapatista initiative.

Claudia Yadira Caballero emphasized the impact that zapatismo has had on youth, especially urban youth. She describes the challenges they face in the city, where there is a paucity of community. She notes how despite these challenges,

there has been an emergence of innumerable initiatives, including in big cities, that defy market and state, and create a distinct way of life, which draws on the zapatistas for inspiration. Of particular value is her observation that the zapatistas' existence radically questioned the dominant paradigm of progress and the conditions that render dialogue between zapatista communities and organized urban groups possible.

In the name of the National Indigenous Congress (CNI), Alejandra Jiménez recalls how the zapatistas contributed to the creation and strengthening of the CNI. The CNI's motto, "We're an assembly when we're together, and a network when we're apart", has allowed this multiplicity of languages and traditions to stay united and active despite the challenges posed by distance. Jiménez reflects on the value of the CNI's alliance with zapatismo, particularly for initiatives in indigenous communities. She highlights the important role that women have had, starting January 1, 1994 with the zapatista insurrection. She also celebrates that the Indigenous Governing Council has a woman as the spokesperson for an entire movement.

Mariana Mora commented on the vitality and relevance of zapatismo in response to the combination of situations and challenges posed by the pandemic. Obviously the zapatistas did not foresee this situation, but their insurrection clearly anticipated the historical processes that we are currently experiencing. Mora also emphasizes the contributions of zapatistas to a new way of constructing autonomy, one based in the centrality of life and in the central role of women, both in daily life

in the zapatista communities and as the public voices and character-defining spokeswomen of zapatismo.

Gustavo Esteva underscores in his text that the zapatistas created a new radical political option in a time of few alternatives. He also stresses the manner in which the zapatistas radicalism continues to be a source of inspiration for the entire world. He highlights how they have nourished the imagination and inspired hope during the last decade as the dominant regime destroyed our surroundings. Esteva also reflected on the zapatistas' relationship with the earth, on their construction of autonomy, and on the meaning of radical democracy they have fostered in their communities, abandoning all illusions of democracy that appear to feed off of the decadence of the nation-state. Esteva emphasizes the zapatistas remarkable listening skills, which will be displayed on their journey to the five continents.

Lau Kin Chi participated in a variety of ways in the session she helped organize in the World Social Forum. For this book in particular, she prepared a brief essay detailing her experiences visiting zapatista communities throughout the years. She reflects on the impact the circulation of information about the zapatista movements and of subcomandante Marcos writing has had on China. She notes that it has had a profound impact on the "nosótrica" or "we-based" vision of the world, which is inherent to the zapatistas. This vision appears to be an effective remedy to the characteristic individualism of capitalism. Lau Kin Chi emphasizes that the zapatista movement has been particularly valuable for the movement for rural reconstruction in China and the displacement of elitist and patriarchal politics.

Finally, she highlights the important role played by women throughout the entire process.

David Barkin, Claudia Yadira Caballero, Gustavo Esteva,
Alejandra Jiménez, Lau Kin Chi, Gilberto López y Rivas,
Mariana Mora & Jorge Santiago
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The Context

The national context that provided the origin for the political and military cluster called the National Liberation Force (FLN), founded on August 6 of 1969, was dominated political party that was profoundly authoritarian for seven decades, anti-democratic, and repressed the movement of railroad workers in 1957, the teachers' in the sixties, and the doctors in 1964 and 65. The Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) was also responsible for the state's crimes against humanity on October 2ns of 1968 and July 10th of 1971. The FLN, founded under these conditions, would eventually give way to the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN), founded November 17 1983. The state violence combined with disgraceful economic conditions that harmed the majority of the population prompted many to consider all available methods of resistance to transform the prevailing state of affairs.

Within the international context, the Cuban revolution of January 1st 1959 catalyzed the formation of political-military groups that led the armed resistance between the seventies and eighties, including the triumph of the sandinistas on July 19, 1979. The action of these youth, inspired by José Martí and led by Fidel Castro, manifested evidence that patriotism, defined as love for the cause and for revolution, can't be demonstrated with words: thus necessitating decisive action and direct confrontation with the dictatorial state, when all peaceful path-

ways to resolving colossal social, economic, and political problems are closed

The Zapatista Army of National Liberation's (EZLN) insurrection, on January 1st of 1994, and the peace talks with the federal government, which started on February 20th of the same year, an unexpected sequence interrupted by the suspension of talks during the second half of 1996, constituted an unprecedented process in the history of revolutionary armed conflict in Latin America. Especially because of the primarily indigenous composition of the zapatista grouping, that raised arms on the basis of article 39 of the Mexican Constitution which states that: "National sovereignty resides essentially and originally in the people. All public power emanates from the people and is instituted for their benefit. The people have at all times the inalienable right to alter or modify the form of their government."

Thus, although the National Liberation Forces (FLN) possessed political, ideological, and organization characteristics of a national liberation movement, the indigenous context within which the initial mestizo and urban group implanted themselves radically modified the methods and contents of the rebellion. Most notably manifest in the processes of voting within the communities on issues such as the pertinence of the war against the government and on the start date for hostilities and for the occupation of at least seven municipal capitals. Ultimately they decided on January 1st 1994, the date on which the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) would go into effect.

The insurgent subcommander, formerly known as Marcos and now Galeano, sustained that the revolutionary mestizos that had arrived at the Selva Lacandona during the first half of the eighties, “were defeated by the communities”, who took charge of the insurgent project and transformed it. The EZLN’s military strategies didn’t follow the classic patterns of Latin American guerrillas. Instead they took their cues from the indigenous uprisings during the colonization and independence, where indigenous insurgent forces took control of cities, centers of despotic and racist power. This deployment of thousands of men and women towards the center of power allowed the EZLN to leave a mark unlike any other national liberation movement.

From the moment in which the indigenous rebellion ignited, Carlos Salinas de Gortari’s government did not hesitate to use force and deception, including aerial bombardment and an attempted ideological campaign that painted the uprising as a local, rather than national, conflict. Prior to that period, the state’s official policy towards indigenous peoples was premised on hollow charity, designed to avoid social conflict instead of addressing the roots of the misery, exploitation, and neglect towards indigenous peoples. The so called policy of “indigenismo” adopted by the Mexican State was characterized by a combination of paternalism, cronyism, co-optation, and repression, rather than by action focused on addressing indigenous peoples’ self-proclaimed needs.

From the very beginning of the insurrection, the EZLN attracted sympathy from a wide breadth of low-income sectors of Mexican society (and more than a few in the international

sphere), who took to the street to demand dialogue and the end of governmental repression and violence. Some intellectuals supportive of Salinas sought to discredit the political-military organization. Anthropologist Arturo Warman stated that the uprising wasn't a movement of the poor, but rather a manipulation of the poor: "It's not an indigenous movement, it's a political-military project instituted amongst indigenous people without representing them (...) there are several indigenous people, I suppose that the majority of the "soldiers" in the so-called Zapatista Army for National Liberation, have grievances that can explain their decision; but many many more, are either on the margins or against the armed uprising (...) We shouldn't get confused: (The EZLN) is not the voice of all indigenous people, merely a few of them are present as representatives of national life". This hypothesis about the external imposition of the uprising and about the everlasting representation of indigenous people as subjects manipulated by external agents was deployed by Salinas, the army, Mexican intelligence services, and even a few media "analysts" in order to shift the blame to Central American guerrillas, external agitators, and mestizo revolutionaries. Octavio Paz, poet and Nobel laureate for literature, expressed his concern over the effects of the massacre of indigenous people at the Ocosingo market on the stock market and on Mexico's international image. Beyond the diverse array of Mexican intellectuals' reactions to the EZLN's rebellion during its start, there was also an ongoing consensus-building process in Mexican society that concluded that the zapatistas' fundamental demands expressed the social condition of millions of indigenous and non-indi-

genous peoples. The conflict could then be defined as a lengthy national problem that touched upon the essence of the relationships between the Mexican state and the peoples that constitute the nation, including the poor and exploited mestizo population.

This was how, on January 1st of 1994, an insurgent army who drew inspiration from the icon of Emiliano Zapata, an insurgent agrarian figure from the Mexican Revolution, demonstrated another Mexico of profound social contradictions and polarizations. A Mexico distant from the “first world”, which Salinas promised to bring about through structural reforms, such as the privatization of Ejido-managed and communal land, and with the counter-reform of article 27 of the constitution, another one of the catalysts that prompted the insurrection. The zapatistas managed to shine a light on Mexico that was different from the transnational commercial entities, different from the Mexico conceived of by banking and financial oligarchies, and distant from elite politics. The EZLN emerged from another Mexico, the Mexico of those on the bottom who entered modernity and managed to survive and resist, defending rights, lands, territories, sovereignties, and life itself.

The news that an insurgent army had declared war on the Mexican army spread rapidly through global media, attracting sympathy and support from activists networks that began to arrive in Chiapas. Zapatismo became a connecting transcendental universal thread, that channeled a new world of building utopias. This transformation occurred in a moment when real socialism disappeared alongside the Soviet Union. In the absence of foreign influence, there was no option but to recog-

nize the genuinely indigenous origin of this rebellion. This disrupted the idealized and essentialized image of the Indian, previously condemned to cultural petrification in museums, crafts for tourists, and an “innate” inability to make demands and alliances at a national and international level. Zapatismo disrupted this image so that suddenly indigenous peoples were recognized as unforgettable social and political actors. It was the revelation of a negated identity, one that had always been present in the historical configuration and actual reality of the Mexican nation, an identity linked to otherness and that had been underappreciated for centuries.

The undeniable political merit of the EZLN is marked by the fact that they started a broad and complex convergence of citizens and sectors in Mexico and across the world. This convergence was focused on comprehending indigenous realities, and starting peaceful dialogues focused on widespread and genuine representation in civil society. This focus and the speed with which negotiations started differentiated the peace dialogues in Mexico from those in El Salvador, Guatemala or Colombia. The pressure that civil society exerted via large protests, across many cities but chiefly in the capital, against massacres, and for peace and negotiated solutions, in addition to the reactions of political organizations, unions, churches and well-known intellectuals forced the federal army into a unilateral ceasefire. The pressure also prompted them to establish a “Commission for the peace” and to reluctantly accept bishop Samuel Ruiz as a mediator.

Consequently, the “Cathedral Dialogue” was established on February 22 1994 in San Cristóbal de las Casas. It included

representatives from the military, Red Cross, and from 287 non-governmental organizations, as well as hundreds of national and international journalists. The assassination of Luis Donaldo Colosio, the PRI candidate for President of the republic, on March 23 of 1994, prompted the first of many crises during the peace process and the return of the EZLN to their positions in the mountain. The second crisis was triggered again by the federal government, now headed by Ernesto Zedillo, who ordered a failed incursion into zapatista controlled territory in a failed attempt to capture the general commanders of the EZLN on February 9, 1995. In those days, the security forces apprehended 20 presumed zapatistas, some of whom were members of the National Liberation Forces, and they disclosed Subcommander Marcos police record.

These crises were resolved favorably, not only due to the zapatista's willingness to sincerely compromise in order to arrive at a peaceful and negotiated resolution to conflict, but also due to the establishment of two political bodies. First the National Commission for Intermediation (CONAI), led by bishop Samuel Ruiz, and composed of actors from civil society in Chiapas and the nation at large. CONAI and the other body, the Commission of Concord and Peacemaking (COCOPA), were established on March 11, 1995 by the Law for Dialogue, Reconciliation, and Dignified Peace in Chiapas. It was composed of federal deputies and senators from the Congress of the Union. This bicameral collaboration, which I was a part of during 3 years in my capacity as federal deputy, emphasized at key moments their commitment to the peace process beyond partisan interests. Moreover in my capacity as one of the rotat-

ing presidents of COCOPA, I presented in the general assembly a denunciation of the existence of paramilitary groups that persist to this day.

Similarly, the existence of this law, enacted by the legislative power of the federation, allowed for the normalization of dialogue and the explicit recognition of four actors in charge of it: the EZLN, the Federal Government, CONAI and COCOPA. Within this legal and institutional framework, there were 17 sessions between April 20 1995 and August 12 1996 that led to the signing of the so called San Andres Accords on indigenous rights and culture on February 16 of 1996.

Thus far I have outlined the context in terms of the events and actors involved in the dialogue. Now we will turn to the significance of this dialogue:

1.- Zapatismo catapults indigenous problems into the national debate and forces the Mexican state to negotiate the San Andres Accords, which focused on indigenous rights and culture. Moreover, despite the government's betrayal, the accords provide a programmatic framework for the autonomous processes that have emerged over the past 25 years and serve as an important reference for other resistance efforts against predatory neoliberal corporations. Unlike many social sectors, the EZLN and indigenous peoples rely on a strategy of autonomy to resist the onslaught of neoliberal politics and defend their natural patrimony, which includes strategic resources for local and national use. Ultimately their strategy of autonomy as resistance is clearly distinct from that of global capitalism.

In the San Andrés dialogue, the zapatistas empower civil society and the representatives of indigenous peoples to lead the

dialogue, setting as the only condition that their representatives seek consensus from the people for any proposals presented by the zapatista leaders. The fact that the EZLN sought broad consensus for its proposals, was undeniably politically astute and secured understanding in Mexico and abroad about the realities faced by indigenous people who had been denied a secular space. In the end, the dialogue between a political military organization and the government incorporated as advisors or special guests of the EZLN, more than one thousand people from political, social and academic institutions; unions; journalists, writers, political leaders, social science analysts and specialists. The presence of more than 40 indigenous groups, highlighted the colorful ethnic reality of Mexico. These people had the landmark opportunity to share their ideas and proposals as part of a complex negotiation mechanism which allowed for an inclusive national debate around the issues.

3. The dialogue provided a forum on how policies could be set through collective participation without the influence of competitive individualistic forces or corporate interests. In San Andres, the approach for setting policy was different from the one imposed by the State, which sidelined leftist party leanings and encouraged affiliation with the PRI party. As a result, the commitment, discipline, camaraderie and honesty that characterized the memorable years at war. The national dialogue gave birth to new ways of thinking and setting policy, in a country where the State previously had perverted or mediated all previous efforts leftist to rebuild, a fatal dichotomy of co-optation-repression through which the state regime imposes itself.

4. When the government began to negotiate, they faced a surprising reality. They could neither co-opt or manipulate a movement that maintained a simple, yet irrefutable principle which was the defense of dignity. Used to using corruption and making profit from the needs of the people, and only seeking support from the population during electoral periods, the government could not understand that dignity cannot be negotiated. Thus, during the dialogue two distinct and irreconcilable political cultures faced each other. On top of this, two distinct negotiation strategies faced off. On one hand, the EZLN opened up a space so that Mexican civil society could propose a new national strategy; while the counter insurgent State was confronted with its inability to meet its commitments.

5. From the day that the EZLN arrived in the national stage, the remaining days of “indigenismo” were numbered. The San Andrés dialogue was in essence, its funeral, although its ghost still haunts the National Institute of Indigenous Peoples. The EZLN and its “autonomies” project, crafted during the Good Governance Juntas, closed the State’s cycle of dependency and paternalism, and eliminated any cronyism and corporatism practiced by the state via anthropological consulting. The recognition of indigenous peoples’ free will and self determination exercised through autonomy was established by the San Andrés accords, which also designated “pueblos” or peoples as the subjects of rights and responsibilities. The essence of indigenous peoples’ autonomy established in the San Andres accords, as well as the de facto autonomies constructed by the zapatistas and other indigenous people of Mexico, constitutes

the configuration of an autonomous subject, with national presence and reach, which incorporated both the need for ethnic reparations and national interest projects with popular support. This was the most significant achievement garnered from the years of war following January 1 of 1994.

6. At the table about Indigenous Rights and Culture, all the documents used to draft the San Andres Accords were the subject of heated and rich discussions prior to reaching consensus, which as stated previously, was the only condition given to their advisors and invited guests during the dialogue. The process ended with the signing of the only accords based on autonomy, free will, legal norms and internal justice. The final signing of these accords represents the main political triumph of the zapatistas. Their content regarding indigenous rights and culture, set historical benchmarks by creating an alliance between the indigenous movement and popular and national movements. The EZLN strengthened the national indigenous movement by encouraging them to develop a platform with a holistic vision of the country's problems.

7. The proposal to recognize the autonomy of indigenous peoples that was agreed upon in San Andres was based on a long-term outlook, seeking deep reforms in the Mexican State and society; modifying the basic tenets of the prevailing social contract ; establishing rights not only for individuals and citizens, but also collectives such as the indigenous peoples (pueblos) who are distinct from the rest of Mexicans; and pushing for a change in mentalities about rights, and in relations between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples. This paved the way not to isolationism not to retreating into sepa-

ratist indigenous peoples and communities, instead it established a pathway towards the unification of equals, in a multifaceted and pluralist national society.

8. If we define the left as a political force that uses popular support against capitalism, without monopolizing representation or taking the voice from different social-ethnic sectors, we can see that the EZLN was able to remain loyal to one of its hardest fought principles for 25 years: “All for everyone, nothing for us”. The EZLN ultimately demonstrated how true they were to these principles when they withdrew all their political and military representatives assigned to the autonomous governments under their control. Governing by obeying, rotating leadership, convincing instead of forcing, and leading from the bottom instead of the top are all ways of leading that are diametrically opposed to the ‘vanguardism’, bureaucracy, and establishment of castes, that tend to prevail, and which use the power of the government and popular representation derived from electoral party mechanisms to seek government positions for their own benefit.

9. The EZLN has shown an extraordinary capacity to adapt and innovate, without abandoning their principles despite the government’s abandonment of the San Andres Accords. Instead they have evolved to include women and youth in all autonomous processes and de facto educating future generations on the liberating pedagogic principles which use dignity and solidarity as the guiding compass for social coexistence; establishing government as a service, and pooling together, in their way, the revolutionary ancestral utopias. The EZLN and National Indigenous Congress’ proposal to form an indigen-

ous governance council, which produced a female indigenous Presidential candidate and demonstrated the strength of interweaving the national liberation movements in Latin America with the indigenous world, which has become a civilizing force for Mexico and has prevailed despite attempts by multiple political oligarchies to erase the identities, culture and self government of the people. The autonomous mechanisms established in the zapatista supported territories, are the highlight of the 'new era', where the people live with the dignity they received from a new form of empowerment, coming from the people without interference from bureaucracy or mediation. All of this was established by the San Andres Accords, which remain relevant 25 years after their signing, a source of political strength for the organization that made them possible.

10. The EZLN has persisted as an emancipator over the past 25 years, and has been called upon time and again in various ways to support transformative changes at the national level. Let's remember the multiple ways we have supported platforms brought forward by the people, which came from the bottom and the left, whether through the National Democratic Convention, the March of the Color of the Earth, the Inter-galactic Gatherings, the 'Escuelita', and the multiple seminars held to stimulate critical thinking among intellectuals, artists and scientists. The Sixth Declaration of the Selva Lacandona synthesized the EZLN's permanent struggle to synthesize national libertarian battles: "We will continue to fight for the indigenous people of Mexico, but not only for them or with them, but also for all the people who have been exploited and

dispossessed in Mexico. With all of them and all the country (...). We will listen and speak to the simple and humble people of Mexico directly, without intermediaries or mediation. With them, hearing and learning from their concerns, we will build a national program to fight capitalism and neoliberalism and seek justice, democracy and freedom for the Mexican people.”

11. During all these years, the EZLN has been the critical conscience of the State and Society. It has been the mirror in which the institutionalized left and system-abiding intellectuals see reflected the loss of moral principles and anti-capitalist moorings. They also see their escapism in the face of a war against indigenous peoples, and their movement towards comfortable alternatives that don't endanger the system of labor exploitation, or the imperialist domination exerted by the United States over Mexico. Given that, it is not surprising to see the visceral hate from anti-zapatista prosecutors from an intellectual current that clearly renounced critical thinking many years ago. Instead, they personify and project their frustration and resentments onto the figure of subcomandante Marcos-Galeano. On August 17, 2019 insurgent Subcomandante Moisés, spokesperson for the EZLN, released a statement where the EZLN reports back to CNI-CIG and to organizations, collective groups, and people in Mexico and across the globe who “take interest in the zapatista peoples” and “accompany us with their hearts beating in time with ours.” As per usual, this documented communication was largely ignored by big media outlets and political parties. The communication notes how in the midst of corporation and state-driven re-coloniza-

tion and humanitarian catastrophe in 2016 the EZLN and CNI committed to shifting from offensive tactics to defending the territory and Mother Earth. They also committed to “spreading the words and actions of resistance and rebellion”. Subcomandante Moisés noted that in keeping with their promise, the EZLN like the CNI had “shifted to the offensive in terms of their verbal, ideational, and organizational efforts.” In doing so they shared extraordinary news for other emancipatory movements across the globe: the rupture of the counterinsurgent encirclement and the establishment of “new Caracoles and of more autonomous rebellious zapatista municipalities in new zones of southeastern Mexico.” This prolonged process of reflection and searching, aided by thousands of communal assemblies molded autonomous and conscientious subjects motivated to lead by obeying. This process also constitutes a transformation of the revolutionary scope and potential. Once again, the Mayan zapatistas rally us with their example. May the Caracoles and Centers for Autonomous Resistance flourish across the nation and globe! May their bottom-up, autonomous, anti-capitalist, and anti-patriarchal processes thrive to bring about, in our real contexts, the concrete utopia erected by our zapatista brothers and sisters.

Gilberto López y Rivas



The Strategy

The EZLN's strategy is to confront the other's war strategy without war

The peoples' fight is a collective vocation. It's invincible.

It is the fruit of conscience.

It has the capacity to position itself as the vanguard of the construction of alternatives

The importance of this strategy lies in turning it into a collective and routine practice.

This strategy is anchored in the strength and energy of the spirit of the people.

With this strategy the Zapatistas are trying to participate in a possible global dialogue.

With this strategy they have the possibility of succeeding.

Their only possible route is towards triumph, there is no defeat.

What does exist is fortitude.

The foundation of this strategy is a life based in belonging to a territory and in an awareness of being a free and autonomous being.

The following questions are resolved permanently by the EZLN:

How to achieve strategic objectives and triumph without war, and without reacting to war with war?

How to be strong, agile, intelligent, and powerful?

How to face the adversary in a way that focuses on transforming them into a source of strength, rather than on destroying them?

How to be fully strategic?

One of the answers is not to lie.

To avoid filling up on fantasies and to embrace reality instead.

This includes being present in reality, in all of its various directions and processes.

Not to forget, even for a moment, the fatal persecution enacted by powerful forces that maintain military and ideological encirclement, and uphold the presence of the patriarchy, of threats, of oppressive employers, and of a history of aggression.

Not to let our guards down and fall into traps, but rather to advance, and win the battle.

In the face of an advancing strategy of death, choose a strategy that emphasizes life

That's where strength lies: in life.

That is success.

This prolonged period of threats, military and ideological encirclement, aggressions and extermination-oriented intentions, and of pandemic, has allowed them to find an exit.

This is the current situation. It goes beyond survival, beyond resistance, beyond regrets, anger, and destructiveness during revindicating moments. It's about the possibility of health, safety, and freedom.

The zapatistas stand against militarization, instead taking a radical stance to protect life. "Our fight is to defend life".

This is the utmost objective: we fight for the life of all beings.

As a part of the path to this end, we carry with us the conviction that we are all seeds.

The following are quotes from six official EZLN communiqués between October 5 2020 and January 1st 2021, where they announce their trip to Europe 2021 and publish the Declaration for Life, inviting groups, peoples, organizations, and peoples around the world to subscribe to it.

The quotes were selected in an attempt to provide a narrative thread for the EZLN's central message.

First.- We see and hear a sick social world, fragmented into millions of strangers amongst each other, focused on their individual survival, but united under a system of oppression willing to do anything to quench its thirst for profit, even when it's clear that the course of actions runs counter to the existence of the Earth. And within this we discern the criminal state of affairs regarding femicide.

Second.- We see and hear the dying cries of nature, whose agony warns humankind that the worst is still to come.

Third.- We see and hear those in power acquiescing and retreating into calls of the United States and its walls.

Fourth.- The COVID pandemic has not only exposed our vulnerability as humans, but also the greed and stupidity of various national governments and the so-called oppositions.

Fifth.- We have also heard and seen the resistances and rebellions that, even when silenced or forgotten, do not cease to be vital indicators of a humanity that refuses to follow the system's hurried pace toward collapse. The deadly train of progress advances with impeccable arrogance toward the edge of the cliff.

Because it turns out that we do live. Despite paramilitaries, pandemics, mega-projects, lies, slander, and oblivion, we live. And by that we mean, we struggle.

That is what we are thinking, that we will continue struggling, that is, continue living. We are thinking about the fraternal embrace of

people in our own country and around the world that we have received throughout these years. We think that if life here resists and even, against all odds, flourishes, it is thanks to all those people who challenged distances, red tape, borders and differences of language and culture. We want to thank them: the men, women, and others—but above all the women—who confronted and defeated calendars and geographies to be with us.

In the mountains of Southeast Mexico, many worlds have captured and continue to capture our hearts. Their words and actions nourished resistance and rebellions, which are just a continuation of the struggle of our predecessors.

People who walk the path of art and science found a way to embrace and encourage us, even from a distance. There were journalists, both bougie and not, who reported the death and misery we suffered before and the dignity of life always. There have been people of all professions and trades who, through what were perhaps small gestures for them that meant a great deal to us, have been and continue to be at our sides.

These are the thoughts in our collective heart, and we also think that now is the time in which we Zapatistas [nosotras, nosotros, nosotrosas] reciprocate the listening ear, word, and presence of those worlds, for those who are geographically near and far.

Sixth.- And as a part of this we have decided:

It is time for our hearts to dance again, and for their sounds and rhythm to not be those of mourning and resignation. Thus, various Zapatista delegations, men, women, and others, the color of our earth, will go out into the world, walking or setting sail to remote lands, oceans, and skies, not to seek out difference, superiority, or offense, much less pity or apology, but to find what makes us equal.

Not only the humanity that animates our varied skins, modes, languages, and colors. But also, the common dream we have shared as a species as of the moment, in a seemingly distant Africa, from the lap of the very first woman, when we set out on the search for freedom that guided our first steps and which continues its path today.

Our first destination on this planetary trip will be the European continent.

We will go tell the Spanish people two simple things:

One: That they didn't conquer us. That we continue to resist and rebel.

Two: That they don't need to ask for our forgiveness.

2021 marks the 20th anniversary of the March of the Color of the Earth, which we carried out with the National Indigenous Congress, to reclaim a place in this nation that is now falling apart.

Now, 20 years later, we will set sail and journey once more, to the world that we hold in our collective heart, there is room for everyone [todas, todos, todoas]. That is true for the simple reason that that world will only be possible if all of us struggle to build it.

The zapatista delegations will be primarily composed of women. Not only because they intend to reciprocate the embrace they received at prior international gatherings. But also so that the male zapatistas can affirm that we are what we are, and that we aren't what we aren't, thanks to them, for them, and with them.

We invite the CNI-CIG to form a delegation to accompany us and thus further enrich our word for the other who struggles in distant lands. We make a special invitation to the communities who hold up the name, image, and blood of our brother Samir Flores Soberanes, so that their pain, rage, struggle, and resistance travels far.

We invite those who are dedicated to vocations or endeavors focused on arts and sciences to accompany our journey from a distance. And in doing so, to help us spread the idea that in the sciences and the arts lie not only the possibility of the survival of humanity, but that of the birth of a new world.

To summarize: we leave for Europe in April of 2021.

Our fight is for life. It's a collective vocation.

Communal life is something that is built today for tomorrow.

Communal life is something that is inherited.

If we don't inherit life, which is the path, then what are we living for?

Organization. Mobilization. Unity. Resistance. Rebellion.

There can be no revolution without women.

We need to choose the fate of our vision. And shift our vision to see the whole picture.

We, men, women, and all inbetween, will go out to learn.

Because the color of the earth will soon be under threat yet again from powers who come to impose their stern words,

Their murderous I, icon of reason,
who disguise corruption as charity

The day will come when death will dress in its cruelest clothes. An even deadlier death.

Then the one that was here first, mother earth, will rise and reclaim with fire her home and hearth. And triumphing over the arrogant modifications of power, trees, plants, and animals will flourish. And in their hearts Votán Zapata, guardian and heart of the peoples, will come back to life. And the jaguar will once again retrace its ancestral routes, reigning once again over what was under threat of rule by money and its lackeys.

And the powerful won't die before seeing how their ignorant pride quietly topples over. And in their last breath, they will know the power that will be no more, nothing but a bad memory in a world that rebelled and resisted death and that led without commanding.

When the men and women of corn look at the world and its troubles, they also see the world that they will have to uplift, and they set their course accordingly.

They have three ways of looking: one for what was before, one for what is now, and another one for what will follow. In looking they plant a treasure: a vision.

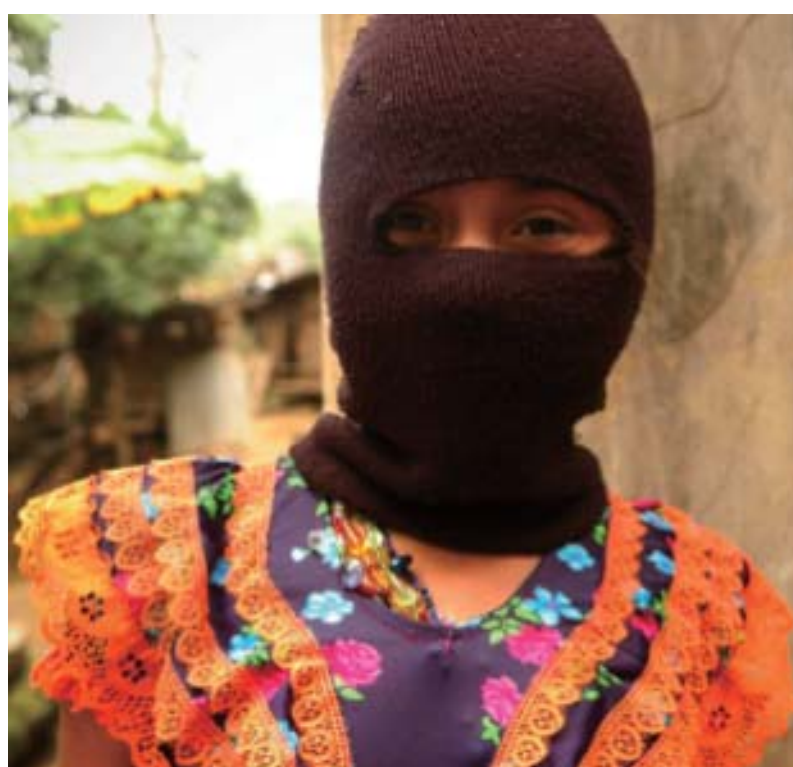
In the Declaration for Life there are very few things that unite us:

That we make the earth's pains our pains.

That we understand that an identifiable system is responsible for these pains.

The knowledge that the system can not be reformed.
A commitment to fighting, in all places at all times.
The certainty that the fight for humanity is global.
The conviction that there are many worlds living and fighting
in the world.
(All attempts at homogeneity and hegemony are an attack on
the essence of the human being: freedom.)
(The equality of humankind is with regards to difference.
Their likeness lies in their diversity.)
The understanding that it is not the imposition of our vision,
steps, organizations, paths, and destinies, that will allow us to
move forward. But rather listening and looking at that which,
although distinct and different, also has freedom and justice as
its calling.

January 29 2021
José Jorge Santiago S.



The Common People Consolidating Other Worlds: the Eco-Communitarian Revolutionary Subject

This moment is an opportunity to celebrate. We are at the dawn of a new milestone on the trajectory of the Zapatista movement: a journey to find the other worlds that are already under construction. In the quarter century since its emergence in the cities of Chiapas, the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) has captured the imagination of Mexico and the whole world. But the decision to embark on a journey to other far-away homelands, to dialogue with organizations and movements committed to the construction of other worlds, is transcendental. From Mexico, we need to celebrate these other groups' passionate reception, and our joining together on a "planetary journey" starting with the European continent; a list of these groups is available on the pages of the "enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx," where *A Declaration for Life* was published in six parts.

Here, I want to attest to the meaning of the worlds the Zapatistas will find: a very different world from the globalized system immersed in its intestate battles, with increasing inequality and the proliferation of discontent, suffering, and environmental destruction. The Zapatista delegation will be socially and politically embraced by these organizations who are occupied with forging new environments, consolidating bonds of solidarity, and strengthening their social, political,

and economic autonomies with their own institutions of self-government. It will be welcomed by groups that have chosen to weave a new social fabric with bonds of friendship, mutual support, with networks that exchange ideas and products that will improve the quality of life of its members. Many of these new social models exist on the margins of their nation-states. They are characterized by their community organization and their search for institutional and productive ways to strengthen their autonomy and protect their territories.¹

This outreach initiative follows a logic that goes back to the first years after the uprising in 1994. The Zapatistas' strident call to the "Intercontinental Meeting for Humanity and against Neoliberalism" in 1996 highlighted the need to build alternatives to imperialism and neoliberalism. Their call for a plural democracy based on the people's power should go beyond ethnicity, as Pablo González Casanova synthesized in his memorable essay, *The Theory of the Jungle*.² At the time, he predicted that "the first universal democratic utopia that comes from the south and below the world" would be raised in the Chiapas highlands; he concluded by quoting subcomandante Marcos: "Politics is not only the art of the possible, but the art of asking for what's necessary from those who want to kill you or silence you." This historical beginning anticipated a movement to overcome colonialism in all its dimensions, a commitment which has strengthened among the ranks of Zapatista support-

1 David Barkin y Alejandra Sánchez, "Sujeto revolucionario comunitario: fortaleciendo sociedades post-capitalistas", *Ideias*, Vol. 10, 2019, <https://periodicos.sbu.unicamp.br/ojs/index.php/ideias/article/view/8656865/21708>

2 Pablo González Casanova, "The theory of the jungle. Against liberalism and for humanity", profile, *The Day*, 5 March 1997.

ers worldwide. At the end of the last century Maori sociologist Dr. Linda Tuhiwai Smith's book *Decolonizing Methodologies*³ became a guide for academics around the world. Dr. Smith also exerts important intellectual and political leadership between peoples of Africa and Oceania. The call for a decolonial understanding has become increasingly persistent among the ranks of those who commune with the Zapatistas, those who are organizing to find them on the "cosmic" journey that they are about to undertake.

The Zapatistas' decision to weave their movement with others from below, strengthening the nascent rhizomes, is the result of their persistence and a logical continuation of their early steps to overcome neoliberalism. It comes at a crucial time for humanity. In the midst of the pandemic, humanity is confronting the deepening of market mechanisms that sow inequality, isolation, and environmental collapse. Around the world, however, many groups are advancing their strategies to promote autonomy and building their capacities to resist pressures driving dissolution and individualization.

Here in Mexico, social mobilization is intensifying and strengthening. The formation of the National Indigenous Congress (CNI) in 1996, "thought of being the home of all indigenous peoples, that is, a space where the original peoples find the space of reflection and solidarity to strengthen our resistance and rebellion struggles, with our own forms of organization, representation and decision-making, the space of the Indians that we are." For more than a quarter of a century, the CNI held five national congresses and many assemblies,

3 Linda Tuhiwai Smith *Decolonizing Methodologies*, Santiago de Chile, LOM, 2016.

serving to bring together hundreds of communities. Although most of its activities have focused on the internal strengthening of its members and the building of solidarity between them, the decision to run for the 2018 presidential election as an independent alternative is remarkable; this attempt did not succeed in the wake of a clear blockade of the national political system, reaffirming its intention to promote autonomous paths for the strengthening and consolidation of participating communities⁴, and reaffirming the character of its struggle: from below, left and anti-capitalist. The CNI's validity and strength is evident in its decision to accompany the Zapatistas on this intergalactic journey. There are 68 native languages that still survive in Mexico. Almost all of these peoples are struggling to defend their cultural inheritance and their rights and are participating in the Congress: more than 500 communities from 25 states —representing 43 indigenous peoples— attended the fifth congress in 2016. During the Congress's lifetime challenges have included the end of land reform, greater mining concessions, and the push for hydraulic fracturing as well as the hoarding of water resources by "water millionaires." The CNI has joined forces to defend their territories, affirming international initiatives promoting the rights of indigenous peoples such as Convention 169 of the International Labour Organization (1989) and the Declaration of Protection of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples of the United Nations General Assembly (2007), ratified by Mexico and thus a part of constitutional jurisprudence. Progress is uneven, but civil society's

⁴ <https://www.congresonacionalindigena.org/que-es-el-cni/>

support for indigenous people's rights has grown and is now felt throughout the country.

In this section, we explore how the consistency and increasing intensity of the communities and civil organizations that support them are having a notable impact. The breadth and depth of social struggle is demanding new responses from the state. Now the Zapatistas and their support bases are embarking on a journey to explain their trajectory and to understand what is happening elsewhere.

The solidarity response from overseas is deafening. It is clear that the voices of Indigenous Mexicans resonate elsewhere. Organizations with optimistic visions for how to take on the future are looking for ways to consolidate and engage with others. Perhaps one of the most determined groups is the Kurds based in the Rojava region, an embattled autonomous territory in northwestern Syria. Many have pointed out the resemblance of this struggle in the "Middle East" to the Zapatista⁵ experience: both struggles emphasize concepts such as direct democracy, local equality, and self-sufficiency.⁶ The emergence of other groups weaving their own global networks during this same historical period is noteworthy. The Via Campesina movement (LVC)⁷ originates in a struggle to face

5 Azize Aslan, *The contradictions of the revolution in Kurdish struggle and economy anticapitalist of Rojava*, PhD thesis, Puebla, BUAP, 2020.

6 Debbie Bookchin, "How My Father's Ideas Helped the Kurds Create to New Democracy" *NY Review of Books*, 15 June 2018.

Yavor Tarinski y Murray Bookchin, *Enlightenment and Ecology: The Legacy of Murray Bookchin in the 21st Century*, Black Rose Books, 2021

7 Peter Rosset "História das ideias de um movimento camponês transnacional". *Tensões Mundiais*, Vol. 14(27):191-226, 2019. Peter Rosset, et al. , *Latin American Agroecological Thinking: The emergence of a critical Latin American agroecology?*, *Agroecology*

the power of the great agro-industrial establishment, bringing together peasant organizations around the world. One of Via Campesina's members, the Landless Movement (MST), had its beginnings during the Brazilian dictatorship and was consolidated in the junta's aftermath as political and economic liberalization progressed. It emerged as a reflection of and in response to enormous territorial and social inequalities. Since its inception, LVC has positioned itself as the protagonist of a collective politics to promote food self-sufficiency and, more recently, has promoted the combination of traditional agro-nomic practices with important innovations from peasant-oriented agroecology. The Latin American members of LVC continue to play a leading role in promoting a critical agroecology, committed to a *dialogue of knowledge* that privileges the contributions of indigenous peoples in the implementation of productive dynamics.⁸ Both the MST and LVC have deepened their peasant-to-peasant schools, in which their own members exchange knowledge and materials among participants. The Zapatistas have also experimented with various forms of popular education to disseminate their ideas and promote a dialogue with individuals committed to their experiences and eager to learn more. Today, LVC is the largest global social organization in the world, with more than 200 million people participating in its member organizations distributed in 81 countries on all inhabited continents. In the context of the Zapatista initiative,

and Sustainable Food Systems, Vol. 45(1):42-64, 2020.

Valentin Val, et al., "Peasant to Peasant: Peasant education for resistance and agroecological transformation". *Revista Brasileira De Educa-ao Do Campo*, Vol. 5:e10904, 2020.

8 Amory Starr, et al., "Participatory Democracy in Action Practices of the Zapatistas and the Movimento Sem Terra", *Latin American Perspectives*, Vol. 38(1):102-119, 2011.

it is worth noting the important literature that has emerged by comparing the dynamics of MST and EZLN^{9 10}; there is also frequent mention of the role that women have played, in the two organizations, driving communal goals. The Consortium of Indigenous Communities and Conservation Areas, known as "Life Territories", is another international organization that supports the capacity of its members –currently 170 across more than 80 countries– as they work to further the conservation of their territories and their well-being.¹¹ It is estimated that indigenous peoples in 87 countries manage or have territorial rights over a quarter of the world's land area; additionally, these areas make up nearly forty percent of all protected land areas on the planet.¹² The Zapatistas' initiative to undertake this journey, promoting contact with local groups around the world, will drive a dynamic that will inevitably reinforce their interlocutors' commitment to move forward with their dynamics of social consolidation and planetary conservation, in the way this consortium promotes. Among the other groups, the intercontinental journey aims to deepen contact with, are the many groups that were in solidarity with the *Declaration for Life*. There are numerous local groups working to transform the quality of their peoples' lives, and to create networks for the production and distribution of healthy food produced with consideration for environmental impact and the needs of workers, —some of whom have recovered their workplaces

9 Ibid.

10 Leandro Vergara-Camus, *Land and freedom: The MST, the Zapatistas and peasant alternatives to neoliberalism*, Zed Books Ltd, 2014.

11 <https://www.iccaconsortium.org/>

12 Stephen T. Garnett, et. al., "A spatial overview of the global importance of Indigenous lands for conservation", *Nature Sustainability*, Vol. 1:369-374, 2019

from their former capitalist owners—. ¹³In this sense, the Basque country is the European region most reminiscent of the transformations implemented in Chiapas. The Basque region has a long history of social and political integration with its iconic and decentralized organization Mondragón. Established in 1956, when Spain had not yet recovered from the devastation of World War II, this initiative established a dynamic that propelled Spain's northwestern region on a path of solidarity with a production and social organization program that has thrived and continues to consolidate into present times. With its collectivist vision, firmly anchored in a remarkable regionalist character, the Mondragón organization has imbued the population with a political and cultural vision that has led them to many manifestations of solidarity with the Zapatista people throughout their years of brotherhood, struggle, and resistance. ¹⁴

Zapatistas probably won't have the opportunity to visit the People's Republic of China (or maybe they will?), but there is also a peasant group there building another world firmly anchored in its history, tradition, and natural environment. The New Rural Reconstruction Movement was formed towards the end of the 1980s in reaction to World Bank policy that promoted a modernization of agriculture in China. Heir to a movement that began in the 1920s, it is empowering peasants, offering them education and training, and promoting autonomous organizations that would meet the social and material needs of its members. Today, the movement highlights its

¹³ Cliff DuRand, *Moving Beyond Capitalism*, London, Routledge, 2016.

¹⁴ Camila PiñeiroHarnecker, *Cooperativas y Socialismo: Una mirada desde Cuba*, La Habana, Editorial Caminos, 2011. Erik Olin Wright, *Construyendo utopías reales*, Akal, 2014.

ecological, productive, and social impacts: they claim to have about 200 million people in their ranks. What is striking about this movement is its explicit recognition of the urgency to address the "commercial" trends of the official policies with productive activities that strengthen peasant society, with its corollaries of self-management and local supply.¹⁵ The Zapatistas are embarking on a path to continue their battle to transcend the colonial heritage conditioning much of our existence. Their own practice over the last quarter of a century is a testament to the saying: "Other worlds are possible, and they are already under construction!" In the meetings of the coming months we will learn from participants' longings and experiences, and from the messages they disseminate along the way and from the synthesis they transmit once again. As one influential Zimbabwean thinker, Chakanetsa Mavhunga, impressed on me in a recent talk: We must be attentive to the results of "'transhemispheric conversations that are not mediated by or wired through Western references, [conversations] which end the hierarchies of knowledge and open a parliament of wisdom where every society is able to invent and order their know-how."

David Barkin

15 Wen Tiejun, et. al., "Ecological civilization, indigenous culture, and rural reconstruction in China". *Monthly Review*, 63 (9), 2012. <https://monthlyreview.org/2012/02/01/ecological-civilization-indigenous-culture-and-rural-reconstruction-in-china/>



What Zapatismo Inspires in Us

I'm part of a generation that was influenced by the Zapatistas from a young age. Through tales and storytelling we learned about ancestral and joyous political thought.

The Zapatista movement opened a window to a world of opportunities to think differently about social organization, and to change our perception about our existence in the world. That is how many groups and networks became inspired to pursue political autonomy.

Zapatismo has been very present in the political imaginary of many adults and youth in cities, but at the same time very distant from their concrete reality. For the vast majority of us that aren't indigenous and don't come from a native community, zapatismo has been an illuminating beacon, a call to support the *bases zapatistas* or "zapatista bases", a thesis project, or an adventure when entering zapatista communities. Nonetheless, thinking of autonomous alternatives where we actually live is a big challenge.

Of course there are several experiences that exist and deserve to be described, but we also must recognize that these practices have little effect on the dynamic of cities where capital is concentrated. Any initiative against the paradigms of development and consumption are marginalized. People spend more and more time moving from place to place, the overcrowding and fatigue is obvious. Technology promises to entertain people with all sorts of TV shows and videos,

maintaining them distracted from their lives, the suffering and emptiness are masked by these types of entertainment.

The decision to leave the city is usually taken by sensible people with the means to do so. I won't go into detail about the difficulties involved in making this decision, given that the majority of people have commitments or ties in the city that are difficult to break (work, family, projects).

The voluntary decision to not be complicit in the craze of cities is very important. And yet there are high levels of migration from the country to the city, so cement and capital, and all the associated destruction, are gaining ground in urban peripheries. Now more than ever, it is necessary to break away from the cement, stressful routines, and dispossession within cities.

A Panorama of Alternatives

Across all cities there are sensible groups of different sizes and vocations. Among the names these groups use to describe what they are doing are solidarity economies, degrowth, self-governance, cooperatives....

In Mexico City there is a large quantity of people and groups creating alternatives premised on harnessing self-governance to satisfy distinct needs ranging from food, art, culture, communication, housing, transportation, health, finance, education, currency, and giving.

Although there is a great number of these alternative practices, they are dispersed across a *megapolis*. Forming linkages is complicated by the physical distance between the collectives and other organizations, and by the different zones they inhabit. Given these distances they struggle to change the daily lives of those who participate in them.

It's imperative that those of us who partake in these alternative practices reflect on our coordination and execution abilities, bearing in mind the ability to meet real needs, ideological affinities, personal empathy, abilities, geographic distances, and capacity to share. We're in an ideal and urgent moment to create these linkages, and to thrive rather than being condemned to survive in market jobs. We must transcend to a *re-existence*, which will only be possible if we can sustain a concrete transformation of daily life.

The zapatista contribution to questioning progress

The zapatista movement has much to offer given it's questioning of a model premised on material progress, and its focus on drawing from ancestral principles and knowledge to solve current problems. This focus revindicates key insights from the knowledge of indigenous peoples.

Southern Mexico is being drilled by mega projects promoted by industries such as mining, hydraulics, tourism, highway infrastructure, energy, banks, finance, and housing; all of which are destroying the planet. In addition to all this, it's imperative to consider the exponential growth of drug industry and commerce.

Beyond territorial dispossession, we are facing extreme violence. In Southern countries, drug trafficking and femicide are harnessed as methods of social control. The uncertain nature of the future has never been more apparent. Not a single international organization has provided a response that rises to the challenge. That being said, many scientists claim that the recent pandemic afflicting all of humanity is driven by the deterioration of ecosystems.

The South houses the regions that will be most affected. Naturally, different countries will have different responses and adaptation strategies in the face of these changes. We're already witnessing the response of countries in the Global North to the waves of migrants, many of them responding with violence and closing off their borders. With that in mind, we must bear in mind that the dispossession of land will bring even more violence that will manifest as wars over the control of territories and their communal goods, increased racism, an uptick in authoritarian regimes, and increased control and digital surveillance. We are facing a multi-sectoral war.

From Southern Mexico

Given the context, we need paths that guide us by daring to imagine a different type of civilization. The zapatista movement continues to be a reference for youth and women's movements, calling them to imagine other ways of life.

We heed the call of the Zapatistas because it's easy to find rituals, customs, acts, and gestures that signify a cosmogony that respects nature within our *mestizo* culture.

It calls for a two-sided process of critiquing Western development while reconnecting with our roots. Latin America has

found the path it wishes to follow by looking through its own history. This path consults its indigenous inhabitants, the humblest, wisest and most affected of all of them. Rather than forgetting, Latin America has recovered its memory and heritage; the Zapatista movement is an example of this.

Dialogue between Zapatista communities and organized urban groups

The sense of community is deeply embedded into the lifestyle of some indigenous peoples. There are even languages that don't have words to define the I, as is the case with Tojolabal, which is spoken by some indigenous peoples in Chiapas, Mexico. Instead they use the pronoun for "us", which configures their perception of themselves in the world. Identity isn't premised on the separation of my body from that of others. Perhaps a good metaphor is that each person is like a wave in the ocean: each wave is different, with different temperaments, sizes, and sounds, but at the end of the day, they are all a part of the same ocean. Consequently, they have a deeper sense of empathy than can be expressed as follows: If I am feeling hunger, then everyone is feeling hungry, if I am feeling cold, then everyone is feeling cold.

It's worth noting the dialogue that has been taking place between zapatista women and young women living in cities. We know that zapatista women are changing the relationship between men and women in their territories, by valuing their feminine viewpoint and centering care and reproduction of life.

When zapatista women explain their daily practices of care in their official communications, they are catapulting care into

the center of a political battle. zapatista women talk about their knowledge of herbal remedies, of caring for milpa, of cooking, and of the pain of giving birth. The feminist process is also very active within cities, where women organize health circles, conversations about care, handbooks on health, women run bazaars, workshops focused on survivors of violence against women, and so on.

Naturally, one of the most important lessons that Zapatismo has shared with urban groups is their perspective on nature. From an indigenous perspective, the earth is a generous, almost maternal, figure whom they thank for providing them with a home. There is a profound love for the territory they inhabit, full of lakes, forests and jungles, and for the air they breathe and the animals that they share their lives with. There is an attachment to the physical space, they identify its characteristics and create a lifestyle adapted to it.

Nonetheless, there is also a global conscience: Mother Earth is the whole planet, not just a small piece of land. There is an understanding of the complex and balanced relationships between the planet's different ecosystems and habitats. For this reason, many authors have compared indigenous conceptualizations with those of figures such as James Lovelock and Lynn Margulis, responsible for the concept of *Gaia*.

This conception of the planet is drastically different from prevalent conceptions in Western life, where nature is seen as something that is studied and dominated in order to reap the rewards of its riches, rather than as an attempt to gently understand it.

The goal isn't to get lost in metaphors and present a romantic view of nature. In our current circumstances, it is fundamental that we stop viewing nature as a resource for growth that only benefits a tiny fraction of the population.

The most recent lessons imparted on us by the zapatistas and by indigenous peoples have been focused on care amidst the pandemic. They denounced the impotence of governmental health systems and decided to take precautionary measures into their own hands by closing the Caracoles and the *Juntas de Buen Gobierno*, or Good Governance Juntas. Those who chose to return to their communities were placed in quarantine prior to entry.

Here in the city, we have not followed their example. The overcrowding and large distances covered have accelerated the spread of the virus. There isn't enough local organization to ensure neighbors are cared for.

Creating interdependent communities in the city

But there are other tangible ways the zapatista movement has influenced cities. One example is the *trueque* groups that have been operating in Mexico. *Multittrueke Mixiuhca*, which has been operating for over 10 years, is an example of one of these groups.

We, like many other groups, have tried to create an interdependent community that will holistically satisfy our members by generating sustainable human and economic relationships. To that end, we use a communal currency.

We're composed of a mixture of cultures, which allows us to take the best of the cultures we are composed of, and substitute mercantile social values such as competition, specula-

tion, depredation, with others such as reciprocity, sharing and respect.

Communal currency models aim to foster lifestyles that respect nature, even within cities. They strive towards, well being, well doing, and well living. They reject the logic of competition and hope to instill a framework of collaboration, creativity and life instead of violence and war.

Conventional currencies are upheld by the fear they promote, the arms they build, and the communication media they control. That is why we talk about and practice a system of autonomy, which relies heavily on exchange, creating our own symbols of value while maintaining a distance from language that perpetuates violence.

Community as a political and economic act can transform the way in which it's members live, feel, and think. We become aware of the emergence of a new political subject that defies market logic. The community bestows us with a sense of commitment, identity, and dignity that is only possible within a web of sensible relationships with others. As such, community becomes a basic and fundamental unit for the recreation of life beyond the individual. The community becomes the common subject that can practice self-governance to harness their abilities, resources, and organization. Moreover, the community is capable of resisting and fighting for this self-governance.

It is capable of defending its place, territory, and planet, just as the zapatista have taught us through their example.

Claudia Yadira Caballero Borja



Our story as people resisting CNI-CIG

Today the indigenous peoples of the world are doing what we have been doing for centuries, resisting in the name of life.

In this piece I will attempt to describe some of the moments, principles, and ideas that seem to be fundamental for understanding our fight as indigenous peoples who constitute the National Indigenous Congress (CNI).

To begin, I want to emphasize the role of art in our resistance. After all, a very important part of the Zapatista movement is all the imagery that has been created and is an example of our diverse patchwork, which is what we have been calling the diversity of the earth's colors and the diversity of constituents, who coexist despite their differences. From the very beginning of the movement, the graphics and images have been congruous with our journey.

The CNI emerges in response to the EZLN's call. After deciding to stop fighting in 1994, the EZLN began a dialogue with other indigenous peoples, movements, and communities that are resisting. This dialogue is fundamental in our history as indigenous peoples. The dialogue was partially triggered by the emergence in 1996 of the National Indigenous Congress, which became a space for reflection and solidarity for indigenous peoples. In this space, resistance movements could commune and cross-pollinate, drawing inspiration from various forms of organization and representation. This space centered on something that was vital for both the CNI and EZLN: autonomy and full reparations for indigenous communities. Most importantly, this space allowed

us to form and articulate ourselves as a network when we're apart and as an assembly when we're united.

Within the CNI we are composed of over 40 different indigenous peoples. In Mexico there are over 60 indigenous languages that are still spoken, although some of them have few remaining speakers. 44 of these languages are spoken in the CNI. Moreover, within the CNI we recognize 13 of the EZLN's demands: work, land, housing, food, health, education, independence, liberty, democracy, justice, peace, self-defense and self-government.

It's important to recognize that despite 50 years of resistance against colonial extermination, domination, violence, dispossession, we never forgot our history and our roots, which are characterized by our resistance and rebellion in the name of autonomy.

As the National Indigenous Congress, we recognize our constitution in the San Andrés Sankamch'en de los Pobres Accords, as the only way we have to continue as indigenous peoples. Core to our routine activities as indigenous peoples in the CNI are the seven principles encompassed under *mandar obedeciendo* or "lead by obeying" which are also central to the EZLN:

- 1 Lead by Obeying
- 2 Represent, Don't replace
- 3 Work from Below, Don't Seek to Rise
- 4 Serve, Don't Self-Serve
- 5 Convince, Don't Conquer
- 6 Construct, Don't Destroy
- 7 Propose, Don't Impose

The recognition of our autonomy and holistic reconfiguration of our existence and way of life as indigenous people is vitally

important for the indigenous peoples within the CNI. As a part of this we seek recognition of the way we organize, govern, administer and seek justice and of the integrity of our languages and territories. We also seek recognition for the fundamental role of the assembly as a mode of organization. All of these elements were included in the San Andrés Accords, which turns 25 this year. When the government undermined this attempt to seek dialogue and recognition of our organizational structure, and directly threatened our autonomy, we realized that dialogue with the government was not possible, and that we needed to build our foundations from the bottom, by coming together as indigenous peoples, and defining for ourselves the future we want without depending on the government to help us. Thus, the March of the Color of the Earth took place in 2001, during which we decided unanimously that we needed to focus on having a meaningful dialogue with the people, not on having dialogue with the existing authorities, and that our fight is for the anticapitalist and anti patriarchal left.

After the Sixth Declaration of the Selva Lacandona in 2005, we established that we would fight for our autonomy and resist to defend our territories during the IV National Indigenous Congress in 2006.

We see ourselves as mirrors of all the collectives and peoples who have been suppressed and evicted, we recognize ourselves in the pain of others and see that we need to fight to redress the collective pain and injustice of the people, who also inhabit the land of Abya Yala not only here but in other places. We recognize the battles being fought, not only by the indigenous peoples, but those fought by peasants and those who seek the inclusion of sexual diversity and gender differences in the big cities. We also

recognize that from our pain is born rage, which also drives our rebellion, and that from this rebellion is born the liberty of people around the world.

In October of 2016, 20 years after the birth of the National Indigenous Congress, we gathered in the fifth (V) National Indigenous Congress. After 3 days of work, we established the permanent indigenous assembly and began public consultations with each and every one of our territories to name an Indigenous Government Council, whose voice was first represented by an indigenous woman delegated by the CNI as an independent candidate, who ran as the Presidential Candidate for Mexico in 2017-2018.

This was how the cry of ;Ya basta!" or "Enough!" was enunciated by all the attending indigenous peoples at the second half of our V National Indigenous Congress at the end of 2016. From the beginning this space was envisioned as a space for representation where there would be one male and one female representative from each indigenous language spoken across the different regions that house the peoples, tribes, and nations that comprise the National Indigenous Congress. Early on, it was also decided that the Indigenous Governing Council (CIG) would be represented by spokespeople. Finally, it was decided the spokesperson for CIG should be a woman. An important moment that sparked lots of action and reflection was when we decided that this CIG spokeswoman should also run for the 2017-2018 presidential elections in Mexico. This prompted an organizational process across indigenous peoples in CNI in collaboration with civil society groups that make up the CNI-CIG Support Network. We also received support from hundreds of collectives, organizations, and persons who joined us in 2017 to help us gather sig-

natures for the independent candidacy of Marichuy María de Jesús Patricio), the CIG spokeswoman.

This process of gathering signatures in support of Marichuy allowed us to listen and build bridges with bottom-up movements, with indigenous peoples, and with the most recent offences, dispossession, and violence against these peoples. And even now, with the supposed change in government, we can clearly see that although each change in political party dominance brings a change of colors and a promise of change, they do not break away from their roles as overseers of an oppressive status-quo. It is only through organizing that we will ever achieve change. We have already made significant gains due to collaboration across various resistance networks, in urban areas, in academia, amongst women, and in other spaces outside of Mexico. We have constructed the possibility of building ourselves up alongside others and of building other politics that draw from the seven principles of “leading by obeying”, and nourish our resistance and rebellion by centering life.

This organizational process made it clear for us that we were not interested in power, we were interested in taking the fight for life until its ultimate consequences.

This fight for life persists, and in the context of the pandemic we can see that it provides overwhelming evidence for a message shared by both the EZLN and National Indigenous Congress: we are in the middle of the storm, and the storm will carry us away if we don’t organize, and if we don’t understand that we can’t achieve change as individuals. The fight is collective, it’s a global affair that we are all responsible for. The only way to face the storm is united and organized. With this in mind, in October of 2020 the EZLN called on us to go out and listen to the voices of

those at the bottom, who are also resisting across the planet. They called us to listen in order to interweave ourselves with them in the face of the violence and dispossession inherent to this capitalist and patriarchal system. Currently, we are already weaving a network of alliances that will receive the zapatistas, especially the women zapatistas in the National Indigenous Congress and the Indigenous Governing Council. After all, we know that women have many answers, because within them resides a greater capacity for resilience, and because we have protected our grandmothers' earthly wisdom. Although this land-based knowledge was silenced for centuries, it left enough of a mark on us to bring us to this movement. Bearing all this in mind, we plan to be in Europe in August to foster a space for exchange and listening with people at the bottom of a different continent who resist against the violence of the same system.

Moreover it is worth noting that with the transition to a so-called left-leaning administration in December of 2018, there has been an increase in violence against indigenous, rural, and zapatista communities. The politics of militarization embodied by the new military body called the National Guard, focused first and foremost on protecting the interest of big corporations caving in with the state. This development confirmed that we will not be able to build the justice we are seeking with neither the state or the legal system, which stem from capitalism and patriarchy.

In conclusion, the primarily female delegation of zapatistas visiting Europe affirms the central role of women. From its very beginning, before it was publicly announced, the first EZLN uprising in March of 1993 was spearheaded by women, including the creation of an early faith-inspiring document, the *Revolu-*

tionary Law of Zapatista Women, which is testament to the centrality of women in the Zapatista Army, and of the centrality of us women in the National Indigenous Congress and Indigenous Governing Council, where a female spokeswoman gives voice to our entire indigenous movement.

Alejandra Jiménez Ramírez



Zapatismo and Caring for Life-Existence

What does it mean that we're still talking about zapatismo 27 years after the uprising? Not only in Mexico, but across different regions, countries, and continents, including Asia. The fact that we're still talking, learning, and acting in response to zapatismo three decades later is a reflection of a core feature of all great social movements, they engage other generations and transcend historic conditions and beyond the historic moment they were birthed in. In this sense, zapatismo, like all great social movements, is capable of traveling across diverse geographies and temporalities.

Taking that as a point of departure, I'd like to share a series of reflections prompted by the Covid-19 pandemic and living in the pandemic. I'd like to focus on something that Alejandra and Jorge mention in their texts, the fact that one of the central political stances of the zapatistas is "caring for life". Not life in the individual sense, or as the sum of various individual lives, but as a collective entity that transcends relations between humans and non-humans. What are the implications of a political collective that holds care for life as a central tenet? And why does centering life transcend the historical context that sparked the zapatista movement, a context marked by the beginning of NAFTA and neoliberalism in Mexico, followed by the destruction of state social welfare programs? What does this mean to center life in the context of the pandemic (in the Mexican context, you can't separate the Covid-19 pandemic

from the extreme violence that we've lived with due to the State's bellicose reaction to organized crime's territorial expansion)?

I'd like to start with my reflections that stem from my role as a professor. I teach classes about social movements, where we read articles about collective actions organized from below. I've noticed that many of the texts make the same mistake; they start by describing the evolving forces of the State and of capital, and then they describe the social movements as reactions to these structures of power. From this perspective, that state and capital are the primary actors that determine history, and social movements are relegated to a secondary plane, always reacting to the state and capital. Nonetheless, part of the beauty of great social movements, including zapatismo, is that they are capable of anticipating historical conditions that have not yet come to be in addition to responding to present threats. Zapatismo, for example, warned us of historic conditions that we weren't capable of imagining in 1994, all while resisting against existing structures of oppression and taking pre-emptive action in anticipation of future conditions.

During that period, the zapatistas spoke out against a political party that had been in power for seven decades, the dictatorship of the PRI party. We were deeply troubled by the privatization of social politics regarding rural, education, health, and agrarian policy. But we never could have imagined the type of violence that would erupt in Mexico starting in 2006, which witnessed rates of homicide, femicide, and disappearances that were so high it was like being at war, even if

we aren't in the midst of a declared armed conflict. We certainly never imagined the pandemic.

Zapatismo's theoretical approach to indigenous peoples' autonomy centers life, a new life and a new possibility for life. This cry for life calls to us- and I don't mean a uniform us, but rather an us that spans across afro-Mexican populations, indigenous peoples, mestizo people, rural and urban folk. This cry acquires new meaning in the context of a non-declared war against drugs and the militarization of life in a large part of the country. They were and are killing us. Although the EZLN was already inviting us to re-conceptualize politics, this call acquired new meaning in the face of drug trafficking, forced disappearances, femicide, and extractive politics. All of these phenomena extract from bodies, from the earth, from territories and their vital forces. Although the EZLN never envisioned a war between drug cartels and the state, or between factions of the narco-state, they engaged political actors who were responding to the effects of that war. Actors such as collectives of victims, relatives of the missing, mothers fighting for justice in response to the femicide of their daughters, all families and communities of people that might not have identified with zapatismo and their struggle for autonomy twenty years ago.

The Covid-19 pandemic arrived in the midst of this violent terrain, plagued with gradual and sudden deaths. The zapatistas call is for life, the care of life, and against the machinery of death. In a sense, we have heeded this call in the pandemic. After all, what have we been doing when we're living in our houses, communities, and apartments, everyone in their respective quarantine, if not taking care of each other amongst

ourselves and looking out for our health, and the health of those who surround us? We're paying more attention to what we eat, and to what the earth is offering us to keep us healthy and strong.

What I'm trying to convey with these accounts is that zapatismo foresaw conditions beyond the historical conditions they emerged in. They prompted us to ask political questions and reminded us to center political action. It's a political discourse that doesn't exploit the war against drugs or the pandemic, and thus speaks with vitality across different historical contexts. It transcends historical conditions partially because caring and defending collective life linked to a territory and creating the conditions for the reproduction of this life is a calling for all indigenous peoples who have survived genocide. This process of elimination, at times expressed through genocide, characterizes any (neo)colonial state such as Mexico. The survivors of genocide rise up to meet the challenge of caring for life-existence are committing a profoundly transformative, liberating, and political acts. These acts impel zapatismo and CNI.

Infusing caring for life with political meaning and action has been a central contribution from the tseltales, tsotsiles, tojolabales, and ch'ol women in the Selva Lacandona, and the northern zone of Chiapas. They are perfectly positioned to endow these autonomous practices with meaning, not because care for life is an inherently female domain. But rather because their daily activities consist of caring for milpa, looking for medicinal plants in the woods, tending to the garden to diversify meals, passing along midwifery knowledge intergenerationally, and recognizing grandma's knowledge as a point of

departure for an autonomous education system. All of these activities transform the endeavors and meaning of the government. These activities facilitate autonomous government, because rather than focusing on production, they center the reproduction of life.

When we think of *zapatismo* we tend to think of leading by obeying, a practice that inverts the relationship between authority and those they represent such that the people lead, and the government obeys. But there are many other elements of autonomy, which aren't given the same level of importance. For example, the women's agricultural production cooperatives, the midwives' activities, the female health promoters. These spaces also prioritize creating spaces for the reproduction of life. These activities have a significant impact on the *zapatistas'* approach to fighting for life and caring for life.

One example of this is the Women's Meeting on March 8, 2018 in Caracol IV Morelia. All the women from the five Caracoles took care of organizing all the activities— transporting food, audio equipment, the electrical system, cleaning the latrines, preparing the food, and preparing the spaces for the workshops and cultural events. When captain Erika welcomed everyone to the meeting the first thing she said was welcome, the latrines are over here, the showers are over there, the dining area is here, and she explained a few details about sleeping arrangements to ensure all the logistics were taken care of. Next she went over the substance of the meeting, why she had convened us, what to expect, and how we would participate. It might seem like a mere inversion of typical welcomes, which cover the substance first and then the logistics. Nonetheless,

the order that captain Erika chose had important implications. Her order signaled that logistics was an essential part of political action, not just the setting upon which political action takes place. Acting as hosts and attending to the needs of all participants and protecting everyone there was an essential part of the substance and objective of the meeting.

I mention this as one of many examples of everyday autonomy in zapatismo and at zapatista events. Captain Erika's emphasis on care offers an example of what it means to be an authority or have authority. What is implied in governing, and is governing different when it centers life? Their example invites us to consider a way of exercising power that emphasizes mutual interdependent care. Even though the meeting was before the pandemic, it embodied the priorities that we have today. We never would have chosen to live with this pandemic and all the intimate and collective suffering it has brought. However, it is worth paying attention to Arundati Roy's statement from the beginning of the pandemic; the pandemic is a portal, a space to move towards other possibilities. We can transform the pandemic into an opportunity to distance ourselves from over-emphasizing production, which only brings destruction and extraction, and move towards conditions that allow for the reproduction of life. These possibilities materialize through small gestures such as captain Erika's choice of order in the 2018 Women's meeting. These are the teachings that the women in the zapatistas offer us. It is up to us to stop and listen, to pay careful attention to the everyday and sometimes silent operations of great social movements.

Mariana Mora

Zapatismo as societal insurrection

A few years ago, Noam Chomsky and Emmanuel Wallerstein agreed that zapatismo was the most radical political initiative in the world...and the most important one.

Those of us who participated in a panel titled “Visions, voices and practices of the zapatistas” are now publishing our contributions in this book. We are convinced that today more than ever, zapatismo is the most radical and important political initiative in the world. In these pages we have tried to explain why.

They are still perceived as mysterious and paradoxical. A revolutionary group without an interest in “seizing power”? Revolutionary leaders that reject any type of public office, now or in the future? An army that shoots words and civil resistance and champions non-violence? An organization, rooted in its local and cultural context, with a global reach? A firm ally of democracy, while at the same time its most radical critic? People profoundly rooted in ancient Mayan traditions, but also immersed in contemporary ideas, problems and technologies? These pages try to address some of these questions.

There don't seem to be doubts regarding the zapatistas radicalism. They defy every element of contemporary society through their words and actions. They reveal the primary drivers of our actual crises and contribute to dismantling the dominant discourse. They subvert modern institutions by calling into question the concepts that they are founded upon and

which operate as principles of social organization. In doing so they render the conventional modes and practices of many socio-political movements and initiatives obsolete. The illusory nature of changes that are implemented from the top-down by “taking the power from the government” is revealed by efforts to reorganize the world from the bottom up, led by common people. These efforts inspire resistance and liberation movements across all areas of the dominant regime. These efforts are also directly involved in weaving this tapestry of movements.

In the 90s the predominant conviction was that there were no alternatives. Following the fall of the Soviet Union, many leftist activists realigned themselves to fit within the dominant “system”, thus demonstrating that their passion had been more about power than justice. Others remained disconcerted and discouraged. They refused to embrace capitalism, in any of its forms. They reluctantly abandoned the battered flag of socialism, which had only manifested itself as a state-run institution. In the meantime, they desperately searched for substitutes or clung to the fundamental tenets of socialisms, as if nothing had happened. There were no alternatives. The matter at hand was to create them. That is what the zapatistas did. Like Wallerstein highlighted in 2005, their rebellion was “the barometer and catalyst for other anti-systemic movements across the globe”.¹⁶ The context changed. The world entered the 21st century in a profound crisis, which many understood as the late stages of the collapse of patriarchy, modernity, capi-

16 Immanuel Wallerstein, “Los zapatistas: la segunda etapa”, *La Jornada*, 19 de julio de 2005.

talism, and the democratic nation-state. In 1994, zapatismo became a source of inspiration to understand this crisis, resist its atrocities, and build alternatives. On December 30 of 2012 a well-known statement capturing the moment was released:

¿DID YOU ALL HEAR?

It's the sound of your world falling apart.

It's the sound of ours re-emerging.

The day that was day was night.

And the night will be the day that will be the day

During the last decade the zapatistas have continued to nourish hope and imagination, producing a similar impact to that of the 1994 rebellion. On one hand, they contribute in thousands of ways to rediscovering hope as a source of social fortitude. By liberating it from its intellectual and political prison, where it was suffocated by the promethean endeavor, the zapatistas created space for re-birth. This rebirth is possible thanks to the pluralistic network of pathways that they uncovered or that are created in the imagination that they awoke and enlivened. They continue to be a source of inspiration for people walking along these pathways, but they are not a centralized authority that administers or controls this pluralistic network, which abides by its own impulses, strengths, and orientations. We all are, or can be, zapatistas.

Behind our black masks, behind our armed voice, behind our unnameable name, behind what you see of us, behind this, we are you, the same simple and ordinary men and women that are replicated across all races, painted in all colors, speak all languages, and live in all places.

The same men and women who are forgotten.

The same who are excluded.

The same who are not tolerated.
The same who are persecuted.
We are the same as you. Behind this, we are you.¹⁷

The Earth

It has always been about the Earth, the zapatistas struggle cannot be understood without taking into account their relationship with the earth. But this fight is very different from those which have come before. Zapata's famous slogan "The land belongs to those who work it", no longer even applies to what they are doing. It's not about ownership. They were trying to recover land that had been stolen by large farming landholders, but not to reclaim ownership to use and exploit it. They were trying to establish a relationship with the land, just like their ancestors before them had. Viewing the land as Mother Earth is not a mere metaphor. It emphasizes a recognition of a fundamental and permanent connection, beyond anthropocentric biases.

As we all know, the legal framework formulated in 1996 has protected the territory occupied by the zapatistas up to a certain point, but they did not give them legal ownership of the land. The zapatistas do not seek this. They are the land's guardians. They take responsibility for it. They defend it, even with their lives, from those who would seek to occupy, exploit, loot, and destroy it. This stance is a source of inspiration for all those who are trying to do something about the climate collapse. Only through a radical change in our relationships with

¹⁷ EZLN, Opening statement from the General Command of the EZLN in the "First Intercontinental Encounter for Humanity and Against Neoliberalism", July 27, 1996.

the land, preventing agribusiness' continued destruction of it, will we be able to give it space for it to regenerate.

Radical Democracy

These days the democratic ideal is universally accepted, but amorphous. Being in favor of democracy doesn't mean anything in particular and it is malleable to various positions. Beyond critiquing the ongoing idealization of this confusing notion, the zapatistas have dedicated themselves to demonstrating the emptiness of our predominant systems. They bring the issues to the public and speak up about topics that were previously spoken of in hushed tones: the general disillusion with the reality of democracy. The abandonment of the polls and parties revealed a growing belief that democracy is a regime, in which a minority of people and even of voters, determine the political party that will govern the country. And only a scant minority of this party decides who will steer the government, without accounting for the opinions of society at large. To make matters worse, governments then make decisions alone, and often without regard for partisan agendas, electoral promises or public consensus. But even then, we didn't see other options. The zapatistas brought legitimacy to the fight for a democracy that didn't give in to illusions or harbor aspirations for a transitional or permanent despot. A fight that isn't about conquering democratic power, but rather strengthening and deepening spaces where people can exercise their own power.

The zapatistas have managed to show that for many people, democracy is about the power of the people, true to the original meaning of the word. They don't reduce the conversation

to the simplistic rhetoric about democracy. They capture its essence. For those who comprise the common people, democracy is about common sense: that common people govern their own lives. It is not about establishing a different type of government, but rather the end of government. Nor is it about a group of institutions, but rather a historical project. It wouldn't be aptly described, for example, by the expression "government of the people, by the people, for the people," used by Lincoln in Gettysburg and often thereafter to define democracy. It also wouldn't be accurate to equate it to direct democracy, which is a different thing.

National Democracy, captures popular experiences and debates. It refers to democracy in its essential form; it defines it.

"From the perspective of radical democracy, the rationale for any other type of regime is likened to the emperor's fancy for his new clothes. Moreover, a people that has lost its political memory (...) can discover the true source of power is the people themselves.

Democracy is a radical, the square root of all power, the original number from which are regimes are multiplied, the root term from which all political vocabulary branches out. (...) It constitutes the base of all political discourse...

Radical democracy envisions people united in a public space, with no need for oversight from the paternal Leviathan or maternal society, only from the open skies— the people making Leviathan's power their own once again, with the freedom to talk, choose, and act."¹⁸

It's a vague notion that traverses all political theory and democratic debate: it's flirted with and evaded, as if no one dared to face it directly from beginning to end; as if it were too radical or elusive: what everyone seeks, but no one can reach.

¹⁸ Douglas Lummis, *Democracia radical*. México, Siglo XXI, 2002, p. 39-42.

Democratic theory operates on a slippery conceptual slope that betrays democracy's root in the power of the people. It defines democracy as a form of government and an ensemble of institutions, which harness the power of the people. It recognizes that the people are the source of all legitimate power, but at the same time affirms that in modern society, people can have power, but not exercise it. It legitimates that political parties and intermediaries capture democracy and manipulate voters with illusory suffrage and limited options. It's a theory derived from Hegel's maxim, which has dominated the debate on democracy since 1820, that: "People are not in the right conditions for self-government". This theory has been adopted by liberals and socialists alike, and it hands over the exercise of power to auto-elected elites. It reduces politics to the manner in which they are constituted, monitored, and replaced.

Radical democracy rejects this slippery conceptual slope. It seeks a political regime where the people exercise power directly, rather than merely being cited as the source of power in the constitution. It is not about returning to a prior state. It draws from a variety of traditions, but expresses the present struggle of peoples that have lived under governments toeing the line between despotic and democratic, and who have observed how governments become corrupted and betray their original purpose and function. So rather than seeking to replicate a prior state, these people seek to live in a state of democracy and to maintain their daily lives under these concrete and open conditions.

The democratic condition can maintain itself when people adopt social modes of existence that allow for that, which is to

say, when we equip political bodies with the capacity to exercise power. There are no clear choices in that regard: for a hundred years we stopped thinking, remaining obsessed with ideological disputes. But when we started looking for options, they appeared in “grassroots” communities, both rural and urban, a mutation of civil society and reformulation of the state. Zapatismo is thus engaged with the search for and fight for the people’s power, and in doing so, exercise it daily.

Autonomy

The zapatistas put autonomy at the center of the political debate in Mexico, especially with regards to indigenous peoples. They refused to delineate their notion of autonomy, the one they apply in their communities, bearing in mind that it isn’t the only nor the best. They also refused to delineate the form autonomy should take. Their demand, articulated from their indigenous condition, can also be applied to all sorts of non-indigenous groups. And their fight is angled towards the creation of political space where all groups and communities can freely discuss their proposals and establish their own mode of autonomy. “We have presented our proposals”, and they warned, “but we have repeatedly said that we won’t impose them on anybody”.¹⁹ This affirmation of many autonomies conveys a rejection of the dominant heteronomy.

Indigenous peoples’ demand for autonomy implies, before all else, respect and recognition for those who already have it. It’s not an ideological proposition or a promised land. “Autonomy isn’t something that we ask someone for or that

¹⁹ Autonomedia, *Ya basta! Documents on the New Mexican Revolution*, Nueva York, Autonomedia, 1995, p. 299.

can be given to us”, said a Yaqui indigenous leader; “we have a territory in which we exercise our own manner of government, justice, and self-defense”.²⁰ They’re not just demanding respect and recognition for what they already have. They have transformed their resistance into a fight for liberation, in the womb of a new society. They’re demanding what they practice every day —practices that have allowed them to survive despite everything being against them—. They’re going beyond the neoliberal dream turned nightmare and beyond representative democracy, which dulls people’s awareness and traps them in an illusion. They are very familiar with the zapatista expression that “things will only change if there’s change up there”.²¹

This concept of autonomy is another manifestation of radical democracy. It requires an autonomous government that leads by obeying. Power is not delegated to rulers who render themselves autonomous from those they govern during their term. Instead, authority, which can be rescinded at any moment, is taken on as an obligation and service, not as a source of income or power.

The current demand calls for recognition and respect for autonomous institutions and practices. “As the indigenous people that we are”, stated the zapatistas, “we demand to govern ourselves autonomously, because we no longer wish to be subjected to the will of any national or international power (...) Justice should be administered by the community, in accordance with their customs and traditions, without interventions from illegitimate and corrupt governments”.²² They are

20 ANIPA, 3ª reunión, Oaxaca, August 1995.

21 Autonomedia, *op. cit.*, p. 299

22. *Idem.*, p. 297.

thus challenged by the need to consolidate themselves in their own spaces and to project that political style on the whole of the society, without imposing it to anyone.

The State and parties' reactions against autonomy have good motives, but bad reasons. It is true that this struggle for autonomy poses a clear threat to the dominant regime and subverts the juridical-political regime that was imported by the founders of Mexico. But it is not true that it contains elements of separatism or fundamentalism, nor that it implies the fragmentation of the country or the formation of castes or patrimonialist strata. And far from fanning the flames of "ethnic conflicts", autonomy prevents them. The recognition of indigenous peoples' free cultural questions the existing social contract and demands a new one. In changing the contents of social life, the continent will also change. Form is always the bedrock. The form determines the content. Democracy cannot be reduced to a vessel that also includes and allows for anti-democratic content. Then the form appears democratic, but fundamentally it is not. In this sense, promoting autonomy would forge a new sense of unity, not chaos.

This state of local autonomy is not meant to counterbalance state power. Instead, it is supposed to render it superfluous. It draws inspiration in the autonomous traditions of Europe, and its adaptation in Nicaragua. In its current iteration by some groups in Mexico, autonomy is understood within the confines of the state as a process of political decentralization. The autonomy that indigenous peoples refer to also wants to recover faculties and jurisdictions that were stolen by the State, but above all, it seeks to provide autonomous political and jur-

isdictional spaces to practice their own ways of life and government. These aspirations are incompatible with the current state of affairs, and even with the structure of the nation-state; it can only materialize itself after a long period of social and political reconstruction from the bottom.

The transition to hope

As the “antithesis of neoliberalism”, the zapatistas practice politics that don’t focus on seizing state power. Their struggles are targeted towards civil society, which becomes political by shifting the matter of politics to another sphere, where the most important feature is society’s ability to exercise power. They try to create spaces where new political relations can flourish and conventional positions of power have no place, because within these spaces there can be no usurpers, as power is already in everybody’s hands. In those new territories, the EZLN would dissolve itself, through a transformation that would make it impossible to recognize; the same would happen with the State party, all political parties and all the dominant form of political activity.²³

Radical hope is the essence of all popular movements. The zapatistas called on it when the universal reign of representative democracy, globalized economy, and all their associated disasters for humankind, appeared to be the inevitable fate of Mexico and the world.

Private hope and public desperation are the key ingredients for the collective manipulation of the masses in modern democracies. Their leaders never cease to blame ghosts, illusory threats, for the disasters of any given day, and in doing so, they fuel indi-

23 (*La Jornada*, 27/08/1995).

vidual expectations and a “save yourselves!” mentality. The zapatistas propose to renew the social fabric that combines personal and collective hopes. Instead of promises of *development and well-being*, they draw from the original sense of the term *prosperity*, from the Latin *pro sper*: “according to hope”. Rather than seeing illusory and alienating futures predicated on bankrupt ideologies, the zapatistas propose the construction of a future defined and determined by the people, the real men and women that comprise it, in all their pluralism and diversity. Instead of *traffic and administering peoples’ hope*, the zapatistas renew authentically democratic politics, where the art of the possible is focused on extending towards: *the art of creating the possible from the impossible*.

The zapatistas are drawing from a broad array of inspiration provided by examples in diverse corners across the world. In the face of an increasingly unbearable situation, millions of dissatisfied and desperate people draw endless inspiration from the zapatistas.

It would be futile to try to weigh all the elements of the zapatista struggle relative to each other, but it is no exaggeration to say that a central component has been its commitment to an anti-patriarchal vision. The Revolutionary Law of Women of January 1st, 1994 established clearly the decisive and influential presence of women in the zapatista movement. This became increasingly apparent throughout their evolution, as women were increasingly present across the zapatistas public actions and initiatives. Alongside women from around the world, the zapatista women have managed to shatter the patriarchal norm. It is quite possible that March 8, 2020 will one

day be considered the historic date during which this patriarchal norm was broken, opening up radical and groundbreaking horizons for social construction.

Within the zapatista communities, they have been practicing a mode of autonomous construction that is explicitly based in the dissolution of hierarchical social organization to give way to horizontal anti-patriarchal modes of organization. In this regard, it is worth recalling an incident that appears to be entirely exceptional. In 2006 the EZLN noted that their presence was contaminating democratic life in communities, due to its inevitably vertical nature. As such, they decided to get out of the communities and establish themselves in the mountains to avoid infecting communal life with their vertical structure. There doesn't seem to be any similar instances anywhere across the world. The decision demonstrated, once more, that the zapatistas never wanted to embody the Leninist tradition, they never wanted to be leaders of the masses or figureheads of movements. At what would eventually come to be known as the Intergalactic Meeting in 1996, there were around 6,000 participants, many of them seasoned activists from various socialist, Marxist, and Trotskyist traditions, who were hoping to create a new international organization to manage the revolution. At the end of the meeting, subcomandante Marcos announced the creation of the "International of Hope". It wasn't a new bureaucratic political apparatus, nor was it a mechanism to guide and spearhead everyone's collective fight. Instead, it called on us to join our hands, voices, and visions towards common hopes.

Another key tenant worth highlighting is that for the zapatistas hope is premised on the capacity to listen. Comandante Tacho expressed this clearly when he said: “Listening to the other isn’t merely hearing, it’s being willing to be transformed by the other.” From the very first moment, the zapatistas listened. In his above contribution, Gilberto López y Rivas recalled the manner in which those who arrived to guide the indigenous people knew to listen and be transformed by them. This is how zapatismo was born, and how it lives on today. They are not traveling to Europe to “conquer” or “discover”, they will not be reproducing the invasive strategy that afflicted us 500 years ago. They are going to listen to Europe, the Europe of the bottom and left. Hundreds of organizations that have been defined by gathering in a horizontal way. There are many groups across diverse parts of the world that want to receive the zapatistas. Surely, they will make their way to all the continents, because the zapatistas continually inspire these processes of forming horizontal linkages across communal “entramados”. Entramados are two or more people who are acting together to defy the dominant system, and who are engaged in dismantling it and creating alternative possibilities for life, and for hope.

Inspired by the zapatistas, many of us are going to listen to others, to embrace and link ourselves with them, learning from each other and practicing solidarity. We didn’t turn our gaze upwards; we turned in towards each other. We aren’t interested in power from above, because we affirm ourselves in power from below, the power that we already have and that we can all exercise every day. Thus, inspired by the zapatistas to

embrace and interweave amongst ourselves in these transformative times, we are changing the world.

San Pablo Etla, March 2021
Gustavo Esteva

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Learning from the Zapatistas

My first affective moment with the Zapatistas was an encounter with a Zapatista sympathizer who was invited to the convergence of the People's Plan for the 21st Century (PP21) at Kathmandu, Nepal, in March 1996. I was in tears when she finished her speech.

Reception in China

The Zapatistas became well known to intellectual circles in China with the publication in 2006 of *The Masked Knight: Anthology of Writings by Subcommander Marcos* (translation into Chinese). It was edited and translated by Dai Jinhua and me, after we went on an exchange trip to Chiapas and Oaxaca in 2002, where we met with Gustavo Esteva, Jorge Santiago, Maria Eugenia Santana, and others. Six thousand copies of the book were sold out within weeks. Dai Jinhua, well known professor of Peking University in comparative literature and cultural studies, feminist film critic, and probably the most authoritative researcher on Che Guevara in China, renders beautiful prose in her translation, adding to the colours of the indigenous world portrayed by Subcommander Marcos (Sup-Marcos). Dai Jinhua wrote a 40,000-character introduction to *The Masked Knight*. It is a comprehensive account of the Zapatista movement and its context, recounting the history of Mexico, of Chiapas, of what unfolded between 1994 and 2006; comparing El Che and El Sup; and discussing the semi-

otic warfare and the cultural traditions in Mexican literature. She describes the caracole as “an important image of metaphorical and philosophical richness in Mayan culture, an image of folding inwards and unfolding outwards, one bend after another leading one inside and guiding one outside, a probe into the heart and a gaze of the vast world, with the sound of waves residing in it, with calls for action blowing from it. In, and out.” (Dai and Lau 2006: 41)



Book cover of The Masked Knight, published in China in 2006.

Oventic, 9 August 2003.
Artists collectively painting.
Photo by Lau Kin Chi.



The image of the caracole catching the imagination in China, a blog well known among intellectuals naming itself “The Caracole Community” was set up in January 2014, posting articles on, but not limited to, Latin America. Its readership is between 2,000 and 6,000.

In January to March 2021, to commemorate the 27th anniversary of the EZLN uprising, I published four online Chinese articles on the Zapatistas, of which two were co-authored with Sit Tsui. The Paper that published them has a popular readership, and the four articles were visited by 140,000 to 570,000 readers within the first week. I had discussed the Zapatista experience on some Chinese platforms, such as the Jan 3, 2021 forum marking the 20th anniversary of the Chinese rural reconstruction movement; the audience in this live-streamed event was 11,000.

Gustavo Esteva was invited to the Seventh South South Forum on Sustainability to dialogue with P. Sainath on July 11, 2021, with Dai Jinhua as discussant. Gustavo Esteva talked about the significance of the Zapatista movement, and the video of this dialogue with English and Chinese subtitles has been viewed by 11,000 audience in China. On Jan 30, 2021, the live-streamed Forum “Zapatista Visions, Voices, and Practices” was attended by 3,005 audience.^T

Thus, the Zapatistas of Chiapas have come into the horizon of the intellectual, academic and movement circles in China. Perceptions of the Zapatistas of course would be multifarious. I would like to highlight what we, from China, can learn from the Zapatista movement.

"Every I is a We"

I have referred to this quotation from Gustavo Esteva many times in my discussion of the Zapatista movement, and have elaborated its relevance to the rural reconstruction movement in particular, and social movements in general. The "I" and the "we" are not static entities, but changing subjectivities embedded in and constructed by fluid social relationships. As Gustavo Esteva says, "we" is more a verb than a noun. The "we" is manifold, as there are different relationships being woven at different moments involving different groups in the social fabric. The question in China, as in many countries, is that in the modernization and urbanization process, individualism and egoism have largely superseded identifications with collectives or communities. The egoistic "I" is presumed to be autonomous, independent, rational, and survives on his/her own competences. In China, the process of atomization is accompanied by a century-long process of disintegration of rural communities as well as inter-dependent modes of production and livelihood. Even though society cannot operate without interdependence and cooperation, the myth of individual autonomy is propagated by modern education as well as institutionalized economic and social modes of governance. Money is increasingly symbolized, acting as the core in weaving networks of references for the guidance of decisions and actions characterizing the atomization of individuals, the imprisonment of subjects leaving them with nothing but money as their last resort. The more one finds oneself being made to depend on a system with deciding values reduced to the value of money as the only value of a society increasingly seen as equi-

valent to the economy, the more one finds oneself losing control over how to live their lives. The classic discussion of the state or the market presupposes the entities in question are existing independently on their own with fixed identities, hence fails to tackle the level with regard to the conditioning of individuation.

On the other hand, the Zapatista experience offers an alternative, in theory and in praxis. It is an example of another world being made possible, existing and evolving. The struggle has been arduous, with the Zapatista movement being subject to incessant violence and threat from the state, the army, the paramilitary, the narco-traffickers, the mafia... Yet, the path chosen by the Zapatistas to build their communities differs from many conventional struggles for rights. In my view, their most impressive choice is not to be reactive to the external threats, that is, allowing one's thinking and actions to be defined by the terms set by the threat, allowing oneself to be seduced into emulating the regimes of the oppressors (as if they were more superior), or to be blackmailed into subservience, but to develop a strong identification with the traditions of the community and a recuperation and a management of the commons. Instead of modern money and power as the central guiding criteria, something much more powerful is at work – the embrace of Dignity. This is the Dignity of the nurturing conversation between the I and the We that makes the I a We, and the We an I, the subjective collective and the collective subjective. Dignity that cannot be measured in monetary terms, to be exact, Dignity that is immeasurable, has been exiled by the discourses of the colonial masters and the modern

elites, but has been quietly nurtured by the Zapatistas and many indigenous communities.

There are so many manifestations of Dignity in my contacts with the Zapatistas. On August 9, 2003, I stood near the elevated platform for a few hours at the Oventic basketball ground, waiting for the official announcement of the newborn Zapatista regional autonomous Good Governments. The Mexican government sabotaged the broadcast, we were waiting and waiting. The security guards, wearing a ski-mask under the scourging sun, patiently waiting, had a piece of notebook paper handwritten with the words “de la seguridad” pinned on their chest. For me, the modesty of the make-do badge of identification commanded respect. A little girl strolled in the area supposedly cordoned-off by the human wall of the security guards; the security induced no tension or anxiety. It was how a community kept order within its parameters. Order required by and for the moment in question, like moments of rituals. The hand-written sign on their chest was far from an identification with modern institutions, but rather a humorous parody of the “seriousness” of modern systems, subverting the authority of identities. Here, identities were no longer determined by abstract institutions, but rather, they were fluid, being answers to the problems presented by living reality, the context of life, not as a result of the institutionalization of hierarchical relations. The identities maintained by the order of the moment were only a task adequate to the living problem, and lasted as long as the moment required.



9 de agosto de 2003.
Security guards identified by the handwritten notes on their chest.
Oventic, August 9, 2003.
Photo by Lau Kin Chi.



A little girl strolled in an area cordoned off by a human wall of security guards.
Oventic, August 9, 2003.
Photo by Lau Kin Chi.

The piece of paper with handwritten words might be interpreted by modernists and developmentalists as a sign of poverty and scarcity, almost synonymous with ignorance and backwardness. Yet for me, and surely for the Zapatistas, it is a proud sign of self-governance. Why should money be spent on uniforms for security guards or soldiers, when the communities prioritize building schools and clinics, training their own teachers and medical personnel, improving production, keeping bees, and protecting the forests? The Zapatistas have made a collective choice, making a distinction between need on the

one hand, and superfluity, waste and insatiable desire on the other. This is not a choice by individuals, but by the collectives. The self governance of the Zapatistas is based on an intricate weaving of the social fabric, continuing with and reviving ancient traditions of not only practices but outlooks and values. Atomized “Is seeking individual gains has lost all its seductive power without the soil of the money economy. In place of it, we have a system of responsibilities and reciprocity. This is the basis for local governance going for self-sufficiency. The delinking from the modernization paradigm is not only in the economic or social arena, but most importantly, in the subjectivities and collective consciousness.

The news that more caracoles were set up in August 2019 after the initial launch of caracoles in 2003 is a confirmation that the communities have admirably sailed through the challenge of threats and temptations from the state, corporations, NGOs, and other hostile forces. As the Zapatistas do not have exclusive control over the territory or the population where the caracoles operate, and the neighbors of a Zapatista family could be non-Zapatista, the difficulties posed to governance have compelled a new mode of governance, unlike the usual forms of state administration with elaborate mechanisms to control the economy and the population. This is a mode, practiced by the Zapatistas for decades, that inspires endeavors to revive community governance with profound dynamics from within. Certainly, no experience can be replicated, as there are different soil, roots, customs, and enabling or disabling forces at work. Yet, at the same time, we are all subject to the ills, abuses and effects of colonialism, imperialism and capitalism,

and therefore, endeavors from the margins can help illuminate possible orientations and techniques for community regeneration.

What can be learnt from the Zapatistas constantly creating conditions for a different kind of “we-ing” to happen is in their making visible the social interactions and inter-dependence among humans, and between humans and nature. They reveal the mechanisms that veil the processes of disruption of relationships of human to human, and human to nature. When “money” is displaced and no longer believed to be the supreme medium for individual well-being and social progress, when collective discussions and efforts reprioritize the needs of the community, and when conscious efforts are made to reverse abuses of patriarchy and elitism, we witness a fundamental challenge to the logic and values of global capitalism and developmentalism.

Displacing patriarchy and elitism

The “enemy” is never merely outside. The “enemy” always defines a complex relation produced through the encountering of histories, ethos, mentalities, knowledge, fears and desires. In other words, relations of domination and violence cannot simply be understood in terms of a division of inside/outside, us/them, and oppressor/oppressed, for oppression, violence and domination would not be terminated by eradicating the outside enemy. The Zapatistas are conscious about changing social relationships from within. The three actions I find most impressive are: firstly, the announcement in 2003 that the EZLN would withdraw from intervention or supervision of “civil” affairs, thus the armed sector refrains from

directing the operation of the Good Government. This is one further step beyond “command by obeying”, which is a form and a process of democratic practice of decision-making. Secondly, the implementation of the Women’s Revolutionary Law promotes spaces for women to change domestic relations (the prohibition of alcohol may be easier to implement than having women make their choice of giving birth, challenging indigenous as well as religious traditions). Thirdly, SupMarcos’ declaration in 2014 that he “ceases to exist” as spokesperson, so as not to become a distracting factor for the movement. These moves, alongside many others, indicate an incessant probe, collectively, for reversing the logic of domination and control in various facets of community life. The wisdom guiding these moves are a combination of inheriting or reviving the legacies of indigenous ways, and attending to injustices or inequalities from the traditions.

These are of particular relevance to the rural reconstruction movement in today’s China. Changes in mentality do not come out of the blue; concepts about community governance may not be actualized unless there are practices in daily relations of production, livelihood, and distribution that are alternative to the mainstream mode in which monetary terms supersede communal relationships. Alternative concepts and visions require that the conditions for community governance are constantly created and regenerated in favor of the collective, countering the drive for atomization and selfishness bred in the 40 years of marketization reform in China.

An ever so small rebellion

The weapon of the Zapatistas is not their military strength in armed struggle, but their moral force calling on solidarity and common struggle of all the marginalized, and their exemplary experiments to bring changes in mentalities, social relations, and relations between humans and nature. SupMarcos serves as a “proper noun”, in the sense of the term used by Alain Badiou, with the figure being a crystallization of the aspirations of the collective. His charisma comes from his gifted contribution in giving voice to Zapatista visions and practices. “Between light and shadow”, the May 2014 speech by SupMarcos, recounts what We as a collective has achieved throughout the years, outlining the convictions of the We for life and not death. The declaration that from then on “Marcos ceases to exist” is a voluntary displacement from the focus of the spotlight. The We that the Zapatista movement produces in the process of the struggles is a multiplicity consisting of multiple talents and roles, and Marcos stepping to the side does not imply his withdrawal from within the community. When the occasion demanded it, SupGaleano re-emerged; in October 2018 in the public gathering in Morelia, he gave a speech alongside Subcommander Moises. He said, the Zapatista rebellion is “a small, very small, ever so small rebellion.” Indeed, in this ever so small rebellion, ever so small persons, such as Ramona, Marcos, Galeano, Moises, and all those covered with a ski-mask or a red scarf, play their ever so small part to constitute the We of the Zapatista movement.

I had the honor of presenting the situation in China and some countries in Asia on May 2, 2006, when SupMarcos was at the Metropolitan University of Mexico on his tour as Delegate Zero, encouraging exchanges among movements. I spoke

about alternative movements in Asia, and presented SupMarcos with a stack of books. My friend, Luis López Llera, was my guide and interpreter.



Second from left:
SupMarcos; from right:
Luis López Llera, Lau Kin
Chi

I did not have any dialogue with SupMarcos despite the fact that his many books have been a source of inspiration, and I have translated some of his writings into Chinese. With Gustavo Esteva, there is a personal touch, a friendship, as we had met at the Earth University in Oaxaca in Nov 2002, at CIDECI in Chiapas in July 2014, and the conversation continued in July 2020 at the Seventh South South Forum on Sustainability, as well as the Jan 2021 webinar on “Zapatista Visions, Voices and Practices”. It is my great honor and privilege to be included in his weaving of a tapestry of we-s in a communal spirit, with hope and love.

Indeed, the we-s can only be produced and reproduced in and through the processes of a movement. They can have no claims to prior existence. This is the spirit we are learning from the Zapatista movement. These are the footsteps we are

following in the making of we-s towards a future brimming with life and diversity.

31 de marzo de 2021

Lau Kin Chi



July 2014 at CEDECI, Chiapas. Gustavo Esteva (left) and Lau Kin Chi (right)

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<https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/lIfFnE504ssVhv9f4h1jtA>

[435,279 visits within 7 days]

March 8, 2021

Lau Kin Chi: “The Zapatistas: Inspirations for Feminism”

https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/5ufSyp1weLzKy7_iEztbaw

[369,715 visits within 7 days]

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Participants

David Barkin received his PhD in economics at Yale University in 1997 and is currently a Distinguished Professor at the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, Unidad Xochimilco, Mexico City. He collaborated in the founding of the Center for Eco-Development in 1974. He is a member of the Mexican Academy of Sciences and an Emeritus Investigator in the National System of Investigators. He received the National Award for Political Economy in 1978. Currently he is collaborating with rural and indigenous communities to promote the sustainable management of regional resources. He promotes self-management, ecosystem management, and self-sufficiency with regards to basic needs, all within a context where productive diversification generates additional income to improve quality of life. These settings strengthen the construction of post-capitalist societies by promoting new modes of coexistence and alternatives to development for advancing towards a world of “buen vivir”. He is renowned for his theory of Radical Ecological Economics. He received the “International Award for Poverty Studies” for his work titled “Food sovereignty as a Strategy for Poverty Reduction”. He was also awarded a fellowship by the Alexander Humboldt Foundation. His latest books are: “From Protest to Proposal: 50 years imagining and building the future” (Siglo XXI, 2018) and “The Environmental Tragedy in Latin America and the Caribbean” (CEPAL, 2020).

Claudia Yadira Caballero Borja has a bachelors in Economics from the Instituto Politécnico Nacional and another bachelors in Sociology from the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM). She explores other ways of life, promotes alternative community-organized economies. She specializes in communal currencies. She is a co-founder of Multitruque Mixiuhca, a communal money in Mexico city and co-promoter of the Eco-común initiative, a currency based on gifts to conserve ecosystems by supporting their defenders. She is an adherent of the Sixth Declaration of the Selva Lacandona and a participant in the World Social Forum and in the Global University for Sustainability.

Gustavo Esteva is a social activist and de-professionalized public intellectual. He works in an independent capacity for a large number of organizations, local, regional, national, and international networks, some of

which he has co-created. He lives in a small indigenous town in Oaxaca, Mexico, where he grows his own food. He is a columnist in *La Jornada* and occasionally publishes in *The Guardian*. He is an author, co-author, and editor of over 40 books, more than 500 essays, and thousands of newspaper and magazine articles. He has received numerous academic awards and has presided over various professional organizations and participated on the council of United Nations Institute for Social Development Research.

Professor **Lau Kin Chi** has taught comparative literature and cultural studies for 34 years in Lingnan University, Hong Kong, China. She is the coordinator for the Cultures and Sustainability Program at the Center for Cultural and Development Research at Lingnan University. She is a founding member and Executive Director of the Global University for Sustainability, founded in 2015. She has also been involved in the Movement for Rural Reconstruction in China for over 20 years.

Alejandra Jiménez. Woman, mother, feminist, defender of the territory and rhizomatic weaver. Trained in anthropology and political science, but with the great fortune of living with indigenous brothers and sisters who allowed me to be shaped by the mountains and coast, the lands of silent and declared resistance. I'm a member of different spaces such as CNI, CORASON, The TGE Group, The Mexican Alliance against Fracking, the Crianza Mutua network, the Psychosocial space for Human Rights, the Popular Environmental Assembly, and a few others. Currently I collaborate and weave with Unitierra, Oaxaca.

Gilberto López y Rivas (1943) has a Masters in Anthropological Sciences with a specialization in Ethnology from ENAH-UNAM (1969) and a Doctorate in Anthropology from the University of Utah, (1979). He is a researcher and professor at the Instituto Nacional de Antrología e Historia, attached to the Regional Center in Morelos. He is a member of the National System of Researchers (SNI). He has been a columnist in the periodical *La Jornada* since 1994. His latest published book is *Indigenous Peoples during the Fourth Transformation*, (Bajo Tierra Ediciones, México, 2020). He was a Federal Deputy of the 54th and 57th Legislatures. He was the first Head of Government elected to the Tlalpan Delegation, in Distrito Federal (2000-2003). He was an advisor to the Nicaraguan government (1980-1990) and to the EZLN during the San Andrés Dialogue. He is an adherent of the Sixth Declaration of the Selva Lacandona. He received the Roque Dalton Medal in 1987.

Mariana Mora is a lead investigator in the Center Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social in Mexico City. She is also a part of the Network of decolonial feminisms and of the Collective to eliminate racism in Mexico (COPERA). She has a doctorate in Anthropology from the University of Texas, Austin and Masters in Latin American Studies from Stanford University. She is the author of *Kuxlejal Politics, Indigenous Autonomy, Racial State* and decolonizing research in zapatista communities. (2018), among other publications.

José Jorge Santiago Santiago was born in San Cristóbal de Las Casas, Chiapas, México, on September 7, 1943. He completed his bachelors in Theology at the Gregorian University of Rome, Italy between 1965 and 1969. He has collaborated with the diocese of San Cristóbal de Las Casas, Chiapas. México. Between 1974 and 2008, he worked in the Civil Association for the Economic and Social Development of Indigenous Mexicans (Desmi, A.C). He also collaborated in the National Commission for Intermediation (CONAI) between 1994 and 1998. He is a founding member of the Commission for Communal Reconciliation (CORECO) and a member of the Board of Directors of the Centro de Derechos Humanos Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas. In 2015 he was a founding member of the Global University for Sustainability in Hong Kong. He published a book titled “Solidarity Political Economy” (Ediciones Eón, 2017).



Jan 30, 2021, webinar on “Zapatista Visions, Voices and Practices”, from top left to bottom right: Lau Kin Chi, Alejandra Jimenez, Sit Tsui, Gilberto Lopez y Rivas, Gustavo Esteva, Jorge Santiago, David Barkin, Claudia Yadira, Mariana Mora



Visions, voices and practices of the zapatistas was made
on the spring of 2021 in
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As Wallerstein and Chomsky stated long ago,
the Zapatistas represent the most radical and
important political initiative in the world.
Their current journey to meet like-minded groups
on the five continents, starting with Europe,
has sparked immense interest and is encouraging
new hope.

They participated in the World Social Forum in 2021,
through a panel in which their visions,
their voices and their practices were discussed.
This book collects the presentations of those
who participated in it.



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