

The Zapatista's Post-Modern War: Causes of the Rebellion in Chiapas

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Amid accusations of today's neoliberal ideologues that the Chiapas rebellion was nothing but the work of Stalinists and foreigners, and obdurate and upstart minorities out to manipulate the "gullible Indians" of the Lacandon rainforest and Chiapas highlands, eight factors stand out as the true causes of what may be aptly described as the Zapatista's post-modern war. With the Maya's heritage of resistance, the crisis of the traditional hacienda, the rise of the theology of liberation and the democratic fervor of the students of 68 combining with impoverishment, marginalization, exclusion and institutionalized violence, the Chiapas rebellion was meant to be the first revolution of the 21st century -- inheriting from and building upon previous revolutionary postulates. In the final analysis, what these "post-modern" revolutionaries aim for is modest but at the same time ambitious: to defend by force of arms the land, liberty and dignity of the people of Chiapas and Mexico, and to initiate a change in their consciousness to pave the way for democracy with dignity, justice and autonomy. It may perhaps be brought to fruition, but in any case, it would be a tragedy for humanity if it were not.

Discrimination

It seems antiquated to talk about causes. Nevertheless, the concept is legitimate. Its usage becomes necessary in response to prejudiced explanations for what is happening.

The indigenous and campesino rebellion in Chiapas has inspired great writers and poets, echoed by television and by extensive official circles, to invent new satanic myths similar to those which in the Middle Ages confused the minds of the miserable and intimidated the doubters with fire at the stake, where the brave were put to the torch.

Today's neoliberal ideologues try to discredit the Chiapas rebellion as the work of Stalinists and foreigners, and obdurate, upstart minorities manipulating the poor "gullible Indians". They have, subsequently, also tried to discredit it as "merely an Indian uprising."

If we understand cause to mean the factor antedating and determining an event, explanation by means of modern myths, however different from

the Medieval variety, attributes these battles, which displease the powerful, to malignant forces.

The violence inherent in that interpretation requires that we recover and reveal its true causes.

First: A Heritage of Rebellion

The Maya stand out among peoples who have most strenuously resisted conquest. They were not subjugated in Yucatan and Guatemala until 1703, and soon rebelled again, organizing a great revolt in Chiapas in 1712.¹ The text of the Chilam Balam says, "Then came the struggle under cover, the struggle with fury, the struggle with violence, the struggle without pity." And those same peoples rebelled again on January 1, 1994. Why and what for? Against renewed violence that has tried to destroy the identity, the personality, the dignity of men and women whose lands are constantly torn from them, who are pitilessly exploited and deprived of food to the point where they have become so small of stature that they resemble children, because of the little they have eaten over so many generations. That the Maya rebelled again as Tzeltales, Tzotziles, Choles, Zoques and Tojolabales is the result of a heritage that causes the same effects in other regions of Mesoamerica.

In the Lacandon rain forest and the Highlands of Chiapas, the myth of Juan Lopez, an unconquerable man who came down from heaven to fight the army many years ago and who promised to return to help native Mexicans in later battles, is still alive.

Second: The Crisis of the Traditional Hacienda

The origin of the rebellion also encompasses Chiapas' development. The crisis of the coffee latifundia began in the 1930s. The serfs fled to other less unfortunate regions, and their liberation by the new newly created cattle haciendas began in the 1950s. Since his services were no longer required, the land-bound peon disappeared for all intents and purposes in the 1970s. Chiapas became a great producer of electricity and oil. Once again, the "free peons" left the coffee, sugarcane and corn plantations and even the cattle ranches. They went to work producing electricity and oil, dams and highways. Others headed for the rain forest to make a life for themselves that was poor but their own. These are the

ones who inhabit the territory now held by the Zapatista Army of National Liberation.

In the rain forest, Tzeltales, Tzotziles, Choles, Zoques, Tojolabales and mestizos related to each other. An identity arose among all of them as oppressed ethnic groups facing plantation owners, cattle ranchers and "kaxlanes", as they call the ladinos or mestizos. This identity began to take shape in the mid-seventies. It intensified in the eighties with the Rural Association of Collective Interest Union of Unions (ARIC) and culminated at the end of that decade in an integration of organizations of ethnic groups and workers. Their members had abandoned servitude without finding a place in the nation's new development.

Third: The Pastoral Contribution

The third cause of change, in an order that is difficult to establish, came from Vatican II and the Medellin Episcopal Conference. From them came a pastoral renewal "Aided by religious sociology and encouraged by the Movement for a Better World."² The systematization of the change was expressed in the world-famous theology of liberation, today violently censured by neoliberal ideologues. The theology of liberation told a large Christian movement that respect for dogma and the faith precludes the use of either against the weak and the poor.

The pastoral activity of that movement began in the sixties: priests and catechists devoted themselves to teaching indigenous Americans that they are human beings.³ Based on Vatican II, they taught them to express their thoughts, and to give value to the life of their community by the word of God and interpretation of the Bible. They trained them; based on their customs of debate and reaching agreement, in new forms of organization for collective labor, fraternal exchange of ideas and the making of decisions. Based on their faith, they led them to interpret the holy scripture, to read *Exodus* so as to identify it with their peoples, and to find in the history of the Jews the history of their own oppression. They taught them to interpret the Christian utopia of the Kingdom of God in their own land. What is more, they provided them with the foundations of a democratic culture in which one begins by respecting oneself, to be able to respect others, and to build, all together, the organizations that represent their common interests, and a Catholic church that includes the Tzeltal, the Chol, and the Tojolabal.

The priests themselves gave ear to their native flock and changed their pastoral message, increasing "reflection and practice" of what they call the "catechization of Incarnation" which aimed "at the word of God, being suffused and made divine" by the historical and cultural unfolding of the community life of the indigenous peoples. The catechists "became spokesmen of community deliberation and ceased to be teachers bearing a prefabricated reflection."

The effort of education and catechization was extraordinary, as was that of organization. No political party or cultural entity has done anything like it. A Bishop of San Cristobal by the name of Samuel Ruiz, with the help of priests, parish curates and deacons of the bishopric, prepared more than 400 pre-deacons and 8,000 catechists in 2,608 communities. "They lived charity" as paupers and as natives, and transmitted to the poor and the natives "all those evils" that consist in believing, thinking and "being" proudly native.

Several "ministries of the community were born in the diocese" based on their indigenous Mayan cultures, as "they acquired the commitment that leads to the construction of the Kingdom of God in justice and truth." Catechists, secretaries, principals, stewards, presidents, choirs, regional authorities, health promoters, coordinators of women, *tujumeles* (or deacons), and those who served in defense of human rights "responded to the necessity that the dispossessed shall walk."⁴

Fourth: The Students of 68

After 68, which ended in Mexico with the massacre at Tlatelolco, student leaders took many roads: some joined the system, or were coopted by it; others organized urban and popular social movements; or contributed to the organization of political parties such as the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD), the largest party of the left in Mexico's history; helped organize campesino movements, or joined the guerrilla movements in Sonora, Chihuahua and Guerrero. There was a common thread in the ideology of these former students: to fight for a democracy in which working and exploited people might make decisions for themselves and prepare to put an end to a repressive, authoritarian and exclusive system.

The survivors of 68 began to reach Chiapas in the mid-seventies. They joined popular organizations. "They helped them to get organized and acquire greater consciousness to carry their struggles forward." The members of the People's Union went into the rain forest in 1976, with a wealth of organizational experience in the valleys of the Mayo and Yaqui, and in the La Laguna region.

Beset by mistakes, missed encounters, theoretical and strategic crises, the leaders of 68 pointed out the need for unification and organization of all "workers, campesinos, settlers, students, small merchants, employees, and professional people." They proposed to lay out a program of struggle for land and wages, for schools and clinics, and, in general, for better living conditions.

The principal internal differences arose in reference to greater or lesser respect for the democratization of organizations. The victory of the democratic position was attributable to theses which linked the expression of opinion to information and participation: "It is necessary," stated a 1977 document, "that the broadest democracy exist, consisting in a great participation of ideas and opinions with respect to any point under consideration. In a meeting or assembly, we must make sure that all present have sufficient information to be able to give an opinion....it is necessary to hear the greatest number of opinions and ideas and provide the broadest opportunity for participations..." The principal objective, it added, is "that mass organizations be constituted on the basis of the most deeply felt demands of the people..." The movement expressed "the revolutionary atmosphere" characteristic of the period, with variants in the struggle against the exploitation of man by man. It also postulated the establishment of a system that would make democracy the fundamental weapon in the mass organizations themselves. The two objectives: the struggle against exploitation and the struggle for democracy, prevail to this day and have spread as internalized values for the organizations of the Lacandon region and the Zapatista Army of National Liberation. Others, such as socialism and the class struggle, lost their strategic value and disappeared from the scene for an indeterminable period of time.

A system of "itinerant assemblies" made it possible for everyone to increase his millenarian capacity and practice in discussing and deciding. Dissension and agreement spread the length and breadth of the rain

forest. Its inhabitants acquired a common culture, which in different languages unites ethnic, religious and ideological groups in the same goals and acts. They learned something new: how to discuss and decide on the revolutionary struggle and how to defend their organizations from provocateurs. The revolutionaries learned that their rhythm was not the same as that of the people. They learned that it is not only a matter of organizing the indigenous inhabitants but of learning how they are organized. They created organizations and politicized those that existed. They themselves became politicized and blended with the rest. They left their Marxist-fundamentalist ideas behind. They discovered that "reordering the world" can only come from a struggle for democracy that includes and is based on the autonomies and rights of native peoples and of the poor who are not natives until it includes the entire nation, with its workers and its people.

A great plan of official provocation was again mounted from the ultra-left. It sought to bring about disorganization among the independent grassroots while strengthening State-sponsored mass organizations. Neither the provocateurs nor the ultra-left was fighting for the possible or even the impossible. To the extent they were able, they exaggerated ideologies, upset acts and rarefied their own verbal pyrotechnics as revolutionary gesticulators.

The leaders of the rain forest faced both provocation and the ultra-left with a new culture and a new policy of preservation of life and autonomy, serenity and firmness. They also dissuaded and defeated the compromisers and their propensity to accept individual and collective concessions with loss of personal dignity and political autonomy. Ultra-leftist arguments about "the correct line", with battles lost beforehand, and with arguments for co-optation and integration of individuals and clienteles, were faced and challenged by democracy with justice and dignity. Thus, many revolutionaries who had come from beyond the rain forest shifted from the expected to the unexpected revolution.⁵ They learned to fight for the impossible to advance the possible.

Fifth: Less Land for More "Poor"

In 1971, by presidential decree, half the rain forest was handed over to an almost extinct ethnic group: the Lacaridons. Under the pretext of preserving a few, it was intended to deprive Tzeltales, Tzotziles, Choles,

Tojolabales and Zoques of the land they had inhabited for twenty or thirty years, and who were being accused of "usurpation". Behind the decree lay great profits for politicians and lumber merchants. Together they introduced themselves as the *Compania Forestal Lacandona, S.A.* This company quickly signed a contract with the "legitimate owners" of the land. It thus acquired the right to extract 35,000 square meters of lumber per annum, equivalent to 10,000 cedar and mahogany trees. The rain forest became the company's monopoly, nothing less than 614,321 hectares.

Aided by the government, the company proposed to "relocate", i.e., expel the supposed intruders. Some left the region, while others, the majority, began to struggle in defense of their land.

The hundreds of indigenous leaders of the exodus, the eight thousand catechists, the former leaders of 68, graduates of the guerrillas of the North and the Pacific began a new stage of mobilizations which led them to the state capital and even to the national capital (1981). This was the beginning of great legal battles combined with direct action.

The inhabitants of the rain forest had already been expelled from other lands. More than 100,000 people were forced to emigrate from the central valleys due to the construction of reservoirs. Their lands were covered by water. Oil drilling made great tracts of land useless, turning them into wilderness or oil wells. Close to 50,000 people were forced to leave. The economic crisis of the late seventies and early eighties diminished urban job opportunities. Two hundred thousand workers were laid off. They were forced to return to the land they had left, and finally, El Chichonal erupted in 1982 ruining 70,000 hectares. Close to 20,000 inhabitants were forced to relocate.⁶

Many set out on their exodus to the Lacandon rain forest. They had no idea that attempts would be made to expel them even from there.

In Chiapas, land, the mainstay of "the poor", became progressively scarcer simultaneously as the population grew naturally. In rural areas, it grew at an annual rate of 3.6 percent. By 1985, the availability of land in certain regions was reduced from 16 hectares per family to an average of less than 4 hectares per family. Population growth became a critical factor in the further impoverishment of the already poor campesinos,

particularly because it combined with the forced deprivation of land and other devices of the companies and the landowners. Even before there were so many of them, the campesinos lacked credit, technical assistance, and minimally acceptable markets. Their production was and is extensive, by means of slash and burn, and frequent plantings which increased the extent of "tired land". All these facts made growing demographic pressure intolerable.

Agrarian disputes became fiercer in the state. In the early 1980s, 400 plantations and latifundia were invaded by campesinos; 100,000 survived as marginal dwellers; 70,000 asked the Agrarian Department for land and received no response.

Demand for, and invasion of land continued. At the beginning of the nineties, 27 percent of unsatisfied demands for land in all of Mexico existed in Chiapas. Of the 10,600 cases being considered in the Department of Agrarian Reform, 3,000 were from Chiapas. After long and expensive suits, the campesinos achieved nothing. When a presidential order was issued in their favor, it was never implemented.⁷

The landless became increasingly conscious of the fact that while they had been impoverished, marginalized and excluded, the great proprietors had acquired covert latifundia they did not even exploit. They not only organized protest demonstrations, but began to occupy some plots of land and cultivate them. The violent response of the plantation owners became systematic. If previously they had violently attacked the indigenous population to take away its rights, now they attacked it "with even more justification" and much more fury, accusing "indians" of violating the sanctity of private property, social peace and the law. Leaders were jailed and assassinated, families and communities removed and persecuted,⁸ land repossessed by the army or the "white guards". The memory of violent reprisals is alive everywhere: in Simojovel, Huitiupan, Sabanilla, Yajalon, Chilon, Ocosingo and Las Margaritas. Even so, the hope remains that one day constitutional law may be applied and justice done. To nourish that hope, from time to time, the government bought land from proprietors and gave it to the indigenous population.

On 7 November 1991, the Federal Executive, fulfilling neoliberal policy, in agreement with the International Monetary Fund, pursuant to stipulations in the North American Free Trade Agreement, and in keeping

with the interests of the great land owners and politicians, both Mexican and foreign, sent a draft amendment to Article 27 of the Constitution to Congress. The new text not only legalized covert latifundia and declarations that there was no more land to distribute, but also facilitated the privatization of *ejido* and communal land by large landowners.

The new text was approved by an alliance of the PRI and the PAN which together founded the new Mexican state. "One of the most immediate effects of the constitutional reform," wrote Maria del Carmen Legorreta, today a member of the official ARIC, "is the implicit strengthening of former hacienda owners." The latter have since then felt favored by the new legal framework. Protected by their "white guards" and by the State apparatus, they set up a modern organization with which to govern Chiapas: the Union for Citizens' Defense.⁹ The landowners became "democrats." They expelled the natives they did not need from their ladino democracy and when they also tried to throw them out of the rain forest, many of the unfortunate prepared to resist. It was their last refuge and they were resolved to defend it. But they were not the only ones who fought, they were joined by campesinos and natives from many regions of Chiapas, particularly the Highlands. They had become even better organized during those years, whereas the government and landowners continued to treat them as if they were not organized: with the same policies of ignoring, repressing and co-opting them, which no longer worked.

Sixth: Politization of the Indigenous Peoples

Indigenous electoral defeats are to be found in the political conscience. In 1982, within the Unified Socialist Party of Mexico (PSUM), the Tojolabales fought for the mayor's seat of Las Margaritas. When they lost, "they lost hope," as they say. In 1974, the natives of San Juan Chamula took the town hall as a protest against electoral fraud committed by the PRI. They were dislodged days later by the army. Since then, a government of caciques began the persecution of thousands of Chamulas whom they accused of being Protestants. Those who were expelled lost home and land. Today, more than 20,000 live in misery in the outskirts of San Cristobal. The caciques in Chamula exercise an autonomous and brutal dictatorship supposedly out of respect for their customs.¹⁰ They rely on "bilingual" teachers who with the caciques constitute a new power group linked to the State and Federal Governments, and to merchants

and planters. A local rhyme says: "In Mitontic, Chenalho, Tenejapa, they prevail as they wish." (To get some of the dispossessed to return, it was necessary to distract and exert immense pressure on the caciques with trips to Rome and Israel).

Electoral democracy in the indigenous areas is a fiction. Local governments resemble the colonial variety. In their electoral rituals, the ladinos and their indigenous allies discriminate, repress, jail, dispossess and assassinate their opponents. The record of their political crimes is endless. They sometimes exercise power paternalistically and even in alliance with the "Indigenous Supreme Councils" and with other official organs which practice limited populism. Such paternalism benefits the few with very small rewards!

Party politics is in general a movement at the top. Indigenous "leaders" join the PRI, PAN, PSUM, PST, and PRD. They frequently switch parties to "see" which will solve their communal or personal problems. The efforts usually end at best in the phenomenon of clientelism which makes it possible to exert joint pressure that produces "some" results. PRI members even take part in different kinds of pressure and mobilize themselves to occupy town halls and government offices. Altogether such efforts fail to change the power structure in which planters and cattlemen are dominant. When local outbreaks occur, their effects are short-lived and *the system* recovers little by little.

After the 1984 elections in Pantelho, all the indigenous males appeared armed with machetes. They said their patience was exhausted. Since they were the majority, machete in hand, the mestizos were forced to recognize the indigenous victory, and waited patiently. After a few months they went to see the mayor elected by the natives. They demanded that he give an accounting and though previously rebellious and loud, he became meek. "Since then, says a PRI delegate, "Don Dionisio has increasingly toed the line."¹¹ Indigenous experience in politics is that their immediate representatives may be democratically controlled in their own communities, but when they become part of the municipal government or occupy higher posts, they have no recourse but to become corrupt, submit or die. Although some submit only partially and demand something for their people,¹² the loss of dignity is very damaging to them, and greatly undermines any policy aimed at accumulation of power.

In many Mexican towns and villages, the PRI municipal office is located in the town hall. The same is true of Chiapas, except that in indigenous areas, "the authorities" generally reject the involvement of any political party other than the official PRI. Landowners and cattlemen support them. Nothing that may affect the PRI or large landowners is tolerated. Elections are carried out without proposals inimical to privilege or the privileged, or that imply a legal-political possibility of electing representatives opposing the PRI and the cattlemen or planters.¹³ The experience of being "manipulated by the PRI or by political parties which seem to be of the opposition and are not, like the PAN, PST or PARM," raised political antipathy in many organizations. The natives feel that under present conditions, "they have no clear understanding of what politics is good for," except when they seek some personal advantage or short-lived success. For many of them, politization in opposition parties is associated only with a radicalization contrary to official indigenist populism and other forms of authoritarianism. To go beyond that, toward the construction of an alternative, is difficult.

In 1994, in solidarity with the EZLN, an initial attempt at electoral struggle was made in which indigenous peoples took part in the offensive with a large segment of the citizenry. Diverse organizations put forward a candidate of civil society and the PRD, for state governor. This was a novelty which seemed to inaugurate a new stage in political and social struggle. The old dominant class-ethnic group reacted with extreme violence and got the support it wanted when, on 9 February 1995, the Mexican army moved into the rain forest destroying Zapatista villages. If the new movement seeks a political confrontation that recognizes the dignity of its participants and the autonomy of its organizations, the old-new colonial class throws all its weight behind a policy of destroying the life and dignity of the natives, as well as the slightest indication of political autonomy or mediation in defense of their rights and vital interests. At the same time and with apparent lack of intent, that colonialist class generally attacks the lower strata of the population, popular urban movements, as well as middle classes resisting the secular and "modern" order.

In any event, a force and a political, democratic and autonomous organization is clearly being built among indigenous and campesino groups. Such is the case of the coordinating body of the supreme Tzeltal and Tzotzil councils which are democratic and representative and part of

the CEOIC, created in 1994 with dozens of indigenous campesino organizations facing governmental and entrepreneurial co-option. The organized civil will toward democracy with dignity, justice and liberty, was born in them. It is this determination that will encourage and shape the rebellion in Chiapas. Its defining characteristics include the struggle for citizenship, the struggle for land and the struggle to liberate the native peoples, objectives linked in the political consciousness of indigenous, agrarian and civic organizations since 1992, in which, after the March of 500 years of Popular Indigenous Resistance, the participants formed the Front of Chiapas Social Organizations. This was the outline of something like an urban, civic, non-partisan, non-electioneering front, which postulated the new political struggle of native Mexicans, for land, the Mexican nation and a democratic system with justice and dignity, and autonomy for social and political organizations, and municipal government and cultural institutions.

A design such as this, profoundly irritated the "long run" colonialist, racist, ethnicist, "fascist" sentiments of the old white-mestizo oligarchies which have dominated the region for the last 500 years. Their interests dovetail with those of companies prepared to pursue and exterminate native Mexicans when necessary, to deprive them of their properties and the territories in which they survive. It is true that the dominant forces, in their most reactionary expression, are prepared to support a design for democracy with colonialism. Pretense is part of their logic. In the event, the noteworthy consciousness of the natives, the progressively more powerful organization of their forces, the evident rise in their struggles since October 1974, when they organized the Indigenous Congress in San Cristobal de Las Casas, in no way made it possible to solve their most elementary problems. On the contrary, those problems were aggravated by the crisis, neoliberalism and increasing repression.³⁴

Seventh: Violence and the Law

Under the racist, oligarchic, Chiapas regime, institutional violence is the law. Without risk of any kind of punishment, in the fields, on the job and in politics, the power-holders are able to violate the law, be it agrarian, labor or electoral. The opposite is true of those who are indigenous or poor mestizos, campesinos, workers and even employees: they may be falsely accused at any time and suffer all kinds of punishment for imaginary crimes.

A racism and criminal degradation exist which are never mentioned in polite company or civic events. In 1970, on the Cupic shore, several young landowners passed the time, practicing their marksmanship, shooting at native sharecroppers. In Simojovel, a region in which land-bound peons still existed in fact as late as 1975, the *droit de seigneur* was still current. In Tapachula, Pichucalco, La Concordia, Joltenango, La Paz, there were frightening so-called private cemeteries where the disappeared were buried. An old chiapaneco proverb has it that, "Lynch law demands death to the Indian and death to the blackbird."¹⁵ The plantations maintain jails equipped with pillories to accommodate prisoners who have never been tried. Natives do not understand the words of the state's attorney, nor judges the language of prisoners. Most of the latter have neither friends nor sponsors to defend them. "There are no Tojolabales in the professions, the priesthood or public service," says an anthropologist. "The system would be hard put to tolerate a Tojolabal as the head of a municipality. Lack of support is accentuated by ignorance and ignorance by internalized terror."¹⁶ An "Indian" who demands his rights is a terrorist, an irritant, and an object of fear.

The law only regulates relations among the powerful or justifies their abuses, and this only when necessary. Most of the time, it is unnecessary to justify the abuses of the powerful. There are systems of rationalization and of "rational option" which make it possible to renew the system without a trace of culpability, under the pretext of what is "necessary, natural and rational."

Some cattlemen and planters waver between violence and negotiation. They are heirs to ancient colonial concessions and others that are more recent. During the Revolution, a period of "the rise of the masses", they granted land to their campesinos and sold them plots. Today, some of them are again taken with the idea of selling land to the new invaders, since they think it in their interest both as business and for their peace of mind. But all of them react first to the impulse to threaten to death the invaders and even plan and carry out brutal "object lessons". After the outbreak of the current Zapatista rebellion, many landowners armed themselves to the teeth, increased the number of their "white guards" and stocked their arsenals. Repression and negotiation remain open and contained. They are carried out with violence and proposed as submission to those who renounce their values and betray or turn-in their own people.

For years, campesinos have occupied land and government offices. These events now occur after three particularly repressive regimes: Juan Sabines, Absalon Castellanos (abducted and then pardoned by the Zapatistas), and Patricio Gonzales Garrido, Secretary of the Interior when the revolt broke out. All of them were committed to repressing the new demands of the indigenous population insisting on its rights, and whose most recent point of departure was the "Indigenous Congress of 1974".

Statistics of the terror are not reliable, they are frightening. From 1974 to 1987, 982 leaders were assassinated in only a part of the indigenous region of Chiapas; 1,084 campesinos arrested without legal cause; 379 seriously wounded; 505 kidnapped or tortured; 334 disappeared; 38 women raped; thousands expelled from their homes and land; and 89 villages with dwellings burned and crops destroyed. "Absalon raised the degree of violence one hundred percent," says one former leader.¹⁷

As the crisis intensified, the campesinos discover that if they protested they would be repressed even if they were members of the PRI, as happened to the 1986 movement. Their politization and firmness led them to defend themselves from a useless death, from provocateurs such as those of "Antorcha Campesina", who led them into suicidal struggles, and also from those who sought to mediatize and corrupt them, tied to the system like those of "ARIC, Union of Unions", who joined the PRI. More and more campesinos and natives gave priority to defending the autonomy of their organizations. Many joined the ranks of the EZLN, in what was originally a defensive attitude, but which made of that unrenounceable and generalized concept of "autonomy", something comprehensive and much deeper than the autonomy of the human person, or municipal autonomy, or the autonomy of parties with respect to the state, or university autonomy or the autonomy of ethnic and multiethnic regions. Surrounded by misunderstandings, the concept of autonomy like that of "dignity" acquired all the dimensions of a new democratic design. Many do not understand it yet. They have not discovered to what extent the movement begun in the Lacandon region and in Chiapas, like the Mexican movement of old, will not stop until a system is created that will respect autonomies and refrain from co-optation, integration and repression of citizens. That system must respect their dignity, not only in war, but in peace as well.

Eight: Negotiated Violence with Profits and Losses

The struggle to overcome internalized terror begins from within. Sometimes the first step is achieved with decision, cold calculation and fraternity. Attempts arise from struggle that is united, associated, interwoven and connected with *ejido* communities, central campesino organizations and unions. Here is where the struggle against co-optation, against the corruption of leaders and their followers takes place, and the trend is toward a persistent hardening in which modern Mexico's political currents and the most varied revolutionary positions are expressed.

Social organizations defend themselves from being mere instruments of political parties. Their members learn to make collective strategic decisions and not only circumstantial ones. They achieve positions of strength in communities, neighborhoods and workplaces, they coordinate with other organizations and even use the political parties. These are campesino organizations of *civic resistance* at work in committees and general assemblies to which they convoke citizens personally to reach agreement. The *lingua franca* in such meetings is usually Spanish. "The bilingual" population (among whom there are many primary school teachers allied to the native villages) hold vital liaison positions. Women and even children take active part, much more than is believed. Such organizations can also organize the economy, transportation, planting and harvest, credit and marketing. Some represent the seed of an alternative economy of collective production and distribution with cooperation, that permits the accumulation of small amounts of capital. Acts of solidarity continue to occur on the part of campesinos and workers in other parts of Mexico. The *ejidos* of the Yaqui Valley in Sonora and the miners' and steel workers' unions of Monclova and Monterrey, among others, have made their solidarity effective. With such funds indigenous organizations hire employees and even lawyers, and even buy land previously occupied by their members.

In view of the characteristics of the Mexican State, the campesinos and indigenous inhabitants of Chiapas face several kinds of experience in the struggle, co-optation of some leaders, selective repression of others, direct action on the part of the masses themselves (to take land, municipal and government offices), and negotiation by the masses and their leaders with authorities and landowners.

As with negotiation, violence may be individual or collective. They kill a leader or they beat him up, or they jail him or massacre squatters or jail them to reduce their number or co-opt part of the people, or make concessions supposedly accepted by everyone. Sometimes negotiations benefit many and even resolve problems for the majority of one movement. But usually, the beneficiaries are only a *segment* which the power elite is trying to separate from the *majority*. *That kind of negotiation is also a cause of the rebellion.*

It is a long-standing method of negotiation developed in the twenties, which continues today. Over time, it has forged a cost-benefit calculation among rulers, landowners, settlers, workers, natives and campesinos. It is a calculation that accompanies the culture of "lordly" violence. If the latter withdraws into proud visions of macho or hard-nosed caciques, with paid assassins, the former moves in with populist traditions or innovations suggesting a still undefined culture of social negotiation. It also evokes the timeworn methods of domestication by the "stick and the carrot".

The mediatizing State — with *mediation* at the service of the State and the powerful — responds by granting concessions to certain violent movements and organizations no matter how strident they may be as long as they are organized and their repression would incur "excessively" high political and social costs.

The state and the organizations share a relative culture of the law. They know that the law is not *necessarily* applied either before or after violence. They practice a form of legislation and of interpretation of the spirit of the law within an order which is simultaneously violent and civilized. They *legalize* concessions after exercising violence on both sides, or with the implicit threat to use it again.

The principal novelty of the twentieth century and its populist derivation consists in the fact that violence with negotiations ceased to be the monopoly of cattlemen, planters and rulers. Natives and campesinos also employ violence be it only to negotiate. They negotiate land, credit, and the release of prisoners. If they gain any advantages, they acquire with them commitments to peace and even the obligation to support the PRI and the government. If they refuse, they are subject to selective repression. Credit becomes hard to get, concessions disappear, accusations are made against the unsubmissive before government

agencies, leaders and even organizations are suppressed. Along the way, and just in case, agents provocateurs are used over and over again, who from positions apparently even more radical, disqualify the true leaders or abort their movements. The system survives with its long-standing colonialist and oligarchic traditions, as well as with the populist variety. It renews one and the other with methods taken from dirty or low intensity warfare, which include the division of populations, corruption of the frightened and "civic action" in the hands of the same army and repressive forces that destroy rebel houses, property, seeds and equipment, while holding out a "humanitarian" hand to the "guilty" who agree to join their ranks and become informers or other auxiliaries.

Many "communities" and members of native villages who "do not have a clear perception of politics" increasingly perceive the differences between the PRI, the PRD and the PAN. National level proposals are taken up for discussion in campesino and indigenous unions. Such proposals give members a broader view of the struggle. They lead to proposals to abrogate the Law of Agricultural Development, the need for production for the people, the indispensable nationalization of the food industry, reduction of property under irrigation to 20 hectares, and a further reform to the mutilated Article 27 of the Constitution; an agrarian reform for the 21st century.

Having progressed beyond slogans and proceeded to their substance, individual and collective processes of intellectual radicalization arise. But sometimes a kind of dialectic between radicalization and discouragement also develops. Legal battles are almost never fruitful. Those that fall back on force grow progressively more costly, particularly with the crisis of populism, neoliberal democracy and the global counterrevolution. The most elementary problems find no solution. Repression without negotiation slips back to the pre-populist *ancien regime*. Politics become paternalized in the old way with neither law nor negotiation, but pure repression, with vulgar attempts at co-optation-transition, amounting to a threat that seems to spread and grow.

In the dialectic of discouragement-radicalization, agricultural day-laborers and temporaries, and in the last instance the communities, tend to sustain firmer attitudes of struggle. Although many of them lack political education, all possess some education, some information, some link to campesino culture of resistance and pursuit. It shows up in

assemblies, meetings and conversations. In them arises the need to overcome the populist struggles of the past, by means of a disciplined democratic organization, worthy of a gathering of all peoples, and in which the aged and the children can participate with men and women.

Union leaders, catechists, teachers and some former and new students, collaborate in the creation of that new democratic position inserted into indigenous democracy with its "coordinating committees" and its "supreme councils" with a grassroots foundation. Land and the struggle "against the repression under which we live," are still the principal objectives,¹⁸ but joined by the democracy of indigenous peoples and the Mexican nation. This is a novelty of growing importance, so great that it has already become unrenounceable, something not yet understood by many government and entrepreneurial leaders disposed only to return to populist and mediatizing negotiation or who apply the politics of holding out until the masses tire.

Behind the new struggles for democracy arising from the indigenous population and from below, the struggle against discrimination, against the exclusion and exploitation of the "Indian" peoples, repeatedly appears. The political and social upper crust continues to treat the "Indians" as they were treated by their Spanish-Creole and mestizo-ladino forebears. The ladino or "kaxlan" inherited the customs and privileges of the colonial situation, now inserted into that "poverty trap" referred to by Alan B. Durning, which embraces from local and national structures to the global variety. Behind the new struggle of the indigenous peoples lies NAFTA and its most immediate expression in the amendments to Article 27, and in increasingly unequal exclusive trade, constitute a real threat to their survival.

To impoverishment, marginalization and exclusion, which in the eighties was accentuated by neoliberal policies closely linked to a rebirth of indigenous and white caciques in Chiapas and in the nation as a whole, must be added all manner of exploitation and abuse by means of starvation salaries and ridiculous prices paid for diminishing labor and for indigenous products sold for a song. Some of those products, like coffee, are linked to transnational economics which share the benefits of what Luis Hernandez Navarro has called "The law of San Garabato: buy cheap and sell dear."¹⁹ "The example of coffee," writes the author, "is one among many of a model of disinvestment and unemployment destined

to leave the poor in poverty until the end of time. In the past week, the price of coffee on the world market rose 100 percent, on the domestic market it rose 60 percent, whereas the Cooperativa Cholon B'ala in Tila, Chiapas, gets the same price it always has per kilo." The author states that there are campesinos who sell what they produce without profit or at a loss. And he thinks, rightly, that "the difference must end up somewhere." Decapitalized, the poor coffee producers "are unable to take advantage of the boom to produce more: they have no credit, and most would require financing nine times greater than whatever guarantee they could offer a bank. There is no solution in sight either for them or the corn producers or for that matter any other to the "poverty trap."

A democratic defensive struggle is proposed to overcome it, a democratic defensive revolution whose only chance for victory is to become a great political and social struggle capable of changing the correlation of forces and the market into a local national and eventually global design. The variations and tendencies of this democratic struggle are insufficiently known and a general theory is lacking. It is only known that without a democratic struggle with dignity and autonomy for the oppressed, there will be no sure social gain, nor negotiation that will allow the people to accumulate sufficient power to face the oppression and exploitation of the PRI, the caciques, the government, the system.

The First Revolution of the Twenty-First Century

Before the ceasefire, I noticed a graffiti on a wall in San Cristobal saying: "We are not guerrillas, we are revolutionaries." Several days before, Bishop Samuel Ruiz, heir to friar Bartolome de las Casas, had said to me: "How odd, as revolutionaries, they are very strange. They demand that the government carry out honest elections."

In connection with those first approaches I began to discover that the Chiapas rebellion has two great lines of communication and action that are particularly novel in the history of revolutions. The two seem to inherit and improve upon previous postulates. Not only those that have appeared in other parts of the world, but in Mexico and Chiapas as well. In them lie the revealed heritage of Russian, Chinese and Cuban successes and failures, and even the most recent ones in Nicaragua, El Salvador and neighboring Guatemala, of revolutions, guerrillas, campesino

■ In short, the Zapatistas combine the most popular of current struggles demanded by the Mexican people and other peoples of the world....[T]hey plan a new democracy among the revolutionaries, a democracy that is plural in ideologies, religions and politics, that is not necessarily the road to socialism, and in which they do not accept a formal democracy that is only mediation, in which they even demand that it be applied effectively and honestly, without trickery.

The very fact of calling themselves Zapatistas and revolutionaries is itself a message to all campesinos and to all Mexicans, for in the collective subconscious of Mexico and the genuine and false emotional education of all Mexicans, we all feel ourselves to be Zapatistas and we are all revolutionaries. That discourse does not ignore its closest interlocutor: the native Mexican, nor the progressive forces of the world, nor journalists and media in Mexico and far away countries, nor intellectuals however sophisticated. The former are addressed in their own language, and it is in that language that they are heard, and all the latter are sent messages and metamessages with quotes in English and even in French, and with corrections to Spanish pronunciation and invitations to good speech and writing of which they demonstrate themselves to be capable.

The Zapatistas reveal that they know dialects, *linguas francas* and catchwords that are *in*. Multiple communication discourse, focused or focalized on a special audience, augments its persuasive capability by the multidimensional manipulation of reason, understanding and judgment, and the expression of forms of thought in styles that are neither pompous, nor overpowering. Sometimes unexpected irony and juvenile coarseness appear in their semi-hidden faces humorously begging for permission. This becomes part of the moral and political message as if

movements of native peoples and, with many symbolic, political and military details, of Mexico from 1910 to 1917.

On one line, historical memory and creation are related to what might be called a politics of empathy and hegemony. On another, memory and creation are related to politics of accumulation of self-made mediations which makes it possible to advance toward increasingly profound objectives in which other qualities of life appear. In short, Zapatista discourse seems to seek multiple interlocutors and to address alternatively and simultaneously a large number of audiences that are potential actors.

it were a cheerful daily resonance without end and behind which hides the firm decision to match conduct to thought, and to keep the faith. It arises too as the joy of death which is a form of a life of daring and a means to identify the hero with him who is not, or not yet, a hero. Thus, a play appears in the revolution for indecisive Hamlets and distant spectators.

The motivation of dignity constitutes a moral foundation for the Zapatista struggle which corresponds in Mexico to what was once Jose Marti's moral-political message in Cuba. It is hard to reach Mexicans with moral arguments; in our culture, dignity releases a far more powerful force.

The politics of mediation or of ways and means to achieve objectives is quite original. In the proposals which the Zapatistas make in this respect, goals and means often appear to be interchangeable. Besides the fact that they demand the government carry out honest elections (in the year of the insurrection, which was a presidential election year), they fight for democracy, justice and freedom and back their struggle with arms. In short, the Zapatistas combine the most popular of current struggles demanded by the Mexican people and other peoples of the world. In so doing, they do not choose a single path or a single hypothesis: they explore to see which works better. At the same time, they plan a new democracy among the revolutionaries, a democracy that is plural in ideologies, religions and politics, that is not necessarily the road to socialism, and in which they do not accept a formal democracy that is only mediation, in which they even demand that it be applied effectively and honestly, without trickery. But far from stopping at that point, the Zapatistas demand democracy with justice, liberty for the individual and not only for peoples, or vice-versa. They espouse the idea of regime that is not presidentialist and of a real federation in which there is a balance of sovereign powers. They propound the problem of justice for the "men in the shadows" and with them, demand democratization at all levels of government, civil society and the State.

In matters of powerful persuasions, they do not declare themselves the

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vanguard as revolutionaries, nor as leaders do they show the least sign of being *caudillos*. What is more is that they declare they are not a vanguard, and that they have decided that victory is impossible without a movement that does not come from all the dispersed and unified movements. As to Marcos, the best known of their spokesmen and leaders, he is purposely a "sub-commandant" and in presenting himself as such, says that he has superiors, and for certain decisions they consult their people in an exhaustive manner in which the aged and even children have the vote. The Zapatista movement surpasses the grave authoritarian experiences both ancient and modern, of Latin American *caudillos* and Russian style "nomenklaturas."

As if the foregoing were not enough, there are other noteworthy events in which the historical imagination nourished by experience, or general theory, constructed on the basis of local and regional abstractions counts for something. In this context, it is striking to see how policies of conflict and consensus, confrontation and negotiation combine, and how in both cases they do so with interests and principles that are undeclinable, joined by expressions of extreme courtesy and respect and dispositions to dialogue.

In matters of deconstruction in the absence of a theory of past and future universal history, it might be said that the Zapatistas are a species of the so-called "post-modern" revolutionary, of a period in which "Reason exploded" with the universal triumph of capitalism. Conflict and consensus, war and negotiation, confrontation and dialogue, breakdowns and truces, disagreements and pacts with governments and proprietors, put hypotheses and designs to the test to advance, deepen and broaden achievements among members of the movement, sympathizers, resisters, unlockers ("Kierkegaard's audiences" in Mexico); all are asked to organize around a hope, or against their own fear, and achieve through peace what they may not be able to achieve by war. They do not even ask them to go to war if they are unsuccessful in peace. Their call to the rest of the nation amounts to its realizing that if it struggles and does not abandon them, and its peoples struggle as a whole, with commitment, for democracy with justice and dignity, it may be possible to achieve peacefully what would otherwise be unachievable either by war or peace. The organized whole is the principal objective and means, which may insure peaceful change and any change at all.

The Zapatista Army's contribution aims to be modest, and at the same time it is ambitious: to defend by force of arms in the Lacandon rain forest and in the Blue Hills, the land, liberty and dignity which the rebels could not defend any other way, and initiate a change in the consciousness of the people of Chiapas and Mexico so that with democracy and peace the objectives of liberty and justice may be achieved not only in the clouds, not only in the rain forest, not only in Chiapas, but in the entire country. The Zapatista Army recalls the beautiful image of the butterfly that unleashed a storm, and the even more precise image of those great movements which seem to begin from scratch and become universal. This implies negotiation that is not a deal, and a revolution that puts a stop to violence against native peoples, to pave the way for a democracy with liberty and justice, dignity and autonomy.

The design is formulated in individual dialects that become universal and the universal languages that flower among Mexicans who are Tzeltales, Tzotziles, Choles, Zoques and Tojolabales. It may perhaps be brought to fruition, but in any case, it would be a tragedy for humanity if it were not. ❁

Notes

- 1 See Ruz, Mario Humberto. "La Cultura Maya: vigencia de la pluralidad", Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, December, 1993, pp. 4-9; Juan Pedro Viqueira María de la Candelaria México. Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1993.
- 2 See the remarkable "Pastoral Message in this hour of Grace on the occasion of the greeting from His Holiness Pope John Paul II to the indigenous inhabitants of the continent, Samuel Ruiz García, Bishop of San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas, August 6, 1993. Feast of the Lord's Transfiguration.
- 3 Leyva Solano, Xochitl. "Militancia político-religiosa a identidad de la Lacandona." Undated mimeo.
- 4 See Ruiz García, Samuel, op. cit.
- 5 See: "Chiapas 94, Carnaval de la Historia," interview with Luis and Antonio García de León, November 11-12, 1994, Guadalajara, Jal. (Mexico).
- 6 See Erwin Rodríguez, "La Agudización de los problemas agrarios en Chiapas durante la década de los ochenta," and by Luis Hernández Palacio and Juan Manuel Sandoval (Compilers), *El redescubrimiento de la Frontera Sur*, Mexico, Ancien Regime, 1989, pp. 141-152.
- 7 Pablo E. Muench Navarro, "La Reforma Agraria en Chiapas, México, Cuadernos de Centros Regionales, No. 7, México, Chiapas, January 1994.
- 8 Hector Tejera Gaona, "Organización comunal y conflicto político en Chiapas," in Hernández Palacios, op. cit. pp. 273.

- 9 Maria del Carmen Legorreta Diaz, "La Reforma al Artículo 27 Constitucional y su efecto en la Union de Campesinos de Ocosingo, Chiapas," Cuadernos de Carlos Reynosa, No. 7, Mexico, Chapingo, January 1994. See also: Antonio Garcia de Leon, "Chiapas y la Reforma del Artículo 27, los regresos de la historia," Ojarasca, No. 11, August 1992, pp. 20-27 and "Prologo" to EZLN, Documentos y comunicados Mexico, ERA, 1995.
- 10 Hernandez Palacio, op cit., pp. 253 and 266.
- 11 Erwin Rodriguez, op. cit., pp. 209 and 305.
- 12 Hector Tejera Gaona, op. cit.
- 13 Jose Eduardo Tappan Meras, "Legislation y practica de la Democracia en Chiapas," CIIH, 1985, Mexico.
- 14 For an excellent analysis of the politization-organization of the natives-campesinos of Chiapas and their increasing problems, see: Taller de Analisis de la Cuestiones Agrarias. Los Zapatistas de Chiapas. San Cristobal de la Casas, SPI, Junio, 1988, No. 93 pp.
- 15 See Erwin Rodriguez, p. 147. The Zanate of the proverb, is the Great tailed grackle (*assidux mexicanus*, genus *icteridae*) particularly damaging to grain fields, being in the habit of eating the seed when it is sown and the grain from the ear. The male is glossy black... etc." See Francisco J. Santamaria, Diccionario de Mexicanismos, Mexico, Porrua, 1974. Second edition.
- 16 Vazquez Soto, Luz Idolina. "Organizacion Campesina Tojolabal. Instancias organizativas y sus luchas," Universidad Autonoma de Chiapas, San Cristobal de las Casas, 1983.
- 17 The foregoing data applies only of 38 to 110 municipalities in Chiapas to only 4 to 6 indigenous regions in the state. See Boletines e informes of the "Fray Bartolome de las Casas, Chiapas, 1989 y siguientes; Patricia Jovita Gomez Cruz y Cristina Maria Kovich, Con un Pueblo vivo, en tierra negada, Mexico, "Fray Bartolome de las Casas" Center for Human Rights, 1994, 185 pp.
- 18 Velazquez Soto, Luz Idolina. op.cit.
- 19 Hernandez Navarro, Luis. "El Drama Cafetalero," La Jomada, September 3, 1994.